



UWA STUDENT GUILD  
The University of Western Australia  
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Dear Professor O’Kane,

On behalf of the Guild Council and elected student office-bearers, we welcome the opportunity to contribute to the passage of the Australian Universities Accord and thank the Panel for their attention to contributions from student stakeholder organisations.

Responses to the below questions have been compiled from the recommendations of our elected student representatives –

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

*Challenge* - minimising the cost of living crisis and increasing housing/rental/residential college fees as a barrier preventing students from being able to ;

- a) commence their tertiary education,
- b) effectively undertake their tertiary education and
- c) complete a degree.

*Opportunity* - utilise the student voice to deliver initiatives that students actually want to engage in and will therefore be viable long-term financial projects for the federal government, as opposed to producing university-targeted stimulus packages or reforms that students will actively resist and will therefore have to be revisited or repealed with each new incoming Parliament.

**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?**

The dependence of student unions on the compliance of their University to direct funding (read: SSAF) towards their portfolio negatively impacts their ability to advocate for student needs effectively (and therefore produce an overall more positive education experience, reflective of what the modern Australian student needs and wants out of their education), as if their advocacy is in conflict with existing University policy or principles, they risk financial retribution, or risk an ongoing reliance on unguaranteed compliance of the University. A fixed, nationalised standard for SSAF distribution, with specific ambit to be independent of year-to-year conflict between student representative bodies and the Universities themselves, would allow student unions to more effectively communicate and enact the interests of their student stakeholders, and allow the Australian university community to accurately reflect the aspirations of the generation it should be delivering for.

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

Where a placement or work-integrated learning program significantly impacts a student's ability to complete paid work outside of university, or wherein undergoing both a placement and external work would be significantly detrimental to a student's ability to complete the requirements of their degree, or wherein a student is completing an identical function with output of a comparable quality to a typically paid profession, WIL and placements should be paid.

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

Engaging in lifelong learning, particularly via a tertiary institution, is comparable to the accrual of lifelong debt, or at the very least, a lifelong impact on a student's ability to house themselves and earn money. Ensuring that the government financially supports students **\*\*above the poverty line, and adjusted to ongoing increases in cost of living and rental expenses nation-wide\*\*** would go a long way to making tertiary education viable to those that do not have a familial support or an otherwise secure financial situation, and therefore would allow students to properly enter a modern workforce that has increasing requirements for the completion of tertiary education without financially crippling themselves in the process.

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

To effectively alleviate the costs of participation in higher education, including living expenses, there needs to be more support from state and federal governments. This is because the costs of education and living expenses can be significant barriers for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and can prevent them from accessing quality education.

Currently, universities are expected to cover a lot of the costs associated with providing higher education, including building and maintaining facilities, hiring staff, and providing student services. This can limit their ability to invest in academic programs and student support, which are the main priorities of universities.

To address this issue, state and federal governments need to provide more funding to universities to cover the costs of infrastructure and other non-academic expenses. This will allow universities to focus on their main priority, which is providing quality education and support to students. In addition, there needs to be more support provided to students directly, such as increased financial aid and scholarships, to help alleviate the costs of living expenses.

Overall, by providing more support to universities and students, we can create a more equitable higher education system that ensures all students have access to quality education regardless of their socioeconomic background.

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

One of the most critical changes is to take more firm action and provide stronger legal support to survivors of sexual harassment, assault, and other forms of violence on campus.

Currently, many survivors do not feel comfortable reporting incidents of violence on campus due to the burden of proof that is required to pursue legal action. This can make it difficult for survivors to access justice and prevent perpetrators from being held accountable for their actions. Therefore, the burden of proof needs to be explained more clearly and looked at more firmly to ensure that justice is served for survivors.

Another change that needs to be made is to provide more resources for students who have experienced any form of violence on campus. This can include access to counseling, legal support, and other forms of advocacy. This will not only provide students with the support they need but also help prevent future incidents from occurring.

Additionally, universities should implement policies and practices that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion. This means taking steps to ensure that students from all backgrounds feel safe and welcome on campus. This can be achieved by promoting cultural sensitivity and awareness, providing training for staff and faculty on how to create inclusive environments, and fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding.

Thus, to ensure that all students are physically and culturally safe while studying, we need to take a multifaceted approach that involves legal action, providing resources to survivors, and promoting a culture of diversity and inclusivity on campus.

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

Reversal of increased "Commonwealth Supported Places" without an increase in the overall proportion of financial support from the Commonwealth, which effectively engineers the courses that are viable for students to take without considering the actual goal of the package to better prepare graduated students for the reality of the workforce. Andrew Norton (ANU Professor, Practice of Higher Education Policy) has forecasted that due to the adjustments in course numbers and incentives from JRG, large numbers of graduates that will likely enter the lowest paid graduate positions will be encumbered with more debt, while universities will produce lower numbers of graduates immediately entering higher paying graduate positions. This is a problem not just for students directly, but also for the financial viability of the package itself -- the government is essentially assuming what will be bad-faith debt, even insofar as its goal is to funnel graduates into industries that are "modern" or "expanding."

The UWA Student Guild would appreciate the opportunity to provide additional ongoing consultation. We believe, as a Guild, that the voices of students hold an important place in the Australian university community, and value any chance to uplift that community.

Kind regards,



Geemal Jayawickrama

*110<sup>th</sup> Guild President*

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