

Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee: Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024

Professor Simon Biggs

Vice Chancellor and President

James Cook University

Cairns – Singapore – Townsville

T (07) 4781 4165

E vc@jcu.edu.au

W www.jcu.edu.au

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James Cook University (JCU) is pleased to provide comment on the inquiry into the Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024.

Commonwealth Practical Payment

JCU welcomes the measure that will see students receive extra financial support whilst on placement. The process needs to be as administratively light as possible in order that the Government can maximise the funding available to be paid into students' pockets.

We recommend the prac placement payments be made through Services Australia, this fits within larger systems of accountability for social support and enables the usual processes for data matching with the ATO. Setting up complex systems within universities that run in parallel to systems that run via Services Australia is inefficient.

Any requirement on universities to administer an overly complex process would be inefficient and ineffective and reduces the amount of funding available to the students who need it.

If Universities are to be responsible for administering the payment, in either the short or long-term, it is essential that the eligibility criteria and assessment processes are simple to administrate and understand for both staff and students. We note that universities were required to administer the Tertiary Access Payment, which was subsequently absorbed by Services Australia. It is inefficient to require universities to set up complex administrative infrastructure that potentially has a short lifespan (as occurred with the Tertiary Access Payment).

We suggest the following principles:

1. students who are enrolled in an eligible degree on census date should be paid the applicable practical allowance for their current study period as a lump sum.
 - (a) There should be no further requirements on the student, for example if the student for any reason is then unable to undertake the practicum they are not required to repay.
2. payment should be made by the university once the student has provided evidence showing that they are in receipt of a) any amount of Youth Allowance, ABSTUDY or Austudy, or b) payslips showing at least 60 hours of work in the month prior to census date.
 - (a) This would be a manual process, unless the Education Department created a centralised AI validation process that could be used by all universities.
3. universities report the total amount paid out to students to Education Department.
4. that funding for the administration of the payments, if the principles outlined above are adopted, should be 10%. Funding for the administration of the Tertiary Access Payment was 8.4%.

JCU would welcome the opportunity to be part of the process to design how the administration of the payment could work if it is to be administered by universities.