

Committee Secretary  
Senate Education and Employment Committees

By email: [eec.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:eec.sen@aph.gov.au)

**RE: Inquiry into the Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024 – University of Tasmania response to Question on Notice**

Dear Members of the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee

Thank you for the invitation to appear at the Public Hearing for the Universities Accord Bill 2024 on Tuesday 24 September. The University of Tasmania welcomes the introduction of the Universities Accord Bill and considers this an important step in making university education accessible for more people across Australia.

Please find attached responses to the Questions on Notice asked during the hearing and in written correspondence following our appearance. If you would like further information on the detail within our submission to the Universities Accord Bill, or our responses to these questions, please contact my office via [PVC.Student.Equity.Success@utas.edu.au](mailto:PVC.Student.Equity.Success@utas.edu.au).

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide a response to the Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024.

Yours sincerely

**Dr James Brann**  
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Equity and Success)

**Academic Division**

**Inquiry into the Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024**  
*University of Tasmania response to Questions on Notice, October 2024.*

**Commonwealth Prac Payment**

We strongly support the introduction of Commonwealth Prac Payments for students undertaking compulsory placements in priority courses, though careful consideration needs to be given in developing the process for means testing to determine eligibility to mitigate negative impacts on students.

The current proposal requires universities to administer Prac Payments to students, rather than being administered through existing central government agencies such as Services Australia. While many universities, including ours, currently make payments to students including stipends or scholarships, the scale and frequency at which the Prac Payments need to be administered will require additional resourcing across university teams. Importantly, the potential impacts on students who will need to disclose their personal financial and income position to their education provider needs to be considered as this process is designed. This process of continued assessment could be destabilising or a barrier for students who have likely already disclosed this information to government agencies.

A process where the means testing and eligibility confirmation is completed outside of universities by the central government agencies who already collect this data would result in a simplified and improved process for students, removing the additional step of engaging with their university about their financial position. This process would also benefit from the privacy and data management processes already in place in these central agencies.

At the University of Tasmania, we take student privacy and management of personal information seriously, as outlined in our [Data and Information Governance Policy](#). While we have existing information management systems to store student information, this would not typically include the type of information required for means testing purposes. Gathering and storing financial documentation including payslips, full bank statements and Centrelink records is not currently within the usual course of operations for our university at scale, and existing systems would need to be reassessed to determine whether they are appropriate to store this type of documentation. This assessment would be aligned with the [University of Tasmania Data Classification Framework](#).

It is likely that this would require the extension of existing system functionality, or introduction of a new system, to ensure alignment with our Framework and manage the potential data risks with collecting and storing this sensitive information.

**Student Services and Amenities Fees (SSAF)**

Student Services and Amenities Fees (SSAF) play a pivotal role in the development and support of our students at the University of Tasmania. Through adherence to the legislative guidelines and genuine consultation with our university community, we ensure SSAF is spent on key initiatives such as clubs and societies, student led events and much needed student support avenues.

At the University of Tasmania, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) approves all SSAF expenditure after consultation with the wider university. All SSAF recipients are then expected to provide regular reporting and updates regarding how their SSAF allocation has been spent and the resulting impacts to student experience. All SSAF recipients are expected to be efficient with their expenditure and ensure they meet the legislative guidelines.

### **FEE-FREE Uni-Ready courses**

At the University of Tasmania, we offer enabling and pathways programs which develop skills to equip students with the capabilities needed to undertake further university study.

One of these programs is the University Preparation Program (UPP), a free academic skills-based course which provides an alternative pathway into university. The UPP is a general pathway course which develops critical key study and foundational academic skills such as academic writing, referencing, general numeracy and science skills, and an introduction to university learning. Since 2015, this program has supported 3,400 students to build the knowledge, skills and confidence to study at university. Of these students, 52% are first in family to attend university, 38% are from a low SES background, and 65% are under the age of 24.

In addition, we also deliver a Diploma of University Studies (DUS) which provides discipline specific pathways to Nursing, Social Work, Education, Engineering, Psychology, Arts, Business, Science, ICT and Pharmacy Bachelor level courses. The structure of the DUS enables continuation of study into Bachelor level courses, by aligning specialised and tailored content to specific disciplines and providing partial credit into Bachelor courses. Since its introduction in 2018, the DUS programs have supported 3,200 students to begin their university studies – 52% who are first in family to attend university, 34% from a low SES background and 72% under the age of 24.

Students in the UPP or DUS programs do not meet the general university entry requirements for Bachelor level courses, and through these programs have alternative entry pathway and supported capability development to prepare them for university study. Together, these programs prepare and enable students to successfully transition to further study at the University of Tasmania.

Combined, over 47% of participants in these programs have continued to further study at the University of Tasmania (excluding students still currently enrolled in pathways programs in 2024). Most students have continued to Bachelor level courses (79%), while others have enrolled in Diplomas and Undergraduate Certificates. Many of these students are studying professionally aligned bachelor's degrees - including Nursing, Education and Social Work.

An opportunity exists to further develop pathways programs in line with the intent of the Australian Universities Accord and the introduction of FEE FREE Uni Ready places. Building on the success of our programs, creating pathways courses which offer students direct access to further study by allowing provision of some course credit into degree level qualifications is a successful way to encourage continuation from preparation courses to qualifications. Our student progression data shows that where pathways programs can effectively bridge the gap into the first year of university, they serve as a successful model for improving university access and reducing barriers such as time and cost of study for students. We urge for consideration of how the FEE FREE Uni Ready places can provide some credit allowance and facilitate direct or guaranteed entry to full qualifications to support the best outcomes for the students who need these courses the most.