



26 April 2023

Sarah Redden
Acting Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment
Parliament House
PO Box 6100
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Redden

Response to Questions on Notice from Senator Henderson

With regard to the Questions on Notice sent to Charles Sturt University following the hearing on Monday 17 April 2023:

1. *In your evidence, you suggested that there were design flaws in the current proposal. What are they?*

There are four potential flaws in the design of the Startup Year program:

- (i) the Program needs to be based on best accelerator principles and practices and these are not clearly articulated at present,
- (ii) the program pilot needs to be co-designed with core stakeholders and potential users to circumvent the participation issues identified in the hearings,
- (iii) the evidence very clearly demonstrates that Start-ups are most successful when they are embedded in specialist support networks – the accelerator doesn't need to be specialist but the networks of support do (mentors, business partners etc.) and,
- (iv) the development of options for scholarships or other forms of support for participants from challenging socio-economic backgrounds should be included in the design of the program pilot.

As implied in point (ii) these issues can be addressed via consultation with stakeholders on the design of the pilot, as well as effective evaluation of the pilot before the launch of the final version of the program.

2. *Does the currently proposed Startup Year program alleviate your concerns that students, particularly students from low socio-economic backgrounds, will be very reluctant to take on more debt in order to participate in an accelerator course?*

Again, careful design of the pilot can ensure that it includes students from diverse backgrounds, including those from low SES backgrounds. Evaluation of the pilot will help determine whether the design of the program is a deterrent to some students or an obstacle to their success. However, even the best program design cannot prevent the prospect of additional debt acting as a deterrent

for some students, though it will be difficult to determine whether this is in fact an issue without inquiring into students' personal circumstances. It would be better to ensure that the program documentation provides potential participants with all the information they need to make an informed decision.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'M. Evans', with a stylized, cursive flourish at the end.

Professor Mark Evans
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)

