



# UNSW Submission – Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment Committee’s inquiry into the *Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024* (the Bill).

## Executive Summary

The Senate Education and Employment Committee should consider the following as part of its Inquiry on the *Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024*:

### Commonwealth Prac Payments

1. UNSW in principle supports the proposed Commonwealth Prac Payments to provide financial support to students for unpaid work placements.
2. However, UNSW does not support administering the Commonwealth Prac Payments via grants provided to higher education providers.
3. Instead, UNSW recommends administering the Commonwealth Prac Payments via Centrelink who have the requisite systems and processes in place to administer student support.

### FEE-FREE uni ready courses

4. UNSW supports the establishment of a new Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding cluster for FEE-FREE uni ready courses, provided the Government’s commitment can adequately meet demand from students for entry into these enabling courses

### Student Services and Amenities Fees

5. UNSW supports the distribution of 40% of the SSAF collected by higher education providers to student-led organisations.

## About UNSW

UNSW is a world-leading research and teaching-intensive university, known for innovative, pioneering research and high-quality education with a longstanding global impact. Since our foundation in 1949 and through celebrating our 75th anniversary year, our aim has been to improve and transform all lives through excellence in research, outstanding learning and teaching experiences, and a commitment to advancing Australia’s economic growth and prosperity.

UNSW is ranked in the world's top 20 universities<sup>1</sup> with more than 70,000 students and over 4,200 higher degree research candidates. UNSW is proud of being ranked first in Australia for employment outcomes (2024 QS World University rankings), as well as being consistently recognised as the AFR's Most Employable University.

*UNSW's Widening Participation Strategy 2030*<sup>2</sup> outlines our vision to achieve 25% of commencing domestic undergraduate students to be from a low SES background or a socio-educationally disadvantaged school, and for these students to achieve the same success and employability outcomes as the average UNSW student. Noting that success is as critical as access, UNSW is proud to have the sector's highest success rate for low SES students for the last ten years running.

## **Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024**

UNSW welcomes the Universities Accord Final Report (the Accord) and the introduction of legislation to give effect to key Accord measures outlined in the 2024-25 Budget. As a 'once in a generation' review of policy and funding settings for the higher education sector, the Accord includes recommendations that will underpin the long-term success and sustainability of the Australian university sector.

UNSW particularly appreciates the Accord's focus on equity in participation, access and opportunity, and the acknowledgement that the critical element of equitable access to a university education is that students within this cohort succeed at university. Ensuring equitable access to a university education is critical for Australia using our entire population as a resource to drive excellence, while also improving student experience by ensuring the diversity of student populations. Changed calculation of the indexation of HELP loans, FEE-FREE university ready courses and Commonwealth Prac Payments will all be pivotal in supporting students from underrepresented backgrounds successfully complete their chosen university degrees.

## **Commonwealth Prac Payments**

UNSW is committed to supporting our students, and in principle supports the proposed Prac Payments to provide financial support to students for unpaid work placements. UNSW currently offers degrees in the following disciplines that would be covered by the new scheme as foreshadowed in the Government's *Australian Universities Accord: 2024-25 Budget Summary*<sup>3</sup>:

- Social Work
- Education (Secondary)
- Education (Primary)

However, the proposed legislative instrument to provide this financial support is lacking detail on how the financial support will be paid to students. As drafted, it would shift the administrative burden to universities and require universities to apply for grants to then provide payments to students who are undertaking mandatory practicums as part of their course of study. This mechanism would duplicate systems and processes in the remit of the Commonwealth Government. Noting that the Government references Austudy in its Australian Universities Accord Budget Summary to benchmark the Prac Payment, UNSW instead recommends administering the Commonwealth Prac Payment via Centrelink who have the right systems in place to provide financial support to students.

---

<sup>1</sup> UNSW (2024) 'UNSW Sydney retains Top 20 position in QS World University Rankings': [www.unsw.edu.au/newsroom/news/2024/06/UNSW-Sydney-retains-Top-20-position-in-QS-World-University-Rankings](http://www.unsw.edu.au/newsroom/news/2024/06/UNSW-Sydney-retains-Top-20-position-in-QS-World-University-Rankings)

<sup>2</sup> See [www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/edi/2024-04-unsw-widening-participation-strategy-2030.pdf](http://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/edi/2024-04-unsw-widening-participation-strategy-2030.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord/resources/australian-universities-accord-budget-summary>.

To facilitate the administrative process for the Commonwealth Prac Payments, UNSW would be happy to share information regarding student eligibility with the relevant Government department:

- Proof of enrolment in an eligible degree;
- Practical placement details as part of their degree, including attendance requirements and location of the prac placement; and
- List of mandatory acquisition of specialised equipment to undertake the practicum.

As mandatory practicums are often set by professional accrediting bodies, reference should also be made to these bodies' lists of accredited qualifications.

UNSW would be comfortable to provide students in eligible degrees with information on how to apply for the Commonwealth Prac Payment from an appropriate agency.

### **FEE-FREE uni ready courses**

UNSW welcomes the proposed legislative change to add FEE-FREE Uni Ready Courses as a new Commonwealth Grants Scheme funding cluster, provided the Government's commitment can adequately meet demand from students for entry into these enabling courses. For context, UNSW had to close acceptances for enabling programs in early 2024 as indicative numbers exceeded the funded load under the current Enabling Load Program funding.

UNSW recognises that educational opportunities are heavily linked to socio-educational advantage and socioeconomic status, with entrenched inequality unfairly impacting access to university and career opportunities. Transitioning to a demand-driven model with a set Commonwealth contribution amount will cement an alternative entry pathway for students from historically underrepresented backgrounds to higher education.

### **40% of SSAF being distributed to student-led organisations**

UNSW supports the proposed legislative change to distribute 40% of the SSAF to student-led organisations to deliver student services and amenities. UNSW is proud of Arc@UNSW (Arc), the student organisation of UNSW. Arc was formed in 2006 as a not-for-profit organisation for students studying at UNSW and is run by students, for students. Arc's mission is to create the best student experience through Clubs, Sport, Volunteering, Events, Wellness, Help and more. This also includes orientation, welfare and legal aid for students.

In 2017, UNSW signed a long-term service funding agreement with Arc to allow Arc to fulfil its mission to create the best student experience. As part of this long-term service funding agreement, in 2023, UNSW provided 37% of its total SSAF funding received directly to Arc.<sup>4</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Thank you once again for the opportunity to contribute to the Senate inquiry into the *Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024* that responds to some central recommendations of the Accord, building a fairer and better tertiary education system. Should you wish to discuss any issue raised in this submission, please do not hesitate to contact our Head of Government Relations, Mr Robin Schuck, on 0411 124 258 or [r.schuck@unsw.edu.au](mailto:r.schuck@unsw.edu.au).

---

<sup>4</sup> See the 2023 UNSW Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) Allocation Report <https://www.student.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/uploads/group136/ssaf/2023-UNSW-SSAF-Funding-Allocation-Report.pdf>