



AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS DEANS COUNCIL

Online submission

1 September 2023

Dear Australian Universities Accord Panel,

**Re: Australian Universities Accord Interim Report**

The Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) welcomes the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report, and the opportunity to provide a written submission about key proposals detailed in the report.

The ABDC's purpose is to make Australia's business schools better and to amplify the importance of business education and research.

In the following submission the Council identifies areas where pre-existing initiatives can be extended to support the Accord's ambitions for 'system shifts' in the higher education system.

The ABDC thanks the Accord Panel for the opportunity to provide comments on the Interim Report. For any inquiries related to this submission please contact ABDC Executive Officer, Caroline Falshaw: [office@abdc.edu.au](mailto:office@abdc.edu.au)

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Keryn Chalmers', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Professor Keryn Chalmers  
President, Australian Business Deans Council



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## 1. International student levy

The proposal to implement an international student levy has mixed support from member business schools. Before committing to an international student levy, the ABDC recommends that modelling and market research be done to understand the potential impacts of a levy on student behaviour.

Successive Commonwealth governments have supported the development of international education as a sizeable export sector, with business schools historically attracting the largest enrolments. The addition of a levy could make Australia less attractive in what is a global market, and thus have an unexpectedly large impact on international student numbers and fee incomes in Australia. This could have a knock-on effect of undermining domestic education quality. To mitigate this risk, the ABDC recommends modelling the impact of a levy on international students' intention to study in Australia.

The government should also assess the potential impact of the levy in the context of existing reputational damage to Australia's international education sector due to the parsimonious supports given to international students during the pandemic. Implementing a levy could damage Australia's reputation further as an international education destination by creating a perception that international students are primarily welcomed for their financial contributions. Reduced interest in Australian university education may increase pressure on universities to accept international enrolments by lowering the threshold for acceptance.

Discussion of the proposed levy raises fundamental and challenging questions about the role and purpose of Australian universities, and the balance between education and skills demands for domestic and international students.

## 2. Skills and equity targets

The ABDC supports the government's ambitions to improve equity of access to higher education for disadvantaged cohorts, as well as skills targets recognising the importance of tertiary education in making Australians a knowledgeable population that can contribute to addressing environmental and social challenges.

Australian business schools provide a variety of programs for disadvantaged students, such as scholarships, bursaries, mentoring and peer support, and study assistance.

The ABDC has worked with its members to develop the [National Indigenous Business Summer School \(NIBSS\)](#) — a week-long, on-campus study programme for Indigenous high school students to spark their interest in studying business and build entrepreneurial skills. NIBSS was developed to help potential Indigenous business students see Indigenous business in action, connected to the needs of community.



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The ABDC also recognises the need to build stronger pipelines to ensure we have many more Indigenous business graduates and Indigenous academics.

All students from underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education have distinct needs that require tailored and targeted approaches. For example, some of our members have developed guidance to assist academic and professional staff to identify at-risk students and provide support at critical points of intervention.

The government's ambitions in this area will only be met if there is adequate resourcing to expand the number of professional and academic staff to support students throughout their studies.

### **3. Reprioritising research**

The report's emphasis on applied research and improving linkages between industry and the university sector is welcome but raises the question of demonstrating real-world impacts of research.

The ABDC recognises that there is a call for interdisciplinarity that shows the role of business in concrete ways (e.g., expertise in supply chains, organisational management, project management, entrepreneurship, etc) and the valuable linkages that business schools make with industry.

As part of the ERA transition there is a need for guidance on the most effective ways to evaluate the wider and often long-term social, economic, cultural and environmental impact of research would allow for better benchmarking.

A major issue is the skilled translation of research findings. Research cannot be impactful if only a small number of academics reading academic journals know about it. There is a need to widen incentives for academics to communicate their work beyond peer-reviewed journals.

To improve fundamental skills, the ABDC has a program to improve how academics translate their research for different audiences. Last year it released a book, *Tell Us: What are you doing? Improving how you communicate your academic research, relevance and expertise*, along with several communications tip sheets. These are available on [abdc.edu.au](http://abdc.edu.au) website. As a follow up, the ABDC Communications Lead is conducting a series of full-day workshops for early career business school researchers in each capital city.

The ABDC has also developed and is currently fine-tuning a communications methodology aligned with the research process. It aims to provide the tools for researchers in any discipline to think through and build communication strategies from the start of research projects.

### **4. Reskilling and lifelong learning**

While business schools have considerable experience innovating to accommodate more modularity, stackable programs, and pathways to bachelor's degrees, success in micro credentials has been



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limited. Partly this is due to low public awareness of micro credentials, but also that micro credentials are ill defined.

ABDC member business schools have had success in developing micro credentials in partnership with industry, or as a B2B proposition (e.g., bespoke graduate certificate programs, or enterprise learning). Retrofitting learning and assessment systems is a challenge in this context.

Competition and pricing pressures, however, remain significant challenges to the widespread uptake of university micro credentials in meeting skills needs. There is a perception that university offerings are expensive, despite their quality being recognised.