

26 FEBRUARY 2024 – MEDIA STATEMENT

“The Australian University Accord offers a promising future for Tasmania’s Higher Education sector” says Tasmanian University Student Association (TUSA) President Liam McLaren

The Australian Universities Accord Final Report was released on the 25 February 2024 with recommendations and targets to transform higher education. The plan aims to enhance the quality, accessibility, affordability, and sustainability of higher education in Australia. The TUSA had an opportunity to provide a submission to the Accord Panel in September 2023, and we are pleased that a key area we highlighted on ‘Affordability and Overcoming Financial Barriers’ for students was included in the final report.

There are aspects of the Accord that are encouraging and overall, there are great steps that have been made in the right direction, including:

- Raising tertiary attainment from 60% - 80%.
- Improving access to and addressing increasing key student payments.
- Paid placement support for students.
- A National Student Ombudsman.
- Expanding access and funding for key groups, such as regional, low socioeconomic, and First Nations students, and acknowledging the intersectionality and additional needs of these students.

“The Accords have rightly recognised the unique environment that regional universities operate in, and the increased difficulties and barriers that our students face in accessing and attaining higher education” said TUSA President Liam McLaren.

We are also pleased to see Recommendation 19 in the report, which outlines:

“The Australian Government ensure that a proportion of the Student Services and Amenities Fee received by each higher education provider be directed to these organisations to deliver agreed services and amenities”.

However, we believe that this allocation should be more specific and transparent. The Student Services and Amenities Fees (SSAF) are paid by students to provide services that students need to have a positive and supportive experience in achieving their outcomes.

In 2023, only 19% of SSAF funding was allocated to TUSA, which remains the peak body representing students at the University of Tasmania. This percentage has decreased from 43% in 2012, indicating a systematic undermining of the student voice at our institution.

President Liam McLaren reiterated, “The Federal Government must ensure, through legislation, that a minimum 50% of the Student Services and Amenities Fees are being directed to student-led organisations if they are truly committed to improving student outcomes and student experiences.”

Overall the recommendations and targets in the Accord are a huge win for higher education in Tasmania and takes a large stride forward, if and when it is implemented, in increasing access to higher education through the needs based funding model, reducing existing barriers such as financial government payments and placement poverty, providing employment to students aligned with study, and recognises the obstacles that regional, low-socioeconomic and First Nations students face in accessing higher education.

“The release of the Accords is only the first stage in creating a better future for higher education students in Tasmania. We need to see federal government moving swiftly and non-partisan support in getting these recommendations through parliament, and our state government and education minister to recognise the role they play in supporting our students!” stated Liam McLaren.

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