

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT INQUIRY INTO THE HIGHER EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (PROVIDER CATEGORY STANDARDS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2020

11 November 2020

Senator FARUQI: I might point out to you another concern that NTEU has expressed about the potential for increased emphasis on undergraduate certificates and short courses, which might result in further contestability in higher education funding and more privatisation of the higher education sector. Do you think this poses risks to academic standards and the integrity of the higher education system?

Ms Jackson: I'm not sure how you could reach that conclusion from the bill we are considering unless I've missed something. I don't think you could reach those conclusions from the bill before us. They may be more general comments. I'm afraid I just don't have a basis on which I could agree or disagree with that. I certainly can't see the potential for any of those things out of this bill.

Senator FARUQI: You don't see the potential of more privatisation because of this bill or issues of any deregulation of the higher education system?

Ms Jackson: I can't see any of those things springing from this set of changes.

Senator FARUQI: I might go back to the previous question that I asked about undergraduate certificates. As far as I understand it, there is an inclusion of the higher education certificates as a higher education qualification, which is a change in the bill that allows for the funding of short bachelor courses, which can now be funded as [CSPs]. My question was going to that. Would that create an atmosphere of contestability? We have seen that hasn't worked well for the VET sector. Are there any similar concerns that you have?

Ms Jackson: I think the answer is, no. I seek your indulgence to take that on notice so we can consider slightly further. The sound is not terrific. You're asking complicated questions. It's not coming through absolutely perfectly. I'd be happy to take that on notice in case there is something which we could give further consideration to and assist you with.

Universities Australia response:

The Bill inserts the undergraduate certificate into the definition of a *higher education award* in the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011*. In turn, this makes the undergraduate certificate a *regulated higher education award*, meaning that only higher education providers registered by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency on the National Register of Higher Education Providers are legally permitted to offer the qualification in Australia. The decision as to which providers will be allocated Commonwealth-supported places in these qualifications is not dealt with by this Bill and is instead enabled by the Minister for Education's existing powers under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*.

Universities Australia has no concerns relating to the short courses initiative that provides additional funding for graduate and undergraduate certificates. Although the undergraduate certificate is a new qualification type, it certifies completion of 0.5 Equivalent Full Time Study Load towards an existing qualification at the Diploma to Bachelor degree level.¹ As it is fully compatible with (and can form part of) existing qualifications, it is subject to universities' normal internal quality assurance processes, including approval by independent university Academic Boards or Senates – the same process as other award qualifications. Students undertaking an undergraduate certificate at an Australian university can be confident their qualification reflects the same quality as every other degree awarded through Australia's world-renowned universities.

In the 2020-21 Budget, the Commonwealth Government has announced funding for additional Commonwealth-supported places in short courses as well as multi-year courses, and has announced that these additional places will be available through both universities and non-university higher education providers. Universities Australia welcomes the Government's additional resourcing to provide further places for students during the pandemic, and is confident that students will continue to choose to study at Australia's world-leading universities based on their demonstrated commitment to quality and excellence.

¹ Council of Australian Governments Education and Skills Councils (2020), *Addendum No.3 to AQF Second Edition January 2013*, Australian Government, p.5