

24 August 2023

Committee Secretary
Education and Employment Committees
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Senate
PO Box

Canberra

Senate Inquiry into the Higher Education Support Amendment (Response to the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report) Bill 2023

Murdoch University has a strategic mandate to support enhanced access to tertiary education for students from a diverse range of contexts, and especially those students from marginalised groups or backgrounds in which tertiary education is less familiar as pathway after completion of secondary education (e.g., first in family). Hence Murdoch University is strongly supportive of the proposed amendments to the Higher education Support Act 2003 to:

- Extend demand driven funding to all Indigenous Australians;
- Remove the requirement that students must pass 50 per cent of the units they study to remain eligible for Commonwealth support (the “50 per cent rule”);
- Require universities to have a “support-for-students policy” that identifies students at risk of failing and interventions to support completion.

We also agree with the response produced by the IRU with respect to the Amendments.

Given the commitment to student support at Murdoch University is well known, and the unique nature of our students and our educational mandate, we provide additional comment from the perspective of Murdoch University.

Our deep commitment to supporting students is illustrated by the number of initiatives we have implemented to support incoming and current students. We argue that these amendments to the Higher education Support Act 2003, should include a focus on documenting and sharing these support systems for the purposes of enhancing support practices across the tertiary sector.

We have implemented a number of student support initiatives and have amassed data regarding the efficacy of these efforts; however, the data we have collected are not sufficient, nor are the analyses and research surrounding these initiatives. As part of the amendments, we recommend the inclusion of “program evaluation strategies” along with directed funding and resources to support such evaluation efforts. It is our view that a dedicated funding pool should be made available under the terms of the Higher Education Support (Other Grants) Guidelines to encourage formal program evaluation of student support initiatives and dissemination of evaluation outcomes. This requires amendment of the Guidelines and recognition of the fund in HESA (41-10 Table).

As we note above, these are highly valued amendments, and based on our extensive experience, we can not underestimate the resources required to not only attract these students but also provide sufficient supports and pathways for all of our students to find success. As experienced in k-12 education systems policies practices, and research (all lacking in the tertiary sector), all of our young people can find educational success, but some require greater resources, time, and effort to ensure this success. This requires differential funding models. We do not believe any such amendments will find success without an acknowledgement and explicit recognition of such differentiation in resource allocation.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if any further information or clarification on our submission is required.

Respectfully submitted,

Professor Don Klinger
Deputy Vice Chancellor, Education

