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<https://puau.org>

Response to Australian Universities Accord

Priority Action 4:

Provide funding certainty, through the extension of the Higher Education Continuity Guarantee into 2024 and 2025, to minimise the risk of unnecessary structural adjustment to the sector. Interim funding arrangements must prioritise the delivery of supports for equity students to accelerate reform towards a high equity, high participation system.

Universities' and eligible higher education providers' Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) funding is currently guaranteed to December 2023 through the Higher Education Continuity Guarantee (HECG). The Final Report will propose new funding arrangements for consideration by Government. Extending the guarantee into 2024 will avoid unnecessary disruption to staff, students and the sector.

The Review recommends that universities and providers should be expected to direct any funding resulting from this guarantee to support greater equity outcomes. This should be directed towards a range of assistance, such as increased support for students in enabling courses, improved academic advice and learning support, wraparound support and services (such as mental health services), scholarships or other equity-related services.

PUA's key points:

- **The employment and working conditions in our universities for academics are iniquitously inequitable for many if not most of those staff and this needs to be addressed with priority**
- **Our entire university system should be fully and permanently funded by government, and that funding should be permanently guaranteed to be on a par with other democratic countries**
- **Australia should not be dependent upon international student fees to fund domestic education and research**

It is curious that the Panel should be concerned about equity outcomes for students, but not for the lecturers who are expected to teach them. **The employment and working conditions in our universities for academics are iniquitously inequitable for many if not most of those staff.** This needs to be rectified with priority.

Our entire university system should be fully and permanently funded by government, and that funding should be permanently guaranteed. Any subsidiary and other funding streams are unreliable, and vulnerable to potential corruption, with deleterious consequences. **Australia should not be dependent upon international student fees to fund domestic education and research,** and in practice, that revenue has often not been used for purpose. It has been inappropriately diverted for non-academic purposes and to fund research that we should have funded through other channels, but it has not resulted in universities employing sufficient full-time continuing lecturers to maintain optimal teacher-student ratios or to ensure that all degree programmes are taught to best possible standards.

From the top down, the situation of our universities cannot be expected to improve. All key management positions need to be filled by democratic elections. This will prevent academically incompetent managers occupying these positions which sadly is now often the case.

Good universities are not only protectors of democracy, but are essential for the future of this country, as a reservoir of deep expertise that generates ideas and helps educate the populace. As shown by the example of other enlightened countries, a low student cost for university education comes with many benefits, both for society and the economy. Good universities are priceless, and are well worth adequate public funding, as are the students who attend them. This is critical to maintain and raise living standards, and also for nation-building. Penny pinching higher education, costs more than it saves. The recent Australian practice of universities having to seek independent funding to support their fundamental societal mission, is as absurd as asking the military to find its own funding.¹

¹ <https://johnmenadue.com/the-crisis-of-academic-values-and-inadequate-governance-in-australian-universities/>