

Questions on notice: Inquiry into the Higher Education Support Amendment (Response to the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report) Bill 2023 hearing

6 September 2023

The following are answers to questions taken on notice by Professor Harlene Hayne CNZM, ATN Chair, during the Education and Employment Legislation Committee hearing for the Inquiry into the Higher Education Support Amendment (Response to the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report) Bill 2023 on 1 September 2023.

Page 13

Senator HENDERSON: *I would like to start with you, Professor Hayne, on Indigenous enrolments. I'm keen to understand all of the data. Could you provide the committee with the number of applications your member universities receive from Indigenous students, the offers made as well as the acceptances by Indigenous students, including a breakdown on metro, regional, rural and remote applicants?*

Prof. Hayne: *I can take on notice the collective data from the ATN.*

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ATN's response

Given the short timeframe of fewer than four business days set by the Committee to respond to questions taken on notice, ATN is still in the process of sourcing this data from the business and planning units at our member universities.

The Department of Education holds nationally consistent data on applications, offers and acceptances and should be able to provide data upon request for all institutions.

The latest publicly available data is from the Department's publication [Undergraduate Applications, Offers and Acceptances, 2021](#). The Department may be able to provide further data by regionality and institution upon request by the Committee.

Excerpt from Table A3 Applications, offers and acceptances by under-represented groups, by state, 2021

	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous
Applications	315,377	7,637
Offers	256,385	6,088
Offer rate	81.3%	79.7%
Acceptances	190,822	4,594
Acceptance rate	74.4%	75.5%

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Page 13

Senator HENDERSON: *How many of the ATN universities are over the cap?*

Prof. Hayne: *I'd have to take that on notice.*

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ATN's response

Given the short timeframe of fewer than four business days set by the Committee to respond to questions taken on notice, ATN is still in the process of sourcing this data from the business and planning units at our member universities.

The Department of Education holds nationally consistent data on funding allocations and should be able to provide data upon request for all institutions.

Page 14

Senator HENDERSON: *How much additional funding do you believe you would require, with your universities, to meet this uncapped demand-driven proposal?*

Prof. Hayne: *I certainly can do that. I'll take that on notice.*

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ATN's response

The Explanatory Memorandum for the Bill notes: "The expansion of demand driven places is estimated have a cost of up to \$34.1 million in underlying cash terms over the period 2023-24 to 2026-27."

The Department of Education may be able to provide further detail and is best placed to provide consistent national data covering all institutions.

Given the short timeframe of fewer than four business days set by the Committee to respond to questions taken on notice, ATN is still in the process of sourcing this data from the business and planning units at our member universities.

Page 14

Senator HENDERSON: *Thank you. I'll try and move through my questions as quickly as possible. Can I ask for all of the data, on a university-by-university basis, on the 50 per cent pass rule? How many students have been impacted, in your universities? How many have met one of the many exemptions that apply under the policy? What are you otherwise doing to stop failing students from accruing massive student debt? You'd be cognisant, of course, that in June of this year more than three million Australians were hit with a 7.1 per cent increase in their HECS debt, which is a very significant burden on their debt. So this is a massive issue.*

Prof. Hayne: *That statistic that you just quoted, however, is across all Australians who have attended university, not those that have been hit by the 50 per cent pass rule. Every student who has a HECS debt was hit with that increase. Is that correct?*

Senator HENDERSON: *Yes, that's right. I wasn't suggesting that was connected with the 50 per cent pass rule. My question was: could I have the data and, secondly, what are your universities doing to combat cost-of-living pressures and to stop students who are failing from accruing massive debts? Every university has schemes in place to stop students continuing if they're not passing their subjects.*

Prof. Hayne: *Of course. We've got loads of that stuff. I'm sure we can accrue that information across the ATN and the IRU and get that to you.*

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ATN's response

Data on 50 per cent pass rule

Given the short timeframe of fewer than four business days set by the Committee to respond to questions taken on notice, ATN is still in the process of collating this data from our member universities.

Student outcomes reported regarding the rule include:

- Rule applied – student transferred to another course within the university
- Rule applied – student withdrew from course and ceased study with the university
- Rule applied – student excluded due to academic progression
- Rule not applied – student granted for remission/subject withdrawal for relevant units

Addressing cost-of-living pressures

Below are select examples of programs that ATN universities have in place to assist students with cost-of-living pressures and financial difficulties.

Curtin University: [Curtin Emergency Student Loan](#)

The scheme provides a small, interest free loan for students who have experienced sudden and unforeseen circumstances that temporarily infringe on their capability to continue their studies at Curtin.

Some examples of sudden and unforeseen circumstances may include:

- Unexpected expenses arising from illness or death of a family member
- Urgent accommodation and living expenses resulting from an unexpected change in normal circumstances
- Urgent and unexpected medical expenses.

Deakin University: [WIL Student Support Scheme](#)

Students undertaking a Work Integrated Learning (WIL) placement in an academic year and experiencing financial hardship can consider applying for this program.

The WIL Support Scheme is an equity initiative, funded by the Commonwealth Government grant via the Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP), to help increase access, participation and success of domestic undergraduate students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, persons from regional areas and remote areas and Indigenous persons.

RMIT University: [Student Hardship Assistance Grants](#)

The scheme provides cash grants and/or vouchers (e.g. Coles, Myki, Kmart, Prezzy, other suppliers) of up to \$1,000 to help students experiencing financial hardship.

The cash grants and/or vouchers are to help students meet urgent and essential short-term needs, such as the costs for:

- Food
- Travel
- Living expenses
- Medical costs
- Direct study expenses

The University of Newcastle: [Student Laptop Grants](#)

These grants are available to students who do not have access to a personal computer. These grants are provided to cover costs directly associated with purchasing a personal computer. Eligible students may be provided up to \$750 via a grant or JB Hi-Fi voucher.

University of South Australia: [Placement Grant](#)

The grant provides financial assistance to students typically in their final year of an undergraduate or postgraduate program which requires a placement for a continuous block duration of 110 hours (19 days) or more.

This grant supports students who relocate to undertake a program required placement in a remote or rural location or students from a remote or rural location required to relocate to a metropolitan placement.

University of Technology Sydney: [Financial Support Grant](#)

Grants to assist with essential living costs; education-related costs—for example: required texts, placement/internship or project costs, text-book assistance and extra-ordinary support costs.

Grant awards are usually for \$500.

Ensuring satisfactory academic progression

All ATN universities have policies and procedures in place (listed below) to ensure that students are making satisfactory progress in their courses and enable appropriate intervention if they are not.

- Curtin University: [Assessment and Student Progression Manual](#)
- Deakin University: [Academic Progress Policy](#)
- RMIT University: [Assessment, Academic Progress and Appeals Regulations](#)
- The University of Newcastle: [Student Academic Progress Procedure](#)
- University of South Australia: [Academic Review Procedure](#)
- University of Technology Sydney: [Student Rules – Academic progression](#)

Students also have access to a range of academic and non-academic services to support their participation in university, including study skills assistance, financial counselling, mental health support and accommodation assistance.