# **Universities Accord discussion paper –** this response includes contributions from Clare Forde, Mark Nading, Richard Irons and Tania Kanellos

April 2023

## The role of higher education in Australia’s future

***Q1 How should an Accord be structured and focused to meet the challenges facing Australia’s higher education system? What is needed to overcome limitations in the current approach to Australian higher education?***

A document that is plain language, accessible and has a set of agreed principles, as well as a 5-year plan with bipartisan approval, so it has long term sustainability. It has to have a plan with an ongoing commitment to an approach, and accountability for upholding the plan and principles.

***Q2 How can the diverse missions of Australian higher education providers be supported, taking into account their different operating contexts and communities they serve (for example regional universities)?***

This needs flexibility. One national framework with targets that are categorised broadly into areas that cover HEP specialisms. Bringing together a working group to determine what those categories would be at a national level would be important. Then there would be common targets for all at a foundational level, as well as specialised/categorised ones.

Government support could be underpinned by community needs, that is to align funding and an associated University’s focus on the needs of the region(s) they serve. As all regions need nurses, teachers etc, these could be common to many; however, where the community is arts-focused or forestry-focused then these research and learning areas could be supported as specialisms, to create centres of excellence. HE in these contexts would be embraced by a strong community.

***Q3 What should the long-term target/s be for Australia’s higher education attainment by 2030 and 2040, and how should these be set and adjusted over time?***

Any targets set would need to be more nuanced than what we've had in the past in the Bradley era. Now that those targets are broadly met, continuing to lift overall participation is not what the nation needs. South Australia does not meet the targets set by Bradley review, so additional support is needed in this location to achieve the ‘base’ level.

This is especially concerning for SA, where new defence contracts are being implemented, so a higher skills demand will need to be met to support these opportunities; however, it is unlikely to change the local gap in attainment significantly enough to make a difference where it is most needed, without additional support from government and other sectors.

More nuanced targets accounting for local priorities and differences in communities across Australia, both metro and regional, as well as focusing on equity group participation. Targets around specific skills gaps are often not useful because of the elapsed time it takes to train a workforce. It may be speedier to fill these through migration before they can be filled by higher education completion.

A postgraduate participation target might be more appropriate going forward, which acknowledges the rapidly changing workforce and the need for generation X and Y graduates to retrain to move between the multiple careers they will have in their lifetime. Continued flexibility to shift CSP (commonwealth supported places) from UG to PG to support PG participation would be necessary.

## The challenges and opportunities for Australia

***Q4 Looking from now to 2030 and 2040, what major national challenges and opportunities should Australian higher education be focused on meeting?***

Key priorities are the environment and sustainability, aged-care and nursing as well as more generally preparing graduates for lifelong learning, generic and foundational skills.

There is such a focus now within universities on meeting the specific needs of professional bodies for graduate employment, that it has taken away from the opportunities to offer students personal development and growth, and lifelong learning skills. This is despite a clear focus in the AQF on skills and capabilities rather than employment outcomes. A Universities Accord may leverage the AQF further and in consultation with industries to develop a set of national graduate qualities. A set of national graduate qualities developed with consultation would show the Government’s support of value for education to employers and the general public.

Clearly, meeting workforce needs is a shared challenge for all industries and preparing graduates for these new roles is clearly a focus for Higher Education Providers. Whilst we can broaden access and participation, Universities must ensure that students who engage in study complete their degrees or at least leave-well and are motivated for their next pathway. Students need support during their studies as they often have conflicting priorities and study often takes a backseat to other commitments. This may be for part-time work, family responsibilities or other important factors, which are essential. A broader network of support is needed, as universities are not equipped to support all these needs, so partnering with service providers (funded by external sources) will be critical.

We should be looking at educating more of our community, increasing critical thinking so that fact-based decisions can be taken, rather than decisions informed by opinion and twitter feeds.

Our community demographic and motivational drivers are very different to 2010. Since Covid, expectations from the workplace are higher and attitudes from the community about work, career, study and ‘what’s fair’ is different. These factors need to be considered when addressing the challenges for the next 10-20 years. Our community needs more nurturing and support, and the recent transactional approach to solving issues for the future is not sufficient (e.g. growth of aged-care sector).

***Q5 How do the current structures of institutions, regulation and funding in higher education help or hinder Australia’s ability to meet these challenges? What needs to change?***

A move to the Bologna 3+ 2 model of HE would help to shift focus away from the content that students may or may not need for their jobs, where knowledge is advancing at an exponential rate, and towards skills and capabilities. Graduates would gain foundational knowledge and generic skills in the bachelor’s degrees and then focus on more specialised vocational education at the master’s level.

For some time, education has been taken for granted and undervalued in our community. Parents, and therefore students, completing secondary school are focused on NAPLAN results and ATARs rather than the learning experience and outcomes. A misdirected understanding that cut-offs for university programs are linked to difficulty rather than demand contributes to students, and their parents, making poor decisions about career choices for our young adults. This (and ‘not wasting my ATAR’) leads to dissatisfaction with university studies and sometimes low self esteem. Providing clear information about careers and pathways is key to changing this. A broader entry requirement may also reduce this wasted effort, for example, if students could start university and undertake foundational learning and then select their program (career pathway) it would reduce obsession with ATAR and shift the focus to building on their areas of strength. This is also key to developing critical thinking, curiosity and other sought after attributes that are transferable skills to many life situations.

The Student Learning Entitlement cap is a restriction that needs to be lifted.

Similarly, caps on placements are a limitation, and professional accreditation requirements that mandate these is a barrier. Other reasons for placement limitations relate to industry/employers being able to support students, so incentives to do so, seem to be needed (with lean workforces, the availability of staff to mentor and ‘train’ students is also limited).

***Q6 What are the best ways to achieve and sustain future growth in Australian higher education, given the changing needs of the population and the current pressures on public funding?***

More consultation with migrants is needed to understand their needs better and attain better data, to ultimately be able to provide more support to migrant families better to find gainful employment and a more sustainable life in Australia to encourage them to stay.

‘We’ need to reconsider the visa regulations for international students, allowing for part time study and part time work for international students and reduce some of the other restrictions to help them balance their lives while they are here.

***Q7 How should the mix of providers evolve, considering the size and location of existing institutions and the future needs of communities?***

If there is broad agreement that the HE market is oversaturated following the achievement of the Bradley era participation target, the government should support universities financially when they either amalgamate or alternatively focus on strengths to encourage the mix that will better suit the nation going forward.

Amalgamations have a heavy burden for those institutions undergoing the processes, so these should be strategically determined, as there will be losses before there are gains and the sector would not sustain multiple simultaneous amalgamations. Many countries have multiple universities in each district/city, so the real benefits and costs and long-term gains need to be weighed up and true investment in building a small number of big-top 100 universities through this method.

Perhaps the limitations on number of institutions should be placed on the numerous private providers which increase reputational risk to the sector. With triple the number of private HEPs (compared with universities) the reporting requirements imposed across the sector create additional red-tape for low-risk HEPs. Perhaps fewer private providers would assist to balance the controls.

Regarding the mix of providers, we suggest that there are already too many different types of HEPs and that this is confusing for the market. We have the AQF which determines the level of a qualification and many other measures and KPIs to determine if a student has attended a high quality HEP. Perhaps we can consider tertiary providers (registered and approved) and universities are those tertiary providers which also conduct research.

## The challenges and opportunities for Higher Education

#### Quality teaching delivering quality learning

***Q8 What reforms are needed to promote a quality learning environment and to ensure graduates are entering the labour market with the skills and knowledge they need?***

#### Meeting Australia’s knowledge and skill need

***Q9 How should Australia ensure enough students are studying courses that align with the changing needs of the economy and society?***

***Q10 What role should higher education play in helping to develop high quality general learning capabilities across all age groups and industries?***

Translating research into curriculum and learning.

Clear information, from a reputable objective source, about the skills that are needed would ensure students take courses that align with the needs of the economy and society. If this information is partnered with some benefits for the learner, e.g. guaranteed employment or a shorter-term gain like apprenticeship support then this would assist in supporting students. This type of initiative requires three-way commitment from industry, government and universities/education providers.

Enabling continuing professional development opportunities and for those wanting/needing to change career, having smaller qualifications available, e.g. graduate certificates and microcredentials that are recognised by industry and universities (meeting appropriate standards). Some current barriers are cost, upfront fees, time and support from workplace.

The Bologna process in EU has enabled member states to work in co-operation towards QA through comparable criteria and methods and something similar would be of value in the Australian HE system, through the Accord.

The current AQF enables so much flexibility in duration of degrees and volume of learning that degree outcomes are difficult to compare. The advanced standing for master’s degrees and option to have a 3- or 4-year bachelor need to be reconsidered. A standardised 3+2 approach will facilitate greater comparability of degrees.

More WIL requirements within degrees would be beneficial as well as consistent regulation of WIL, e.g. standard agreements etc.

There should be greater focus on quality of teaching, and it should become essential for HE teachers to have a teaching qualification, designed specifically for their professional needs. As many HE teachers have PhD this qualification, they are prepared for research focused components of their employment, but they receive no substantial training for teaching. A new qualification equivalent to a Graduate Diploma (one year) at AQF level 8 could be created for these staff.

A national teaching excellence framework is something that the Accord could lead towards developing. The framework should support ongoing professional development of teaching staff, to prepare them for the changing environment in which they are are employed, e.g. designing relevant assessments to reduce academic integrity, writing business cases for programs, curating content for digital delivery etc.

***Q11 How should Australia boost demand from people to study in the higher education system?***

A more coordinated education system would assist with the transition for students. Removing the barriers to study and normalising the experience at an early age would assist to grow demand. Anecdotally, we hear that many students are convinced that they are not suitable for HE as early as year 9. Similarly, the aspirations for STEM careers declines at this time. Many HE choices and skills being promoted are in science-based organisations, even for non-science careers, so the connection to science needs to be addressed. Perhaps a competency-based approach to assessment, with multiple submission opportunities, during these early secondary school years would help students build a solid foundation and build resilience, curiosity and critical thinking.

More specific growth targets that focus on areas/categories (e.g. low SES) where participation is low. Targets should take into account population trends (e.g. number of births, migration, metro vs. regional populations) and economic needs. A postgraduate target may be useful to upskill the existing workforce who will have an older retirement age and multiple careers.

***Q12 How should an adequate supply of CSPs be sustained and funded, as population and demand increase?***

A 3-year generalist undergraduate degree + 2-year specialised masters model across the sector would enable greater transferability and flexibility at the undergraduate level, which would appeal to the school leavers who are uncertain what career outcome they are looking for upon entry to university. It would help sustainability of CGS place by reducing the amount of switching/transferring between degrees. If the vocational tier of HE is largely at the PG level, where the degrees are shorter in duration, and the students already have an UG degree to give them foundational skills and to guide informed career choices, the CSPs could then move within the PG programs in a more agile system between disciplines to respond to trends in demand.

***Q13 How could an Accord support cooperation between providers, accreditation bodies, government and industry to ensure graduates have relevant skills for the workforce?***

The Accord needs to drive a balance between the requirements set by professional accreditation bodies, employers needs and the missions of universities. Professional accreditation bodies currently hold disproportionate power in curriculum decisions and outcomes. Unfortunately, some employers still *complain* that graduates are not job ready, so meeting the needs of professional bodies alone is not sufficient.

The Accord could provide a consistent message on the desired outcomes and contributions from each stakeholder group. Bringing these groups together to provide operational input into policy formulation, and advice on assistance/resources needed to implement policy at the ground level. In working together a more realistic balance between professional body requirements, degree requirements, work-ready requirements may be achieved, including an acceptance of the onboarding process and investment in new students/professionals/graduates.

Much of the *agreement* needed relies on work experience within a degree, often referred to as WIL (work integrated learning). There should be clear legislation relating to the support of students in WIL and managing WIL, including through the Fair Work Act and tax/funding initiatives for industry to drive engagement with providers. Industry/professional registration bodies can be incentivised to incorporate placement hosting into their CPD.

In turn, mandatory government reporting could be expanded to include ‘career readiness’ data to provide national statistics rather by individual providers.

***Q14 How should placement arrangements and work-integrated learning (WIL) in higher education change in the decades ahead?***

Perhaps a rethink and robust debate about the role of industry WIL in degrees is needed. If we move to a 3+2 model, a one-year paid internship could be offered to graduates or apprentice-style degrees, where on the job learning is undertaken concurrently with degree studies.

In a practical sense, if all continues as is, Universities will need to have top-down clear direction on WIL/placements that is formally documented in policy to effectively manage risk. This direction then needs to be resourced effectively both academic and professional staff contributions. Clearer divides between the roles of the different personnel to ensure consistent experience for external stakeholders (students & industry) and management of risk. There is an increasing shift towards making WIL a core aspect of all programs to improve employability outcomes, this will again need clear direction.

***Q15 What changes are needed to grow a culture of lifelong learning in Australia?***

Pre-requisites present as a barrier to lifelong learning. We believe that anyone who completes a Senior Secondary Certificate in Australia, regardless of subject choices they make as a teenager, should be able to select from the full range of university undergraduate disciplines without extending the duration of their bachelor program beyond 4 years. Normalise the inclusion of all requisite learning within the Commonwealth Supported program schedules for all bachelor’s degrees. This would be a key step towards making all aspects of Commonwealth Supported undergraduate curricula accessible regardless of the availability and quality of delivery of subjects at individual secondary schools.

It is impossible to keep faith with the mission to prepare graduates for lifelong learning while maintaining entry rules that exclude or disadvantage young people based on subject choices made as early as year 10. The same students who are told to choose carefully else risk missing out on their preferred disciplines at university are simultaneously told they will engage in lifelong formal learning to enable multiple career changes throughout their lives. Fifteen-year-olds told they must succeed at advanced maths and science subjects in high school to be an engineer or have a career working with technology can have their career aspirations prematurely and permanently narrowed by a single bad experience in one semester or one topic or with one teacher.

One form this change might take is to require any programs that insist on maintaining subject prerequisites to offer a version of the same program with the prerequisite subjects taught within the program and sequenced to add no more than 0.5 EFTSL to the program length. At present, this option isn’t entitled to CGS funding support. A better form of this change would be to incorporate the requisites within the standard length of the programs and allow students commencing with existing subject knowledge to swap those subjects out for other options that add breadth to their first-year studies, but not an option to shorten the overall length of their program.

***Q16 What practical barriers are inhibiting lifelong learning, and how can they be fixed?***

Prerequisites are often used in entry requirements to ensure that duration of degrees does not exceed 3 or 4 years; however, with the absence of specific bridging courses (not full foundation programs), this creates barriers for career changers and lifelong learners to pursue new fields of study.

The upfront costs for bridging courses, informal learning and microcredentials are also a barrier for lower-income workers. More CSPs or FEE-HELP support would reduce this barrier.

Full recognition and transferable certification for micro-credentials into awards may facilitate ongoing learning.

#### Connection between the vocational education and training and higher education systems

***Q17 How should better alignment and connection across Australia’s tertiary education system be achieved?***

Credit pathways need to be transparent and consistent. TAFE has a national curriculum, so national credit minimums and maximums for TAFE studies articulation into university studies would be a good step towards bringing the sectors together. This would work particularly well if the university sector went down the path of a 3+2 Bologna model. It is hard to implement with Australia’s current Higher Education system because of the huge variability between degree structures and durations.

Universities use EFTSL to measure study load, so if this type of measure were in place for TAFE and aligned to EFTSL then this would help to build connections.

***Q18 What role should reform of the AQF play in creating this alignment?***

The AQF should describe the equivalency of level of learning between VET and HE awards but also describe the differences between the outcomes of the two branches of education. The approaches and learning models are necessarily different because they achieve different outcomes and are not interchangeable.

A standardised volume of learning/units for study across the VET and HE would enable better transition and translation of studies.

Duration described in years rather than load has led to confusion for prospective students and partnering with overseas institutions.

The current AQF structure does not enable a coherent tertiary sector, it seems to focus on the role of VET sporadically when it should be very clear that VET qualifications have a role across the whole education sector, as do Higher Education and Secondary Education.

The hierarchy of levels in the AQF does help non-education professional to set their own goals by understanding how to attain higher level qualifications or to choose how they attain deeper level knowledge and also to understand where their experiences and qualifications fit within the whole education framework for entry and RPL.

***Q19 What would a more effective and collaborative national governance approach to tertiary education look like?***

Create one single regulatory body for VET and HE instead of one for each. This could bring more consistency across the two, where it matters for collaboration, therefore streamlining interactions. The two sets of rules for all matters leads to clunky solutions when collaborating, building programs, dual offers, setting tuition amounts and fee payments etc.

Curated articulation that provides two-way recognition for prior studies are a more equitable approach and reduce the perception of two-tiers or standards of education.

***Q20 How can pathways between VET and higher education be improved, and how can students be helped to navigate these pathways?***

The government may financially incentivise more partnerships between VET and HE indirectly by setting participation targets for HE that prioritise equity group participation. Universities may leverage the VET student profile to help achieve those targets. If the funding allows, universities can set up dedicated teams to support students and help them navigate the VET to HE journeys.

***Q21 How can current examples of successful linkages between VET and higher education be integrated across the tertiary education system?***

***Q22 What role do tertiary entrance and admissions systems play in matching learners to pathways and supporting a sustained increase in participation and tertiary success?***

At the moment, TACs do not have a role; however, if they were able to promote seamless pathways that provide an opportunity to increase preparedness and demonstrate capability, they could play a role in increasing participation.

Fees for application also restrict application by low-SES, this fee is paid upfront and for SA, a late fee is incurred after 30 September, this is quite substantial and a barrier.

#### A system that delivers new knowledge, innovation and capability

***Q23 How should an Accord help Australia increase collaboration between industry, government and universities to solve big challenges?***

***Q24 What reforms will enable Australian research institutions to achieve excellence, scale and impact in particular fields?***

***Q25 How should Australia leverage its research capacity overall and use it more effectively to develop new capabilities and solve wicked problems?***

***Q26 How can Australia stimulate greater industry investment in research and more effective collaboration?***

***Q27 How can we improve research training in Australia including improving pathways for researchers to gain experience and develop high-impact careers in government and industry?***

The Accord, as well as government regulatory frameworks should encourage universities and private industry to collaborate on experimental and developmental work, and it should be part of the research education that universities provide for reasons of graduate employability.

Universities must also continue doing *basic* research because it underpins all other research, and whilst the for-profit sectors won’t invest in this type of research, it is critical to all disciplines. The funding for this activity will continue to fall on government and other university income so needs to be factored into the operational budgets.

Employees of private industry need to be able to continue to be paid their salary while undertaking PhD research, which is likely to be focused on solving problems for that company. Alternatively, a government tax offset/deduction/exemption for employers to this support that model of WIL may encourage industry support.

#### Creating opportunity for all Australians

***Q28 What is needed to increase the number of people from under-represented groups applying to and prepared for higher education, both from school and from other pathways?***

It is very important to understand the barriers for under-represented groups, so we need more information from this group and follow a few individuals to understand where the challenges begin. In our foundation studies program, we discovered that some new learners hadn’t had exposure to requirements around form completion, deadlines etc and through their studies and the high-level support network, they have been assisted to understand these requirements, to overcome these barriers, and many have continued with with studies and are now professionals in industry. It can be a real transformation, but support is needed along the way.

It is difficult to see the benefit of higher education if you don’t have exposure to examples of success for people within a similar demographic to your own. We need a solution that builds momentum and allows for review and continuous improvement in how we build numbers and ensure success for under-represented groups.

Building aspirations for higher education study is critical. The media may also be a strong influence in this space, e.g. criticism of teachers.

Early awareness and normalisation of the view to study further to establish career goals should be introduced to young adults in a meaningful way. Unfortunately, the personal learning plan (PLP) in SACE doesn’t achieve this, as it is completed in year 10 and then, not referred to or amended during the period that young adults select their university preferences. Currently, additional pressure is imposed on year 12 students as they feel that this is the only/most critical decision and selection time, but in reality, the journey to your first professional job can take a longer windy road.

Perhaps more preparation around recognising strengths and determining how to overcome shortfalls/weaknesses in middle years would assist. This would embed an ethos of *review and improvement* that supports lifelong learning and long-term planning as well as a self-service approach to career planning.

Empowering individuals to seek objective advice through the provision of useful tools would also assist. Online tools that can be accessed privately, without judgment, to attain information that can be used along their life journey. A complete service with expert case managers would be beneficial. I note that versions of these suggestions exist but that these need improvement and modification to respond to the current population and job environment, e.g. <https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-and-training/help-guide-your-career-choices> is not easy to follow if you don’t regularly access government information, and when considering under-represented groups, these types of websites are barriers. Another site at <https://labourmarketinsights.gov.au/> includes valuable information about the job environment and trends but also a career quiz, so trying to cater to different audiences thereby becoming a barrier to less-confident under-represented groups (noting that this is soon to be replaced by <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/> this new site doesn’t provide for individuals needing career information or advice, and does not provide a referral to this type of information). Similarly, job network services staffed by individuals who are not equipped to provide career guidance or are created as hurdles to access to income support do not satisfy the current need.

More bridging, foundation and TAFE pathways or partnerships with Higher Education are needed. These can help to gain confidence as small trial samples for individuals.

Encouraging lifelong learning, through shorter courses (e.g. microcredentials) that lead to Higher Education degrees may provide attractive options and build supportive pathways for under-represented groups.

***Q29 What changes in provider practices and offerings are necessary to ensure all potential students can succeed in their chosen area of study?***

Foundational/bridging programs with high touch support models in higher education have been very successful in nurturing students from non traditional backgrounds. So, a focus on equity participation and retention from HEPs and/or a regulator would help encourage more of that.

***Q30 How can governments, institutions and employers assist students, widen opportunities and remove barriers to higher education?***

These key stakeholders each contribute to the education journey for students, so collaborating on initiatives that enable students to experience employment and study during their degree will remove barriers.

Building work experience pathways into undergraduate degrees, for apprenticeship-style degrees may provide opportunities for non-traditional learners. This may require incentives for employers.

***Q31 How can the costs of participation, including living expenses, be most effectively alleviated?***

Reconsider the JRG low completion rates rules, which are a significant barrier to participation.

The HE sector needs to stop using ATAR for admission. It gives a false impression of the skills, or aptitude for HE study. The media also needs to stop reporting on ATARs as though this is the measure of success.

Set specific targets for equity groups for the sector and consider further government subsidy for those groups to reduce the student contribution.

Inclusion of placements and work experience are key to career outcomes for many degrees; however, this imposes a financial burden on students with limited income. Many students will need to take time-off from part-time work to attend full-time placements over several weeks. This unpaid period can impact some students quite seriously, and not all students are entitled to income support during this time (especially for those who are under 22 years of age).

Some inhibitors to study for under-represented groups, e.g. low SES, are imposed through application fees (through TACs) and fees to meet professional requirements set by placement providers, e.g. first aid certificates, criminal history checks, so removing this fee for students would assist in removing barriers. The deferral of these types of fees would also be appropriate provided this did not impose high interest rate for the debt.

***Q32 How can best practice learning and teaching for students from under-represented groups be embedded across the higher education system, including the use of remote learning?***

***Q33 What changes to funding and regulatory settings would enable providers to better support students from under-represented groups in higher education?***

Building in HELP and CSP for bridging courses that are relevant to key degrees would improve support for students from under-represented groups. For potential students who are not starting university study, directly from SACE their options are limited, especially if they have not taken literacy and/or numeracy-based subjects during their later years of secondary school or if some time has passed. Aside from enabling programs that offer foundation level studies, many bridging programs/courses are offered with an upfront fee or packaged to include nonrelevant disciplines.

#### Governance, accountability and community

***Q34 How should the contribution of higher education providers to community engagement be encouraged and promoted?***

***Q35 Where providers make a distinctive contribution to national objectives through community, location-based or specialised economic development, how should this contribution be identified and invested in?***

***Q36 What regulatory and governance reforms would enable the higher education sector to better meet contemporary demands?***

As stated, sector expertise on governing bodies should be mandatory.

***Q37 How could a more coherent and dynamic national governance system for higher education be achieved?***

One quality body setting and reporting one set of standards for all providers delivery higher education in Australia.

*University Acts are usually State Acts whilst the Funding is a Federal Act, would a more coherent system have purpose and funding governed by the same body?*

***Q38 How can the Accord support higher education providers to adopt sector-leading employment practices?***

The Accord should make a commitment to work towards more consistent and equal approach across the sector for Enterprise Agreements.

#### Quality and sustainability

***Q39 What reforms are needed to ensure that all students have a quality student experience?***

***Q40 What changes are needed to ensure all students are physically and culturally safe while studying?***

Universities are renown for embracing diversity in their student population and local communities. Embracing international students and their families, welcoming them to Australia and relaxing migration rules and visa requirements would build a multicultural community with a mixed demographic. Additional support in English language development may will facilitate immersion in the community and would reduce isolation for students and their families.

Building population and housing density around university centres will also create a community that is physically safe.

***Q41 How should research quality be prioritised and supported most effectively over the next decade?***

***Q42 What settings are needed to ensure academic integrity, and how can new technologies and innovative assessment practices be leveraged to improve academic integrity?***

#### The role of international education

***Q43 How should the current recovery in international education be managed to increase the resilience and sustainability of Australia’s higher education system, including through diversification of student enrolments from source countries?***

***Q44 How can the benefits of international education be shared broadly across the system, including in regional areas, and what level of reporting should there be?***

As above, Q40:

*Universities are renown for embracing diversity in their student population and local communities. Embracing international students and their families, welcoming them to Australia and relaxing migration rules and visa requirements would build a multicultural community with a mixed demographic. Additional support in English language development may will facilitate immersion in the community and would reduce isolation for students and their families.*

*Building population and housing density around university centres will also create a community that is physically safe.*

#### Investment and affordability

***Q45 How should the contribution of different institutions and providers to key national objectives specific to their location, specialist expertise or community focus be appropriately financed?***

***Q46 How can infrastructure development for higher education be financed, especially in regional and outer urban locations?***

***Q47 What structure of Commonwealth funding is needed for the higher education sector for the system to be sustainable over the next two decades?***

A structure that priorities quality of education overgrowth in numbers. Where participation targets exist and are incentivised with funding, they should be targeted to address specific gaps in participation rather than encourage overall growth. This will help to encourage some universities to become more specialised instead of every university being broad based and doing largely the same things.

***Q48 What principles should underpin the setting of student contributions and Higher Education Loan Program arrangements?***

Inflation, graduate salaries and equity principles should underpin the setting of student contributions. Graduates who have taken up HELP options, should have some guarantee that any interest applied to their debt would be less that CPI (and never at the bond rate, as previously proposed). This uncertainty may prevent capable students from engaging in HE studies.

There should be some differentiation between contributions based on the cost of different degrees. It is important to maintain public awareness of the differences in cost of teaching different degrees but the gap between the highest and lowest student contribution needs to be much smaller than it is under the current JRG arrangements.

***Q49 Which aspects of the JRG package should be altered, and which should be retained?***

The low completion rules need to be altered as they are a barrier to access, discouraging participation from equity groups.

The restriction on Student Learning Entitlement (SLE) capped to 7 years may limit study options for students who undertake pathway diplomas/degrees to gain entry to strict quota degrees.

The HECS bands are complicated, with the additional provisions for program-based fees, i.e. psychology and social work, so this should be simplified so that students can calculate their own fees intuitively.

Allowing students who meet Low Completion Rate (LCR) criteria to continue their studies in their degree, if they can pay their tuition fees (FPUGs) does not address the issue for low completion satisfactorily. In fact this creates a barrier for those who cannot pay upfront, so is an equity issue, and should be removed as an option. Students who meet LCR should be case managed to leave well or supported to continue (if appropriate).