

## **Senate Employment and Education Legislation Committee**

### **Inquiry into Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Bill 2025 and the Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2025**

**Public hearing Friday 13 February 2026**

By way of an opening statement, I wanted to make a few brief remarks on the progress of the Australian Universities Accord and, in particular, its recommendation to establish the Australian Tertiary Education Commission – ATEC – to provide genuine stewardship to our higher education system.

The Accord represents the most comprehensive review of our higher education system in more than fifteen years, setting out a long-term blueprint for structural reform and for meeting Australia’s skills and knowledge needs into the future.

The establishment of ATEC is central to that vision. It is designed to provide independent advice, support system-wide coherence, and ensure that reforms to the higher education system produce better outcomes for Australia. ATEC will provide whole-of-system stewardship for the sector, guiding its quality, equity, strategic direction, and long-term sustainability, supporting and supplementing the work undertaken by the Department of Education. The Government has already taken significant steps through the introduction of the Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Bill, marking a key milestone in turning that intent into reality.

I want to acknowledge the leadership of **Professor Mary O’Kane AC**, who chaired the Universities Accord Panel and served as ATEC’s inaugural interim Chief Commissioner. Mary has been instrumental in shaping the Accord and in guiding the establishment of the interim Commission. As has been observed publicly, she has helped lift the words of the Accord “off the page and make them real,” and it has been an honour to work alongside her throughout this process.

I also recognise the contributions of Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt AO, with whom Mary and I worked closely on both the Accord panel and the interim Commission. Together, we have sought to build the foundations of an ATEC that can deliver meaningful, long-term outcomes for the sector, students, and the nation.

The development of the ATEC, from concept to the proposal in the Bill before you now, has benefited from wide consultation across the sector, including through the Accord review process, through the subsequent creation of the Accord Implementation Advisory Committee and through the exposure draft process on the Bill. Providers, state and territory governments, and leaders from across the tertiary education system have provided valuable insights that helped shape its governance, its remit and its future role.

This collaborative approach is entirely consistent with the spirit of the Accord, which was built on listening deeply to the people and organisations who rely on a strong tertiary education system. I particularly want to acknowledge the contributions of the Accord Implementation Advisory Committee established by the Minister to provide advice to Government on implementation of the Accord recommendations.

As this Committee reviews the legislation, I want to emphasise that ATEC is not merely an administrative structure – it is the anchor for a decade-long reform agenda. The Accord has given us a clear roadmap. ATEC will help ensure we stay the course, delivering a more equitable, coherent and forward-looking tertiary education system that meets Australia’s future skills needs. The Accord has given us a clear roadmap. ATEC will help ensure we stay the course.

The Bill is fit for purpose and will deliver an ATEC capable of delivering strategic stewardship of the sector. The fundamental case for ATEC is strong, and the groundwork has been thoroughly laid through the extensive work of the Accord.

Professor Barney Glover AO

Acting Chief Commissioner, interim Australian Tertiary Education Commission

Commissioner, Jobs and Skills Australia

13 February 2026