



# Australian Universities Accord Panel Discussion Paper

Submission by Deakin University

April 2023

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## **Executive Summary**

Deakin University welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission in response to the Universities Accord Panel's Discussion Paper.

Representing a unique opportunity to undertake significant re-imagining of the post-18 education sector to suit the needs, ambitions, opportunities and challenges of twenty first century Australia, its society and economy, a realised, ambitious Universities Accord will recognise the drastic change since the Dawkins reforms which continue to shape the sector today. Though our sector is not broken, neither is it fit for purposes for a modern, outwardly focussed and advanced economy.

Reflecting these ambitions, Deakin includes a series of bold ideas and prescriptions to reshape the sector, seizing the opportunity for lasting change. Realised, this will drive a sector oriented to national interest and priorities, and effecting a more prosperous, secure and equitable Australia.



**Professor Iain Martin**

**Vice-Chancellor**

## Deakin University makes the following recommendations to the committee:

1. A rolling process to agree and adjust national priorities to form a National Accord for post-18 education.
2. Adoption of the Dual Accord Model to drive institutional alignment to national needs and external priorities.
3. Further alignment of HE-VET systems, to a post-18 education system.
4. Mapping of HE-VET integration models to develop best practice approaches.
5. Increased alignment of ASQA and TEQSA, as well as admissions systems.
6. Adoption of the *Three Pillars Model* of institutional purpose, informing funding models.
7. Adoption of the *Volume and Block Funding Model across the Three Pillars*
8. Consultation to develop a transition approach for the sector, recognising shift away from cross subsidisation, and the need to preserve levers for growth.
9. Creation of an independent National Centre for Learning and Teaching to advise on and develop innovative and practical responses to national priorities in a changing national and global context.
10. The creation of a national action plan to foster improved university-industry interactions, including identifying and addressing pain points, sharing good practice, expectations for all stakeholders and testing regional or national models for collective action.
11. Wider embedding of direct industry collaboration in the design and review of courses, including innovative models that strengthen university-industry relationships.
12. Implementation of the 2019 AQF Review including its recommendations for further work, as well as investigate options for career-wide subsidies learning.
13. Consideration of teacher training standards for higher education aligned to competencies expected for school and further education.
14. Adoption of Deakin recommendations regarding industry-engaged research approach.
15. Adoption of Deakin recommendations regarding research capacity and workforce.
16. Apply learnings in equity from those institutions with the track-record i.e., University of Newcastle, Deakin; and ensure alignment of equity funding to demonstrable success; institutions liable for practices that increase enrolments without aligned progress and success rates.
17. National metrics of institutional outreach and recruitment across key equity cohorts: providing incentive for institutions to engage with equity cohorts actively, and publicly accessible indication of institutional commitment to equity.
18. Development and provision of financial assistance models, to address to the cost-barriers for participation in higher education amongst historically excluded equity groups. We note the ATN recommendations and suggestion in this regard.
19. Deakin notes the wide variety of practical, immediate measures available to pursue equity ambitions, and advocates for the ready adoption.
20. Use of institutional accords to drive equity commitment, including accountability for institutional behaviour, with incentives for sector-leaders and financial consequences for lack of adequate performance.
21. Cross-sectional review of costs as a barrier to post-18 education, reflecting reform aimed at contributions from across beneficiary groups.
22. Government-led examination of intergenerational fairness, costs, and wealth imbalance across the economy, including costs and debt associated with post-18 education.
23. Institutional accords include dialogue on each university's international student diversity plan and objectives in order to inform a whole-of-government approach to supporting Australia's international higher education program through aligned policies and programs.
24. Federal Government, in partnership with the higher education sector, review how DFAT, DOE and DHA are aligned in supporting the Australian higher education value proposition is projected in new and emerging markets.
25. The university level accord process includes regional and rural campuses identifying their international student program plans and objectives in order to assist government aligning programs and policies accordingly.
26. In partnership with the sector, the key government agencies including DOE, DFAT and DHA conduct a review and refresh of the datasets made available, as related to international student experience and Australia's market competitiveness.
27. Collaborative development of new employment models across the sector, based on needs and values expressed above.

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## INTRODUCTION

Deakin fully supports the purpose of the Australian Universities Accord as articulated in the discussion paper:

*“[t]o drive lasting alignment between Australia’s high quality higher education system and national needs. The Accord is a way to develop a shared, long-term commitment among the stakeholders in Australian higher education, and improve the way they work together to address major challenges and opportunities, thus strengthening the system over time.”*

This submission outlines Deakin’s high-level policy proscriptions and objectives for reform. We have specifically not responded to all questions, instead focussing on key reforms to reshape a post-18 education sector. We make this submission in concert with that by the Australian Technology Network (ATN), of which Deakin is a member and to which contributed significantly. Where Deakin has not provided comment, we fully support the position of the ATN and its proposed approaches.

## ACCORD OBJECTIVES AND A DUAL ACCORD MODEL

The Accord process presents as a rejuvenation of the university education system of Australia, as part of an increasingly integrated and aligned post-18 system. The substantial growth and development in Australian universities’ domestic and international student profiles across teaching, research and innovation capabilities, which has taken place over the preceding four decades, requires calls for major renewal; realising and multiplying our strengths while strategically and ruthlessly tackling weaknesses that permeate.

To achieve this, the Accord objectives must be characterised by a single phrase: “national objectives and interest”.

Centring national interest and objectives, the Accord will set a clear expectation that universities exist to contribute to external needs, requirements and objectives; each institutional playing its role towards a greater good.

Rather than simply seeking immediate policy shifts, the Accord must grapple with a central question: what is the overarching purpose; our mission; our values and ethos, as universities? What does Australia want from a modern, successful, impactful university sector?

### Dual Accord Model

The Accord should clearly agree a set of national priorities and national interests - based on those highlighted in Section Two of the Discussion Paper, as well as aligned strategies i.e., manufacturing and industry, defence etc. This would reflect issues such as the transition to the green economy and skills, regional security etc. It would also tackle priorities such as how we meet the knowledge and skills needs for twenty first century Australia, as well as reflect the broad socio-cultural and economic role of Australian universities within our communities and breadth of landscape.

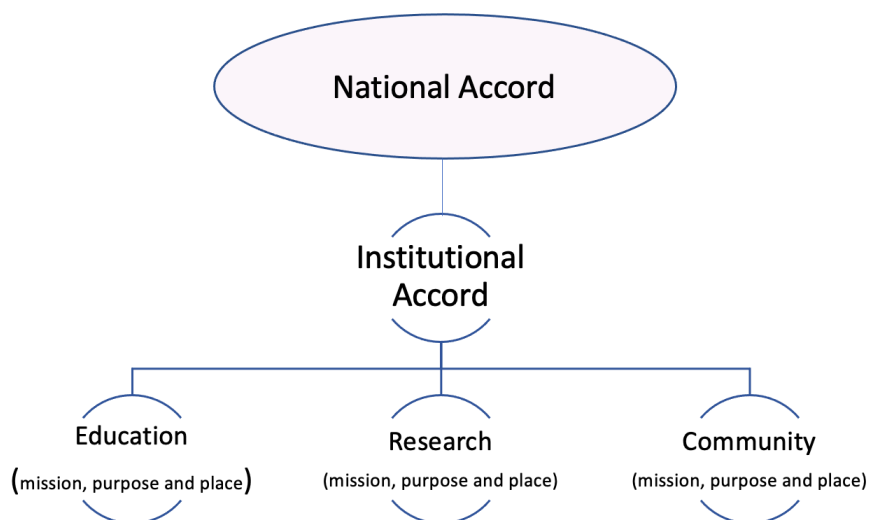
As outlined in the VicChamber submission, an educated society is a critical component of continued productivity and prosperity growth. With almost 1.2 million additional workers required by 2026, and nine of ten requiring post-school education, this is a fundamental challenge. Though Deakin steadfastly opposes confusing universities with a skills-only mission, standing in clear defence of higher learning and the pursuit of knowledge as a critical component to a prosperous society, it is similarly critical that universities best serve student populations and the nation.

Considering that this as a concern beyond the sole remit of universities, such as process would require consultation between government, post-18 education sector, industry and social stakeholders. Preserving the flexibility to re-align in response to changing circumstances, an inbuilt, rolling review period should also be established.

Having agreed priorities and national interests, the key question is the mechanism through which we may deliver alignment between each institution and the overarching aim.

Deakin proposes the adoption of a *Dual Accord Model*:

1. A National Accord: outlining national interests and priorities, and the role universities, and our related educational and knowledge creation ecosystem have in the priorities and ambitions of the nation, its economy, society and people overall.
2. Institutional Accords: replacing the current compacts, institutional accords to clearly agree an institution’s individual role in delivering their identified outputs aligned to the National Accord. This will be a clear announcement of the contribution of the institution: what will focus on/funded to deliver, and what will it not be funded to deliver, across mission, purpose and place.



**Recommendations:**

1. **A rolling process to agree and adjust national priorities to form a National Accord for post-18 education.**
2. **Adoption of the Dual Accord Model to drive institutional alignment to national needs and external priorities.**

**An Integrated Post-18 System**

Deakin notes that shifts to an aligned, more integrated post-18 education system is critical to meeting national challenges and opportunities. The current misalignment is not commensurate to achieving the aims and ambitions outlined above. Similarly, the adoption of targets, missions and ethos for the university sector limits the ability to address national challenges, without an aligned focus on other post-18 education components. To view the system through the post-18 lens, rather than the current differentiation, holds the key to true national impact.

There are fine examples of successful linkages between VET and higher education across the nation. Centrally mapping these successes and establishing a structure to continually share, enabling proven practices to be adopted into operating and regulatory frameworks would be of significant benefit.

These successful linkages between VET and HE extend beyond the traditional pathway arrangements, including ‘reverse’ pathways where HE students then study at VET. For example, Deakin is currently establishing the Hycel Technology Hub at its Warrnambool Campus. Working closely with our partner, South West TAFE, creating new courses, modifying existing courses and doing so in close consultation with industry. We believe Hycel will be an exemplar of a VET/HE/industry integrated education and workforce development. As new industries are established across the nation, we should integrate proven models that reduce costs of set up, as well as speeding timetables for adoption.

Finally, it is critical we address tertiary admission systems. To increase participation, we support deepening the relationship between ASQA and TEQSA. This would enable better curriculum mapping to ensure student participation. Alongside this, further incentives could be explored to provide TAFE institutes who are successful in progressing graduates to higher education. Notably, schools and their role to prepare students for academic success must be considered here.

**Recommendations:**

3. **Further alignment of HE-VET systems, to a post-18 education system.**
4. **Mapping of HE-VET integration models to develop best practice approaches.**
5. **Increased alignment of ASQA and TEQSA, as well as admissions systems.**

## **Sectoral Diversity**

Our sector is not very diverse: almost all Australian universities would fit into the first Carnegie Classification of Doctoral Institutions, compared to less than 20 per cent of degree awarding institutions in the United States. This raises real questions regarding shape, structure and focus of our sector, whether we have got the mix right to deliver the best outcomes for the greatest number of students. As it appears currently, we have not.

Despite the difficulty of such discussions, we must actively pursue diversification of institutional types and purpose in the Australian sector, for example:

- Discovery research intensive versus industry-aligned intensive institutions.
- Community-focussed institutions with a local social remit versus less community/social focus.

Critically, this means we must consider teaching focussed/teaching only institutions within the mix. While seemingly a threat to some, to ignore this issue is intellectually dishonest.

## **THREE PILLARS: EDUCATION, RESEARCH, AND COMMUNITY**

Our current system has evolved to an at-times convoluted mix of purposes, pillars and drivers of mission. From an original focus on education and research, universities now play significant civic, social and economic roles. Likewise, resourcing such complex missions, whether locational, equity, or geo-strategic, have evolved at a rate outstripping the regulatory and funding systems.

The make-up of such multifaceted purpose is also strongly debated, often responding to changed government priorities as much as strategic reconsideration. This subsequently informs the uncertainty and fissures that characterise the modern university sector.

### **The Three Pillars Model**

For the system to thrive, Deakin proposes three pillars for universities: education, research and community engagement – each at parity of esteem in terms of reward and investment. These subsequently inform a funding mechanism within the Dual Accord Model.

Each pillar will carry across all aspects of university activity. For example, academic career paths must reward excellence in education, research and industry engagement, while funding policies must facilitate universities to see each pillar as being of equal importance. Excellence in research should not privilege grant funded discovery research over impactful applied industry partnerships, while the quest for commercialisation must not starve vital discovery pipeline and blue-sky outlook.

As we consider the mission of each university as defined by the coming accord process, and as a partnership with the community, both local and national, it will be crucial that we seize this as an opportunity to diversify our universities. Across the sector, a one-size-fits-all approach will fail us. The balance of education, research and community should match regional needs.

### **Recommendations:**

- 6. Adoption of the *Three Pillars Model* of institutional purpose, informing funding models.**

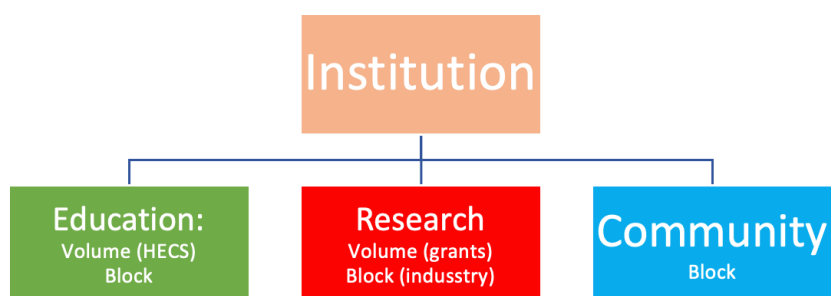
### **Three Pillars Funding**

Based on current arrangements, universities receive approximately \$20 billion in Commonwealth funding, including HELP student loans. The major sources are:

- volume based teaching funding of between \$14 and \$15 billion (CGS and HELP)
- other grants of around \$1.0 billion, including \$300 million for various equity purposes
- research block grants of around \$2 billion
- project based research grants from the \$1.5 billion in NHMRC and MRFF funding
- project based ARC research grants of around \$800 million
- research capacity grants of around \$300 million.

This is a convoluted system, driving inefficient behaviour such as cross-subsidisation, while entrenching burdensome regulation across the sector, and placing a handbrake on performance.

Deakin proposes a recast funding system which promotes diversity among universities, and which achieves national goals, including increased flexibility and adaptability. This is a volume and block funding model across the three pillars.



### **Education Funding:**

**Volume:** funding based on the volume of students enrolled in any single program. This would be a continuation of the current HECS model with the state and students each sharing a proportion.

Importantly, this funding would speak specifically to education and make no inherent assumptions about covering the costs of research. There would be an agreed national total volume and institutions could grow/shrink within this based on demand and student preference. Deakin notes the recent Productivity Commission Five Year Report support demand within post-18 education as a critical productivity driver for the Australian economy over the coming period.

**Block Grant:** the volume model has serious challenges and there is a strategic need to support specific areas of study, as well as equity delivery. As part of the funding agreement, universities would be able to define a mission and justify why it was appropriate to have supplementary educational block grants.

For example, as noted in a recent paper by University of Technology Sydney Pro Vice-Chancellor Verity Firth, almost 60 per cent of low SES students are enrolled at 15 universities, while 50 per cent of regional and rural students are enrolled at 11 institutions. Neither current volume funding, nor equity pools, adequately address these additional costs.

It is important to note, this move has significant implications given the cross-subsidisation model that has been encouraged to-date. Consideration must be given to transition, ensuring adjustment time, and not reinforcing current inequities in the system that favour older, established institutions compared to those at the forefront of industry-engaged learning and equity.

### **Research Funding:**

**Volume:** there is a need for a strong and competitive discovery and innovation driven grants scheme. To ensure stability and quality we should move to a system of full cost research funding through the grants mechanism. This includes the ability to recover indirect costs in real time, for example via the RSP portion of Discovery Grants, as well as grants shifting to fully cover the salary and employment costs of relevant researchers i.e., NHMRC and ARC grants, fellowships etc. This would specifically address the vast issues with the current PSP rates.

Overall, Deakin argues that smaller volumes of high quality, appropriately grant funded research is in the longer-term interest of the nation and the sector: better outcomes at a higher quality.

**Block Grant:** if grant funded research is fully funded then the block grant should be based around industry facing research, supporting doctoral studies and shared infrastructure platforms. Likewise, block funding may also be utilised to support infrastructure requirements that fall outside the Volume funding pool, or the lifespan maintenance costs currently requiring cross-subsidisation. This pool is critical to system equity, which addresses those institutions who deliver much of the work at the intersection of national priorities without the benefit of longer histories. The block grant would also serve as a security in the case of another black swan event i.e., COVID-19, ensuring continued stability of national interest research and workforces.



### **Community Funding:**

We must finally establish a system to support delivery of crucial third pillar community activities. If we are to focus education and research activities, community activity should be supported via agreed block grant, subject to university mission and agreed regional/community need.

**Block Grant:** recognition of an institution's role within the local community, and its central purpose i.e., community outreach, industry engagement, employment programs etc. Deakin acknowledges this is more readily aligned to the role of outer-metropolitan and regional institutions. However, that speaks to the specific value of such universities, and the critical economic and social uplift such institutions occupy, where traditionally the sector was poorly equipped to address.

#### **Recommendations:**

7. **Adoption of the Volume and Block Funding Model across the Three Pillars.**
8. **Consultation to develop a transition approach for the sector, recognising shift away from cross subsidisation, and the need to preserve levers for growth.**

### **Other Education Pillar Matters**

Prior national initiatives to research, develop and apply good practice and sophisticated peer review culminated in the Australian Learning and Teaching Council and its successor the Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) inside the Department of Education. The national approach created practice, expertise and leadership. Since the closure of the OLT, national collaboration for learning and teaching has dramatically dropped, with institutions making slower progress in parallel. The rapid rate of global and national change in economic and social factors requires much more agile and adaptive response from higher education. The work of the National Centre would be targeted to national priorities considering economic and social impact.

#### **Recommendation:**

9. **Creation of an independent National Centre for Learning and Teaching to advise on and develop innovative and practical responses to national priorities in a changing national and global context.**

The relevance of courses for graduate employment is assessed by the success and future impact of graduates. Employers are largely satisfied with the graduates they employ (*ESS*) but point to the opportunities for improvement, notably transferable skills such as ways of thinking, communicating, interacting and managing oneself. While all Australian universities embed these skills in degrees, opportunities for students to practice transfer into diverse work situations can be limited. The need for adaptive skills is clear in the recent mass uptake of generative artificial intelligence technologies. Core capabilities such as digital fluency, creative problem-solving and analysis support rapid response to change.

#### **Recommendations:**

10. **The creation of a national action plan to foster improved university-industry interactions, including identifying and addressing pain points, sharing good practice, expectations for all stakeholders and testing regional or national models for collective action.**
11. **Wider embedding of direct industry collaboration in the design and review of courses, including innovative models that strengthen university-industry relationships.**

The review of the Australian Qualifications Framework (Noonan et al 2019) proposed a more unified framework, better describing connections across all levels of education. Implementation of the recommendations will create a mechanism to promote alignment for all providers and with industry.

Likewise, lifelong learning relies on the capacity of an individual learner to learn effectively, to determine their own learning needs and navigate providers to find the appropriate qualification or learning module. To promote, we require alignment of post-18 education systems and deep collaborations between educators and industry/community to create relevant and user-friendly learning opportunities. The way forward is to place the learner at the centre of re-design with over-arching requirement for seamless transition between learning providers.

### **Recommendations:**

12. **Implementation of the 2019 AQF Review including its recommendations for further work, as well as investigate options for career-wide subsidies learning.**
13. **Consideration of teacher training standards for higher education aligned to competencies expected for school and further education.**

## **Other Research Pillar Matters**

### **Industry Engagement and Contribution**

Australia is a nation of SMEs and their particular and potential challenges in becoming innovation driven enterprises must inform approaches. Larger companies should increase contribution to an innovation driven national and globally connected economy. Four areas for more effective stimulation of industry investment in research and collaboration with providers are:

- enhanced and more effective tax incentives research and development by industry
- consolidation and alignment of research, innovation and commercialisation schemes offered by government and others and making them more visible and accessible through a concierge and brokerage service
- targeted support for industry university precincts and co-location, particularly for SMEs
- reform and expansion of the NCRIS and ARC LIEF schemes to include and drive creation of research and innovation development platforms that enable industry to advance TRL, MRL, CRL and BRL on the road to market.

Likewise, the Accord should include strong expectations of university collaboration with government and industry that is mission and accord-based.

### **Recommendation:**

14. **Adoption of Deakin recommendations regarding industry-engaged research approach.**

## **Research Capacity and Careers**

Currently Australia has latent and underutilised research capacity and a declining pipeline of research talent. We are losing talent to commercial companies particularly in critical fields such as IT and AI. Additionally, losses are accumulated overseas and to non-research career opportunities, due to structural barriers and limitations in the sector and beyond.

Several options exist to tackle this challenge, and leverage research to tackle wicked problems:

- Create sustainable and flexible research career pathways, especially early and mid-career by:
  - enhancing existing fellowship schemes
  - supporting career pathways that include moving in and out of academia and industry in both directions, including new types of fellowships and internships.
- Support training, retraining and lateral career moves across disciplines for academic researchers, and research engagement and training for the industry workforce, in response to new needs and priorities.
- Explicitly fund allocation of time for research by university academics in priority areas and based on university strengths to enable consolidation for excellence and scale.

Further, the current barriers between research training and high-impact government or industry careers beg solutions. Review of regulations, particularly regarding length of training and scholarships, to identify and address barriers to access and consideration of part-time scholarships would potentially open research training to a wider talent pool and for industry and government.

Deakin University is focusing on enhancing pathways for HDR students into industry and for industry workforce to access research training in universities. A program of secondments, internships, exchanges for university staff and HDR students with industry and government and more flexible research training for industry and government workforces is emerging particularly galvanised by our Trailblazer REACH award. Review of such programs across the sector would help inform a systematic and more consistently effective approach that could be recognised in a national Accord and in university and industry funding and incentive programs.

**Recommendation:**

**15. Adoption of Deakin recommendations regarding research capacity and workforce.**

## **EQUITY, EXCELLENCE, ACCESS, AND SUCCESS**

Deakin joins the ATN, wider sector stakeholders and Federal Government in the commitment to a post-18 education system more accessible and equitable to a diverse range of student cohorts. Our long history serving diverse student cohorts, and as an institution founded to provide access to university education beyond the traditional school leaver category, speaks to our commitment in this regard. Deakin views equity in education as central to Australia's national interest, meeting the nation's ability to serve future needs while upholding the intrinsic egalitarian values of the country.

It is critical universities acknowledge their historical role in privileging or disadvantaging different groups, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This has been intrinsically linked to impact, changing lives for people from under-represented groups and their communities. It is fundamentally outdated, and misleading, for equity to be considered through a lens of students lacking ability to undertake university without special consideration. Rather, we must acknowledge the major social and economic impediments that work to disengage and limit opportunities.

As the demand of the labour market, as well as broader society evolve, all Australians require access to lifelong learning in a post-18 environment. Despite the growth in select equity groups via the previous demand system, and post-Bradley, the results have been patchy at best, and set the challenge we must meet.

We must inspire future student cohorts no-matter the background, while ensuring the systems and measures are in-place to support them towards success. Rather than seeing equity as a matter of participation, we must consign this limited view to the annals of history and set the watchwords of success and excellence as the duality of equity. Where capability and need exist, we must provide the pathways and systems to support attainment and most critically meet potential. Whether school leaver, mature aged, low-SES, Indigenous, living with a disability, or otherwise, all Australians should be supported to combine their hard work with implicit potential, and achieve success.

We particularly note the success of the University of Newcastle in this regard. Learning from their systems would deliver the prioritisation of approaches that work with equity groups to increase their engagement and success in higher education. Critically, these models place the onus on universities to view equity beyond enrolments, towards the success of the students and excellence of their support systems and practices. The mistakes of demand must not be repeated, where too many students ill-prepared for university were enrolled to fill courses, fees charged, debt leveraged and no support given resulting in increases drop-out, churn and debt.

**Recommendations:**

- 16. Apply learnings in equity from those institutions with the track-record i.e., University of Newcastle, Deakin etc; and ensure alignment of equity funding to demonstrable success; institutions liable for practices that increase enrolments without aligned progress and success rates.**
- 17. National metrics of institutional outreach and recruitment across key equity cohorts: providing incentive for institutions to engage with equity cohorts actively, and publicly accessible indication of institutional commitment to equity.**
- 18. Development and provision of financial assistance models, to address to the cost-barriers for participation in higher education amongst historically excluded equity groups. We note the ATN recommendations and suggestion in this regard.**

### **Provider Practices and Barriers**

Deakin notes several practical and easily accomplished measures that may make a meaningful contribution to equity engagement and success in post-18 education, particularly as it related to the practices of providers. These include:

- Sector wide uniform alternative entry schemes for equity students with targeted support programs upon commencement of studies at university. These should be designed with students needs in mind and their experience at the core.

- Development of national best-practice onboarding process and support specific to under-represented groups. This should be done in concert with group representatives, acknowledging equity is not a single group, but individuals with specific requirements.
- Inclusion practices and Universal Design principles embedded in institutional policy and procedures to ensure students have equitable access to higher education.
- Targeted support for equity students during the transition to university, including the challenging period between enrolment and commencement of classes where students have disconnected from secondary school, but haven't yet connected to university support.
- Universities required to adopt and commit to Universal Design principles across Teaching and Learning, physical and digital spaces and within policy.

Likewise, barriers to higher education may be tackled through collaboration, including meaningful measures such as:

- alignment of funding provided to best enable institutions to expand opportunity. See the *Three Pillars Model* proposal
- broadening of equity funding to ensure there is coverage for cohorts not currently covered under the current Commonwealth funding policies; this should be reflected in an institution's Education Block funding, under the Deakin *Three Pillars* proposal
- update equity policy to include a broader definition of 'equity' with groups not currently defined under the IRLSAF
- removal of the current 50 per cent non-complete HECS-HELP rule.

**Recommendation:**

**19. Deakin notes the wide variety of practical, immediate measures available to pursue equity ambitions, and advocates for the ready adoption.**

### Quality and Institutional Accountability

Where our current system challenges itself to questions over equity, quality and excellence, it often does so on mutually exclusive characteristics. Indeed, at times there is a strenuous focus on avoiding matching the two concepts. For example, defining excellence by a measure of the average entry ATAR of students rather than considering true underlying potential, while considering equity as nothing more than enrolment statistics, whether those students sink or swim.

This 'definition' of equity, which has too often been that adopted in practice, if not in principle, may hit a few superficial equity metrics, speaking more to the institution rather than the aspirations and needs of the students themselves, and potentially undermining our social mission as universities. Without success, excellence and quality as the watchwords of equity, along with meaningful measurements and systems that hold institutions to account, we will have a system of neither equity nor excellence.

As such, Deakin supports the use of institutional accords, or existing compacts if continued, to place accountability measures upon institutions regarding equity. These would move the sector beyond enrolments and towards the systems, measures, policies, and procedures in place to support equity students, a university's commitment to equity via factors such as outreach and recruitment, as well as student success levels. Critically, the focus of such accountability must be the institution, rather than the misplaced focus on the student seen in the current 50 per cent pass system.

**Recommendation:**

**20. Use of institutional accords to drive equity commitment, including accountability for institutional behaviour, with incentives for sector-leaders and financial consequences for lack of adequate performance.**

### A New Social Contract

There are little doubt costs present as major barriers to access and entry in higher education in Australia. Current cost-of-living increases notwithstanding, the overall trend over decades has been towards students facing increasing cost pressures to engage in post-18 education, and a negative rebalance between work and study. This is equally so

for mature aged students, subject to major financial impediments to engage in post-18 education, particularly university, while also facing economic realities (i.e., mortgage payments, health costs, child expenses etc) within a system ill-suited to lifelong learning. Note, this does not yet even speak to the debt implications of HECS-HELP, where debts now commonly exceed \$50,000.

Simultaneously, intergenerational data demonstrates clearly that the former trajectory of each generation living longer and more prosperously than that preceding has broken: Millennials and Generation Z cohorts on average will die younger and poorer. For a country such as Australia, where national values indicate egalitarianism, the generational social contract is now broken. Given universities exist to serve the public good, this is a circumstance we must push to be addressed.

Though noting such issues take in a multitude of factors beyond the remit of a national Accord, for example housing costs, healthcare costs, employment security and opportunities etc., it is requisite that this Panel, and process, engage with such complex, interwoven issues. They are at the heart of a prosperous, healthy Australia for decades to come, and speak directly to our ambitions in education and training. As such, Deakin strongly argues the Panel to recommend to Government an additional policy process, bringing together the multitude of stakeholders to reconsider the Australian Social Contract, and how to revive its meaning and value.

Education is of net benefit to the nation, society, and economy – the value of education goes beyond individual opportunity and income, to an uplift more broadly. The direct correlation between education intensity and economic advancement, along with living standards globally, speaks to this. Recent statements by the Federal Government reflect this. As such, consideration should be given to a rebalance of payment systems reflecting such society-wide benefit, where contributions are properly reflective of the breadth of beneficiaries, rather than the narrow band currently considered i.e., student and state.

#### ***Recommendations:***

- 21. Cross-sectional review of costs as a barrier to post-18 education, reflecting reform aimed at contributions from across beneficiary groups.**
- 22. Government-led examination of intergenerational fairness, costs, and wealth imbalance across the economy, including costs and debt associated with post-18 education.**

#### **International Education**

For institutions, an international presence is more than student education or research collaboration. It is a social, economic and cross-cultural bridge to soft diplomacy across regions old and new, facilitating increased understanding across an ever more engaged populace to address challenges and opportunities with innovation, partnership, and learnings. As such international perspectives are relevant to all aspects of most universities' missions.

Similarly, a diversified international student cohort benefits Australia's university sector, as well as student cohorts (international and domestic) by contributing to a rich and vibrant learning environment. Exposing students to different perspectives, experiences and cultures, it facilitates critical thinking, creativity and innovation, enabling students to develop important skills such as empathy and cultural competence. International students also contribute to the local and national economies by providing a reliable workforce while studying and as skilled labour upon graduation.

For the nation, a healthy, valued, diversified international education sector is proof point of our global outlook and engagement. It reflects a modern, progressive, diplomatic nation with a clear sense of our place in the world and an outlook towards engagement and collaboration. In an age of rising geo-political tension, our approach to international education must be one speaking of partnership and collaborative interest, not narrow income streams.

Australia's international education success over the next decade will rely on universities remaining highly responsive global demand trends. While each institution has a unique profile and opportunity in international markets, a sustainable program will require strong and consistent support across government, including provision of a coherent and timely student visa program, a robust and consistent regulatory framework and a reliable pathway for international graduates to employment.

### **Recommendations:**

- 23. Institutional accords include dialogue on each university's international student diversity plan and objectives in order to inform a whole-of-government approach to supporting Australia's international higher education program through aligned policies and programs.**
- 24. Federal government, in partnership with the higher education sector, review how DFAT, DOE and DHA are aligned in supporting the Australian higher education value proposition is projected in new and emerging markets.**

### **Benefits and Data**

International students are highly valued in regional communities where they add diversity, cultural exchange and new perspectives. They also contribute to local economies through their spending and by bringing unique skills and knowledge to local businesses and organisations.

However, regional campuses are not the natural first choice, or even in the consideration set, for many international students when considering Australian destinations. To address this, dedicated promotional and incentive programs are needed to make regional campuses more appealing. The Destination Australia scholarship program and introduction of extending post study work rights for international students at regional campuses are recent examples of initiatives that have had impact.

### **Recommendation:**

- 25. The university level accord process includes regional and rural campuses identifying their international student program plans and objectives in order to assist government aligning programs and policies accordingly.**

Notably, international higher education in Australia relies on the provision of timely data to guide quality assurance of the student experience including through the application and visa issuance process as well as in the classroom and as consumers and participants in society.

### **Recommendation:**

- 26. In partnership with the sector, the key government agencies including DOE, DFAT and DHA conduct a review and refresh of the datasets made available, as related to international student experience and Australia's market competitiveness.**

## **Governance and Industrial Relations**

Deakin supports comments made by the ATN and UA regarding governance matters. We also support the governance-specific recommendations made by the University Chancellors Committee.

### **Industrial Relations**

The increased casualisation of the academic workforce has led to significant consequences for the sector that are far from desirable, including regarding our reputation as institutions of learning. For some universities, casualisation occurred as a result of the mass growth of higher education, a spinoff from the vastly increased scale of undergraduate education, combined with few alternative approaches to career pathways or employment models. For other institutions, it must be accepted casualisation of the workforce was at times a specific outcome: an option supporting workforce growth while preserving income for other areas of investment.

Either way, it has progressed from its origin appropriate model to employ subject specific experts and higher degree research students in sessional roles, largely tutoring, to covering vital, ongoing and annual teaching and research work. It is desirable that future arrangements make the sector far less reliant on sessional academics, using them where it is genuinely the desired approach.

However, a meaningful solution to this modern employment question must avoid looking in the rear-view mirror as the sole option. Instead, it should provide secure, respected and meaningful career paths for academics that align to their strengths and aims, while simultaneously ensuring institutions have the flexibility to respond to shifting requirements of evolving demand.

There are a few key areas where change will assist:

- Ensure that we have career paths for academics who specialise in education, research, or industry engagement, that can sit alongside the more traditional portfolios.
- Create a different approach for sessional academics where a more enduring employment relationship is the normal approach, with the associated security for staff included.
- Allow fixed term teaching intensive roles, with protections to ensure repetition of roles by individual staff triggers security for the staff.

This will be challenging, requiring flexibility and give and take on both sides, but the consequences of a modern approach to university employment will bear benefits for decades to come.

***Recommendation:***

- 27. Collaborative development of new employment models across the sector, based on needs and values expressed above.**