Hello, Australian Universities Accord Committee.

(I apologise, I attempted to submit earlier under the same name and email but my session timed out before I could finish the document)

My name is Lucca Lewthwaite, while I cant say I represent the interest of any greater shareholder, I can only make a few comments as a current university student from one of the disadvantaged background’s this accord has found so important in their recommendations and focus.

I am personally very glad for review into the higher education system, while there are far more difficult stories I have personally had great trouble with the way I’ve been integrated into the higher education system, and the challenges apparent especially with the application stages.

Although ive lived my whole life in Australia, the simple fact of being born elsewhere significantly affected my application process, while took so long, required so much prework, long call centres and a sensation of dread that I only finished my application 4 weeks into the first semester.

I was an average student, particularly of my own fault ill admit but either way I was given a fairly unremarkable ATAR score of 70.40. Growing up without citizenship, or even permanent residency, simply because the process was so expensive meant I was unsure I could even undertake a degree in ustrlia at all, let alone get the commonwealth supported place that was imperative to affording a degree. I was lucky though, and simple luck meant I was eligible and able to attend the University of Queensland within a Bachelor of Arts in 2022.

After a year online during COVID-19, my university (UQ) has completely removed their online component, leaving me stranded and without the money to move on campus, as well as ineleigble for the limited help provided.

Costing has always, and will always be the greatest obstacle to higher education among disadvatged groups, and at risk of repeating what the accord has already figured or stated, these would be my three greatest recommendations to increase the ease and possibility of university among other disadvantaged groups.

I understand that not everything recommended or said may be in this Accords purview, but I would be remiss if this process wasn’t just standard recommendations, but recommendation build entirely around making my own situation easier for the countless many who may find themselves in it later.

## Comment 1: Application and Entry Requirements

I was quite surprised to read that 55% percent of Australian jobs should and may require tertiary education by the 2050s. I think the biggest comment I had was: “How can anyone expect 55% of Australian students to meet annually increasing entry scores?” Every student is defend, as the saying goes and I sincerely doubt that 55% of work-seeking high school graduates In the years preceding 2050 could realistically graduate with the at least 70+ coming on 80 score our better universities seek right now, especially not with the possible annual increases I’ve seen since I graduated, a full near 30 years before this workforce reality reaches its predicted apex.

Even since I graduated most courses have increased their entry requirements by at least 1 or 2 selection points, it wouldn’t surprise me if even the average entry score for a degree is at least 80 across most institutions by 2050.

Therefore, I think that greater entryways should be looked into for tertiary education. Now while the Accord has already identified this in their most current report, and admittedly I haven’t read the whole report, I couldn’t find many explicit options.

I think personally, entry and early courses in undergraduate degrees, low cost or perhaps even free, should be available to everyone who can afford it. The universities still make an income from providing these courses, and anyone who wishes it can make themselves more attractive to non-traditional application pathways. To increase availability these should also be offered entirely online.

For the most in demand disciplines, like nursing or STEM, there should be more Diploma-type introductory courses, which give the student all they need depending on their scores the ability to move up to undergraduate courses. These courses should be subsidized if not themselves a Commonwealth Supported Place, which all contain pathways toward undergraduate learning.

I acknowledge across institutions such courses already exist, but they are scarcely advertised or supported enough to pose a viable pathway as of yet, nor attract large enough numbers of prospective students. I sincerely doubt that for example, anyone can move from a Diploma of Laws to a Bachelor of Laws, very often the most selective and difficult Bachelor across our biggest universities.

I would also recommend that these Diploma’s or Certificates be built to accommodate those already working, their time structure fitted to accommodate those who already need to be or are earning an income. No ATAR should be necessary, but perhaps a temporary score given though tests to apply successfully for these courses, just passionate and respectable people. Though to avoid a saturation of inadequate applicants, you should need to show promise and quality effort and learning to be eligible for upgrading.

Especially considering how this accord admits less people are choosing a tertiary pathway, such options really need to be refitted for the non-ATAR students and lifelong learners. As it stands, there are some groups in Australia which cannot become whatever they want. If the need for such a large percentage of the workforce to be tertiary education is fast approaching, then everyone with the drive should have a clear, subsidized and available pathway to their desired degree, one that takes a reasonable amount of time and increases their prospects in the workforce in the meantime.

As such, I believe a truly integrated Diploma/Certificate system as a surefire way to upgrade to a tertiarily degree, perhaps in quicker time than currently available as well (Not many want to spend years in pre-university just to spent another 4 in actual university, let alone postgraduate study)

## Comment Two: Work Integrated Learning from early in the degree:

Just because you have a degree, doesn’t mean you have a job on graduation. The workforce has always been, and I assume will always be highly competitive, even with such an increased demand. If your studying, especially fulltime, you will unfortunately lack work experience. Pretty much every job these days requires work experience, and how else will Australian students remain competitive unless they can receive quality work experience while learning? Who you know is the most important and immediately rewarding effect of

Every successful student in perhaps even their second year of study should have integrated work-study options available to them in competitive and quality roles. If in a three-year degree you can work part-time at a relevant firm, like government or a multinational for two years you stand a far better chance at employment and have far-reaching opportunities than the average student forced to work an entry-level job during university or those on student allowance completely without experience. If they do well and make a good impression they should even be then offered integration into full time roles.

As it stands only the highest achieving students in some institutions can access single semester internships which increase their desirability in the workforce. The average student, the real apparent and necessary majority in this changing workforce, needs guaranteed access to far more impressive programs which last longer and provide an income while studying. Imagine a two year internship, structurally built around full time study through Australia’s greatest employers and most competitive entities, and just how this will reflect on a far more internationally competitive and better 55% of the future workforce.

## Comment Three: Online Integrations

Every University in Australia went online during COVID. Now not every university still offers the revolutionary option. If my personal ATAR was more competitive, I would transfer away from UQ, simply due to their complete removal of Online Learning. The infrastructure is there to offer a far further reaching and open degree, one which especially benefits poorer and regional/remote students. Myself being the clear example, I would say: “Just because you graduate high school, even if you achieved the best ATAR you could, doesn’t mean you can and want to immediately migrate for school”. Simple due to my parent’s lower income I haven’t and cannot yet move on campus, nor afford continued living without finding a job in a very difficult market. The second you move to university, unless you have parents to afford your upkeep, your immediately in poverty. Now there are scholarships and allowances to ease the transition, yet considering how long it took me to even finish the application process, the first semester would be over before I received my likely rejected application for scholarships, even so how would I afford my accommodation, at coming on %500 a week rent on the campus all on a $800 a fortnight allowance? As such the two-year mark is approaching since I began my study, and I still am not in a position to move to a university which has completely destroyed its online component, meaning I’ve been forced to take nearly a year off.

I think its fair and costly for universities to be required to provide at least the first year of classes for all degrees online, and for greater and less picky early allowances for moving students, not just the 90+ ATAR lot. I would also recommend this possible grant is expanded for all groups, not just high school graduates. I am fairly sure that because I’ve spent this time at home, I am no longer eligible for the insufficient moving bonus given, I am sure there are others in my situation and this grant should expand to students who have spent this time online. I think its fair that around $3000 is initially given to moving students, as well as an at least two month partial or full subsidisation of accommodation and food costs while the student looks for a job or seeks more permanent welfare.

No matter how much money you throw at disadvantaged groups, it’s a serious and expensive lifestyle change to move locations, and without expanded and inclusive support the 53% needed increase to regional students won’t come.