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Chief Executive:
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Our Ref: P-04-005

19 September 2012

Ms Amanda Rishworth MP
Chair
House Standing Committee on Education and Employment
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
ee.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Ms Rishworth

Inquiry into Higher Education Support Amendment (Maximum Payment Amounts and Other Measures) Bill 2012

Universities Australia (UA) supports the adoption of the Higher Education Support Amendment (Maximum Payment Amounts and Other Measures) Bill 2012, and wishes to note in particular our support for Schedule 3, relating to the disclosure of information to third parties.

Section 179 of the *Higher Education Support Act (2003)* (HESA) currently restricts access to data contained in the Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS) by non-authorised persons or entities. This restriction means that UA must undertake our public policy development work in partnership with Government agencies with publicly available data that is insufficient for this purpose, with many data being suppressed because of cell sizes that are considered too small.

Universities are always seeking ways to minimise the reporting requirements sought by Government. Allowing greater access to HEIMS data to additional Government agencies – particularly the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) – will lower the likelihood of requests for duplicate data (especially when two agencies want the same data but in different formats) and reduce the inherent inconsistency that would arise under such conditions. It would also reduce the costs incurred both by the agencies seeking the data and the universities providing it.

Through discussions with both TEQSA and the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE), moves have already been made towards the creation of a single unified higher education data collection process. This current Bill is a central element towards achieving this aim. All agencies and organisations involved agree that it is not to anyone's benefit if TEQSA had to create its own separate data collection process when the information it would seek is already provided through HEIMS.

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Making the HEIMS data available to the sector through a centralised collection process will ensure that regulatory functions operate within known parameters and that the reporting burden on universities, particularly the duplication of effort, is kept to a minimum. Furthermore, data will be able to be utilised in more proactive ways not currently possible, and at more appropriate levels of granularity, leading to better public policy outcomes through better provision and access to information.

Universities make significant investments of time, money and human resources to provide data to HEIMS, and we would argue that there is not currently as great a return on this investment as there would be if the Bill is passed into law. We believe strongly that Australian higher education would be well served by the proposed amendments to the HESA.

Yours sincerely

Pamela Kinnear
Deputy Chief Executive