24 July 2024

The Hon Jason Clare MP
Minister for Education
GPO Box 9880
CANBERRA ACT 2601
Via: AustralianUniversitiesAccord@education.gov.au

Dear Minister

Re: UOW submission in response to the establishment of an Australian Tertiary Education Commission

The University of Wollongong (UOW) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the implementation consultation paper relating to the establishment of an Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC).

As a leading regional university with a strong commitment to educational excellence, equity and community engagement, UOW is well-positioned to contribute valuable insights into the establishment and operation of the ATEC. UOW has nine campuses throughout NSW and four off-shore campuses, each tailored to meet the unique needs of our communities. Our innovative programs, personalised student support and strong industry partnerships drive increased participation and attainment among underrepresented groups and produce career-ready graduates. UOW's efforts are not just limited to academic excellence but extend to fostering an inclusive environment that nurtures talent from diverse backgrounds.

We believe that the ATEC's role in supporting the implementation of managed growth and needs-based funding is pivotal to ensuring that funding models are aligned to increase tertiary attainment while providing stability and certainty for institutions.

UOW presents the following considerations, suggesting the need for the ATEC to embody expertise, representation and autonomy, while fostering equity, developing a long-term strategic vision and encouraging collaboration and innovation within the tertiary education sector.

Ensuring deep expertise, representation and autonomy

For the ATEC to be effective, UOW believes it must possess deep expertise and broad representation from across the higher education sector. This includes not only academic and administrative professionals but also stakeholders from various regions and equity groups. In addition to the First Nations Council, consideration should be given to establishing structures that can effectively and genuinely engage prospective and current students. The Commission's decisions should reflect a comprehensive understanding of the diverse challenges and opportunities within the sector.

Moreover, the ATEC must operate with a high degree of autonomy to make impartial decisions that prioritise national interests over sectoral ones. This will require clear demarcation from the responsibilities of relevant government departments. Proper

funding and resourcing is crucial to ensure that the Commission can execute its mandate effectively. We suggest that particular attention be paid to the early years of ATEC's operation as crucial to navigating the introduction of enrolment caps and needs-based funding.

Autonomous and well-funded, the ATEC can truly serve as an unbiased arbiter and catalyst for positive change in the higher education sector.

Including Equity and Regional Commissioners and a National Equity Strategy

UOW welcomes the inclusion of a First Nations Commissioner in the proposed structure for the ATEC. However, an Equity Commissioner and a Regional Commissioner are also essential to address the specific needs of underrepresented groups and regional communities. These roles will ensure that the ATEC's policies and initiatives are inclusive and equitable, promoting access and success for all students.

Furthermore, a National Equity Strategy, spearheaded by the ATEC, should guide institutions in addressing equity issues and set clear performance indicators. Such a strategy will ensure that increasing participation and supporting success remains a central focus in the tertiary education landscape. It will also provide a structured approach for institutions to measure and improve their equity outcomes continuously.

Developing a long-term strategy with bipartisan support for stability

The ATEC should develop a long-term strategy with bipartisan support, ensuring that its goals align with national priorities and remain stable across political cycles. This strategy should enhance sector-wide capabilities and facilitate negotiations across funding and teaching caps, allowing institutions to plan and execute their missions effectively.

Additionally, the Commission should serve as the central forum for ongoing discussions about the Universities Accord, ensuring continuous engagement with stakeholders and fostering a collaborative approach to addressing sector-wide issues. This will help maintain transparency and inclusiveness in decision-making processes.

Fostering collaboration, innovation and harmonisation

UOW sees significant opportunities for the ATEC to collaborate with universities in leveraging their strengths, establishing harmonisation strategies while also enabling differentiation, and responding swiftly to market needs. This approach will enhance the agility of institutions to embrace opportunities in the national interest.

Reducing competition and duplication will ensure managed growth across both higher education and vocational education and training sectors. This collaborative approach will optimise resource utilisation, enhance cooperation to support lifelong learning and improve outcomes for students and institutions alike.

As a steward of the tertiary education system, the ATEC should encourage innovation in student support, trial new methods, and share sector best practices. The Commission can play a pivotal role in providing a visionary framework while allowing providers the flexibility to deliver according to their unique strengths and contexts. Universities should be expected to work within this overarching framework to tailor their approach consistent with their status as self-accrediting institutions.

By fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration, the ATEC can help institutions adapt to changing educational needs and economic landscapes. We also anticipate ATEC's role will evolve as it shepherds the sector through an initial period of significant transformation to achieve the vision outlined in the Accord.

UOW strongly supports the establishment of the ATEC with the expertise, autonomy and funding necessary to fulfill its mandate. We look forward to collaborating with the ATEC and Government to create a more harmonised tertiary education system that is equitable, innovative and aligned with national priorities.

We would welcome the opportunity for further discussion and engagement regarding the design and implementation of the ATEC. If you require any further information, please contact UOW Director, Government and Community Relations Canio Fierravanti – caniof@uow.edu.au or 0411 244491

Yours Sincerely

Professor John Dewar AO
Interim Vice-Chancellor and President
University of Wollongong