



03.09.24

Mr Gerry McNally
Committee Secretary
The Senate Education and employment legislation committee
Via email

Re University Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024

Dear Mr McNally,

The National Australian Apprenticeships Association (NAAA) represents the providers of Australian Apprenticeship Support Services, that sign up and support all apprentices, trainees and their employers in Australia.

NAAA is supportive of the aspects of the legislation that aim to:

- Make the HELP system fairer by improving the way it is calculated and including updating, and making it consistent with, the Australian Apprenticeships Support Loans Act 2014.
- Providing "Prac" Payment support for university students studying nursing, teaching and social work.
- Recognising the value of student lead organisations in having a say on how services are delivered to them.

However, the Association would like to highlight a potential unintended consequence of the provisions of the FEE-FREE Uni Ready Courses. The aim being to provide greater opportunities for those from under-represented groups. On the one hand expanding places for key priority groups is to be applauded, but we caution that over the last 10 years programs aimed to achieve this have had two downside impacts.

Firstly, the drop-out rate for these cohorts, particularly where the individual student has an ATAR score below 75, is roughly double the average university drop-out rate.

Secondly, there is a substitution effect where students who may otherwise have undertaken an apprenticeship are attracted to university courses they then subsequently fail to complete.



NAAA supports the legislative provisions of the Uni Ready Courses that may assist individuals to make an informed choice but highlights that a range of continuing wrap around support services will need to be effective if this is to be prevented in the future. These should include referral to an Apprentice Connect Australia provider where students fail to complete a Uni Ready Course, or where upon completion they would prefer an alternative tertiary educational pathway.

The Universities Accord legislation is a significant step forward in the creation of a unified tertiary education system and NAAA supports this aim. But the Committee should be aware that increasing university participation will further reduce commencements in apprenticeships at a time where they are already in rapid decline due to a step down in the financial support arrangements for employers of apprentices.

NAAA is not seeking any wider amendment to the University Accord legislation but would ask the Committee to understand the interplay of expanding one part of the tertiary system at the expense of another vitally important component.

Instead, the Association would ask the Committee to bear this in mind when considering any future legislative changes that may flow from the Strategic Review into Australian Apprenticeships and Incentives that was finalised last month.

The Association would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with the Committee.

Please thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide feedback on the University Accord Bill.

Yours sincerely,

Ben Bardon
CEO