

Senate Standing Committees on Education and Employment

Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Date of hearing: 12 November 2025

Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International

Department of Education Question No. IQ25-000050

Senator David Pocock on 12 November 2025, Proof Hansard page 34

Job Ready Graduates Package reform

Question

Senator DAVID POCOCK: Has the government asked the department to do any modelling or options for Job-ready Graduates reform?

Ms Joldic: Not to my knowledge, while I've been in the chair.

Ms Mohr: I think we'd have to take that on notice, just to confirm across all areas of the department that that hasn't been tasked—it hasn't been tasked to my area, but I want to make sure we can give you a fulsome answer.

Answer

The Australian Universities Accord (the Accord) provides a long-term blueprint for reform across the tertiary sector. The Government has responded in full or in part to 31 of the 47 Accord recommendations, including implementing measures to ease cost-of-living pressures for students, expand access for students in outer suburban and regional areas, introduce the new Commonwealth Prac Payment, and support student and staff wellbeing.

As recommended by the Accord, the Government established the interim Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) to drive reform of Australia's tertiary education sector. The interim ATEC's Terms of Reference include commencing work to better understand the cost of teaching and learning so that the ATEC can provide advice on overall higher education funding levels per student. Further consideration will be given to the Accord recommendations in future Budgets, incorporating independent advice from the ATEC.

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Department of Education Question No. IQ25-000051

Senator Marielle Smith on 12 November 2025, Proof Hansard page 37

Consultation paper – opportunities to streamline regulation for universities

Question

CHAIR: Thank you very much. I'm happy for you to take this next one on notice. With regard to the question that was posed by the consultation paper about opportunities to streamline regulation for universities, if you could provide me with a bit more detail on notice, as it goes to those themes, when you're able to, noting that you're still working through this and there are some confidentiality issues, I would appreciate it.

Answer

67 submissions and 22 survey responses to the consultation paper on *Modernising and Strengthening TEQSA's Powers* have been received. Key themes regarding opportunities to streamline regulation include the following:

- There is a view that regulatory processes should be simplified to reduce administrative loads.
- There is support for the clear delineation of roles and responsibilities between TEQSA, ASQA, the NSO, ATEC and Department of Education.
- There is also support for increasing collaboration, coordination and data sharing between regulatory agencies, and those agencies making greater use of publicly available data and reports.

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Department of Education Question No. IQ25-000052

Senator Marielle Smith on 12 November 2025, Proof Hansard page 37

Broader work program of reform in Higher Education – Prac placements

Question

CHAIR: I have one more question for the department. In your earlier evidence, in response to Senator David Pocock, you mentioned the broader program of reform that was happening in higher education. I was hoping you could talk us through where we're at with the implementation of some of that broader work program, specifically things like paid prac placements, free bridging courses, HECS reduction and changes to HECS indexation. Can you give us a status update on where that reform agenda is currently sitting?

Ms Joldic: Sure, and I will throw to my colleagues. I understand we are on track in implementing the majority of the recommendations. I will go to Jess on the themes specifically on where we are at.

Ms Mohr: I'm not sure how much information we have in our packs here about prac placements, but there is a wide reform agenda in terms of managed growth funding for universities being introduced in 2026. The demand-driven needs based funding that is also being worked through is being implemented. We've had the prac placements, which I understand are well implemented. I don't have the details of implementation of that at my fingertips—we'd be able to take that on notice—but there is a significant reform agenda happening across that that has been implemented over the last 12 months.

CHAIR: I'm happy for you to take that on notice. I'm just keen for our committee to see a picture of the extent and breadth of that reform agenda, and where we're up to, because I know officials in your department have been working very hard at it. If we can get that on notice, that's absolutely fine.

Answer

Higher Education Reform

The Government has been progressing a significant reform agenda, to make Australia's higher education system better and fairer.

This includes:

- The interim Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) commencing on 1 July 2025, to advise on and implement tertiary education reform, drive growth through equity, and ensure Australia's national skills needs are met
- A new approach to equity funding for higher education to ensure more students are supported to access, participate and succeed in higher education. Starting 1 January 2026, demand-driven Needs-based Funding will give more funding to publicly funded higher education providers to help more students from low SES backgrounds, First Nations students, and students studying at regional campuses graduate.

- A new Managed Growth Funding system for Commonwealth supported places for higher education institutions will be fully implemented from 1 January 2027, with a transition year occurring in 2026.
- A 20 per cent reduction in all student debts and making the HELP repayment system fairer.
- Making Paid Prac a reality for students studying teaching, nursing, midwifery and social work.
- More than doubling the number of university study hubs across the country. With 65 already open and more to come by the end of 2025.
- Establishing a National Student Ombudsman to support students and resolve disputes.
- Establishing a mandatory National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence.
- Mandating that higher education providers allocate at least 40 per cent of the Student Services and Amenities Fee to student-led organisations and removed 50% pass rate rule that was unfairly targeting students from under-represented backgrounds
- Delivering additional funding for FEE-FREE Uni Ready courses to help more students prepare for university
- Making CSPs demand-driven for all First Nations students

Details on Commonwealth Prac Payment (CPP)

CPP commenced 1 July 2025 and responds to Recommendation 14 of the Australian Universities Accord Final Report.

There has been strong early student interest and uptake for the CPP across teaching, nursing, midwifery and social work. As at end of October 2025, higher education providers report that over 67,000 applications have been received.

Higher education providers have been active partners in the program's implementation and are reporting positive feedback, including that the payment is reducing financial pressure on students and supporting improved participation in mandatory placements.

The department is closely monitoring implementation ahead of the legislated review scheduled for 2027-28.

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Department of Education Question No. IQ25-000054

Senator Mehreen Faruqi provided in writing.

Transparency in university governance

Question

The lack of transparency around university funding and university decisions is a core part of the governance failures we are seeing. There are a number of ways that transparency could be improved, for example, requiring universities to fully disclose employment data, making university funding and budgets transparent and easily accessible for the public, and opening up university councils through live streaming meetings and ensuring minutes are readily available.

- a. Do you agree that transparency must be improved? And do you support these aforementioned measures?

Answer

On 17 October 2025, Education Ministers considered the University Governance Principles developed by the Expert Council on University Governance. These are available at: <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord/resources/expert-council-university-governance-final-report-and-principles>.

The Principles set strong expectations across 8 key themes. Principle 4 concerns requirements regarding transparency, including ensuring the university's purpose, objectives, decisions and performance are transparent to stakeholders. Transparency and public disclosure expectations are also contained in:

- Principle 1 (Accountability), which includes requirements for university governing body committees to disclose the number of meetings held annually and attendance by members of the committee, and
- Principle 8 (Responsibility), which includes requirements to establish and disclose a clear and sustainable workforce strategy, including a remuneration framework.

On 18 October 2025, the Minister for Education announced that the Government will implement the University Governance Principles to by incorporating them into the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021.

In addition, the Minister announced further transparency requirements for university governing bodies to be included in the Threshold Standards including a requirement to publish:

- outcomes of meetings and decisions taken,
- consultancy spending, its purpose, value and justification,
- Vice-Chancellors' external roles,
- annual remuneration reports in line with requirements for public companies, and
- composition of governing bodies.

The Minister's announcement is available at:

<https://ministers.education.gov.au/clare/improving-governance-our-universities>.

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Senator Mehreen Faruqi provided in writing.

Collaboration with universities to address racism

Question

In December, the Race Discrimination Commissioner published the interim report on racism at Australian universities, and the Commissioner, Giridharan Sivaraman, stated that the Commission “has heard that both interpersonal and structural racism are pervasive and deeply entrenched at universities”.

- a. How is the Department working with universities to ensure that this takes place?

Answer

The Government, supported by the Department, is taking coordinated action to improve the experience of students and staff on campus and to address interpersonal and structural racism. Key initiatives include:

- Passing legislation on 29 November 2024 to establish the National Student Ombudsman (NSO), which has the power to investigate complaints from students, including about antisemitism, Islamophobia or any other forms of racism. The NSO began taking student complaints on 1 February 2025.
- Engaging with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), including participating in social cohesion roundtables with universities.
 - A first roundtable was held on 31 October 2024. This included discussion with the Minister for Education, universities, students, the NSO, the Australian Human Rights Commission, Universities Australia, the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism and the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia.
 - A second roundtable was held on 25 February 2025. This included discussion with the Minister for Education, the Special Envoys, the Race Discrimination Commissioner, Universities Australia, and Vice-Chancellors.

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Department of Education Question No. IQ25-000056

Senator Mehreen Faruqi provided in writing.

TEQSA reforms

Question

1 a) What is the timetable for introducing TEQSA reforms, and will these reforms include own-motion investigation powers, compulsory information gathering, and the ability to issue public sanctions for governance failures?

b) Will the strengthened powers include the ability to act on failures of academic governance and failures to manage staff and student safety, not just narrow compliance breaches?

Answer

On 3 September 2025, the Government released a consultation paper inviting views on potential amendments to the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (TEQSA Act) to modernise and strengthen TEQSA's powers. The paper is available at: <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education/resources/teqsa-act-consultation-paper>

Submissions closed on 31 October 2025. Submissions are being reviewed and follow up consultations with stakeholders are being held as necessary.

Decisions on any changes to the TEQSA Act and the timing of any legislative amendments are a matter for Government.

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Department of Education Question No. IQ25-000057

Senator Mehreen Faruqi provided in writing.

Governance compliance with workplace laws

Question

The Fair Work Ombudsman identifies systemic wage theft as linked to failures of governance. What is the Department doing to require universities to demonstrate compliance with workplace laws as part of their governance reporting obligations under Domain 6?

Answer

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021. Domain 6 (Governance and Accountability) sits within the Threshold Standards.

TEQSA released a Statement of Regulatory Expectations (SRE) on compliance with workplace obligations on 28 May 2025. This is available at: <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/how-we-regulate/statements-regulatory-expectations/statement-regulatory-expectations-compliance-workplace-obligations>.

Commencing in early 2026, providers in the 'Australian University' provider category will be required to submit annual reports to TEQSA attesting if they meet the expectations of the SRE and providing a list of supporting evidence. Annual reporting will be required for an initial period of 2 years.

The Minister for Education has also announced the Government will implement the University Governance Principles developed by the Expert Council on University Governance and incorporate them into the Threshold Standards. Principle 8 relates to workforce and remuneration. This is available at: <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord/resources/expert-council-university-governance-final-report-and-principles>.