11 April 2023 Dear Committee,

RE: Call for submissions in response to Australian Universities Accord Panel Discussion Paper

Save Aussie Ed is a youth-led movement advocating for reform to primary, secondary, and tertiary education systems in Australia. Australia has the chance to be a leader in an equitable and world-class education system, but significant change is needed. The Universities Accord provides an opportunity for a fundamental reset of the relationship between students and universities. This provides the opportune moment for the principles of equity and accessibility to be placed at the forefront of the Australian university system, to ensure that all young Australians are able to access tertiary education, should this be the path they choose. In 2023, young Australians are now, more than ever before, facing increasing barriers to accessing higher education. These barriers are diverse in their origins and include, but are not limited to, rising student contribution amounts in disciplines such as the arts and commerce, rising HECS-HELP debt amounts created by indexation, and rising costs of living. In light of these circumstances, we urge the Panel, irrespective of their final recommendations, to center the voices and experiences of diverse young people in any proposed reform, to ensure a stronger and more accessible higher education sector is created for young Australians. There are two key issues of concern to Save Aussie Ed. Rising student contribution amounts in Commonwealth support places When referring to the student contribution amount in degrees offering Commonwealth supported places, the Discussion Paper notes that “the proportion paid by students increased from just over 20% in 1989 to a projected 47% in 2024”. This represents a significant increase in student contributions, which has been exacerbated even further by the Job Ready Graduates package. For example, with the introduction of this package, students in disciplines such as the arts experienced an increase of more than 100% in their student contribution amount, simply because they enrolled in their course one year later. This increase in cost was used to encourage students to enroll in specific courses, but the Discussion Paper notes that no significant change in enrolment choice has been created through such price signaling tactics. This change therefore only acted to create additional cost barriers to university attendance, particularly for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds or those experiencing educational challenges during secondary schooling. With respect to the arts and other disciplines such as commerce, for which student contribution amounts increased in response to the Job Ready Graduates package, these disciplines play a critical role in stimulating thought, debate, and innovation within Australian society. It is of the utmost importance that these programs remain affordable for students to ensure the next-generation of Australian leaders continue to be nurtured in higher education. We therefore recommend that students studying in Commonwealth supported places should, wherever possible, have the government contribution increased and student contribution decreased. Any change ought to be grandfathered in, to ensure that students entering university during the Job Ready Graduates era do not face continued financial barriers. This will help to bring Australia in line with international neighbours across Europe and in New Zealand, for example, where higher education is significantly more affordable. Indexation of HECS-HELP debt Forecasts suggest that the indexation of HECS-HELP debt will lead to an increase in thousands of dollars of student loans this year. These continued increases faced by students add further pressures in an already challenging economic environment. The Panel must give consideration to the current indexation scheme and how this creates additional financial barriers to loan repayment and access to higher education for diverse young people in Australia. Thank you for your consideration of our submission. With best regards, Save Aussie Ed