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Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
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Dear Sir

Please see below responses from the University of Newcastle to Senator Henderson's questions arising from the Inquiry into the Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024.

Commonwealth Prac Payment

- 1. Students will be required to provide personal information to assess their eligibility, such as identity documents, pay slips, bank statements and Centrelink records. What systems do you have to protect student information?**

In compliance with the [Australian Privacy Act 1988](#), the University of Newcastle currently stores and manages this type of sensitive student information. Our systems restrict staff access to sensitive student information to only those who are required to view it as part of their role. We currently require the submission of identity documents as part of our admissions processes and hold that information securely in our systems. We also require pay slips, bank statements and Centrelink records for the assessment of scholarships and/or hardships grants. Details of documents to be held will depend upon the nature of the final scheme.

Student Services and Amenities Fees (SSAF)

- 2. In allocating SSAF funding to student led organisations now, do you agree on or approve the use of funding and for what purposes?**

The University of Newcastle has a formal SSAF funding Agreement with their student led organisation, UNSA. This agreement stipulates that the University engages UNSA to provide certain amenities and services for the benefit of the University's students, utilising the SSAF collected from students. UNSA agrees to provide certain amenities and services for the benefit of students with the understanding that the use of the SSAF is regulated by the HESA and that such amenities and services must be provided in accordance with the terms of the Agreement.

The services and amenities provided will be amended each calendar year in accordance with decisions of the University's SSAF Advisory Committee which includes UNSA members. The Committee considers the results of an annual student survey into which of the nineteen SSAF categories are most important to students. UNSA is required to provide a quarterly activity report and is also subject to performance and additional warranties, including termination provision should UNSA breach any provision of the agreements. UNSA is required to provide an annual report to make available a clear and concise overview of the financial performance and operations. An audit is also taken of expenditure at the request of the University Council, typically every 3 years.

3. Are there limits in place for how much funding can be used to support overhead or administrative costs for providers as the legislation is now and under this bill for student unions, guilds or associations?

The allocation of SSAF funding under the current legislation is regulated by the terms of the formal agreement between the University of Newcastle and its student-led organisation, UNSA. This agreement includes provisions ensuring that the SSAF funding is allocated primarily for the direct benefit of students, with specific attention to the services and amenities deemed most important by students, as reflected in the annual survey.

While the Agreement does not stipulate fixed caps on overhead or administrative costs, there is an implicit requirement that the majority of the SSAF funding must be directed toward delivering student-focused services and amenities.

Excessive allocation of funds to overhead or administrative costs may conflict with the intended purpose of SSAF, as governed by HESA. Furthermore, the mandatory reporting requirements, including the quarterly activity reports and the annual financial performance report, provide a layer of oversight and transparency that helps ensure that administrative costs are kept within reasonable limits and that funds are being utilised in alignment with the University's obligations under the agreement and HESA regulations. It would be expected that this remain under the bill.

FEE-FREE Uni-Ready courses

4. Can you provide the committee with data on the number of students at each of your universities, both enrol in and complete an enabling course and in what discipline?

In 2024, 4,111 students have enrolled in University of Newcastle enabling courses of various types and durations: Yapug, Open Foundation, NUPrep, and our pathway diplomas. These courses range from a few weeks to a year full-time equivalent study, depending upon the academic preparedness of the student for higher education.

The University of Newcastle uses a measure of 'Confirmed attempt' to understand progression through enabling courses. Confirmed attempt is measured by confirming that at least one unit of study in a course of learning is successfully completed. In 2023, the confirmed attempt success rate was 88%.

In 2023, 60% of students enrolled in the STEMM disciplines; 40% of students in HASS, including foundational law and business studies.

5. Do you have any data to show how many students who complete their enabling course go on to enrol in a further degree of study?

78.3% of students who complete a pathways degree at the University of Newcastle have transitioned to a undergraduate degree at the University within three years, and 73.5% within two years. Noting that students often take a break after completing pathways to get their affairs in order to enable them to commence undergraduate study.

Other students access a degree at another institution, but we are not able to gain data about this external progression to other universities, which is often arranged through internal direct admission at that institution.

Yours faithfully

Mark Hoffman
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