



Australian Government



ATEC

Australian Tertiary
Education Commission

Equity in Higher Education

EPHEA Student Equity Webinar: 29 July 2025

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The Australian Tertiary Education Commission acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community.

We pay our respects to them, their cultures, and Elders past and present.

The Australian Universities Accord



The Australian Universities Accord made it clear:
**Equity must be at the heart of Australia's
higher education system**



The Australian Government has set an ambitious target of **80 percent** of working age Australians attaining a tertiary qualification by **2050**.

To meet this goal, we will need more people from underrepresented backgrounds going to university.

Key Reforms

To achieve its ambitious target, the government has announced a number of key reforms which support growth through equity:



An **Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC)**



Demand-driven **Needs-based Funding**



Managed Growth Funding for
Commonwealth Supported Places



Overview – Changes underway

2025:

- **Disability Support Fund** funding was quadrupled from 1 January
- **FEE-FREE Uni Ready** started 1 January
- **National Student Ombudsman** started taking complaints from 1 February
- **Commonwealth Prac Payments** to students began 1 July
- **Interim ATEC** began on 1 July
- **Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP)** administered by ATEC from 1 July

2026:

- **Managed Growth Funding** transition year, including Structural Adjustment Fund*
- Demand-driven **Needs-based Funding** begins 1 January*
- **Outreach** program begins
- **ATEC** permanently implemented^

2027:

- Full implementation of **Managed Growth Funding**^
- Enhanced **mission-based compacts**^

* Implemented through the *Higher Education Support (Other Grants) Guidelines 2022* for 2026, with final settings implemented through the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* from 2027.

^subject to passage of legislation.

Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC)



The Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) will be an independent steward for the higher education system, tasked with creating a better and fairer tertiary education system that delivers for students and on national economic and social objectives.

The Interim ATEC commenced on **1 July 2025**, with the permanent ATEC to commence on **1 January 2026** (subject to the passage of legislation).

ATEC – Governance and Leadership



Professor Mary O'Kane AC
Interim Chief Commissioner



Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt AO
Interim First Nations Commissioner



Professor Barney Glover AO
Jobs and Skills Australia Commissioner

- Government has agreed the ATEC be established and led by three expert Commissioners:
 - **A full-time Chief Commissioner**
 - **A full-time First Nations Commissioner**
 - **A part-time Commissioner**
- As a collective, Commissioners must bring a diversity of experience to the ATEC, including substantial experience in VET.
- Commissioners will be appointed through a transparent merit-based process as independent statutory officeholders and supported by an ATEC staffed from the Department of Education and beyond.
- Commissioners will be appointed for up to five years.

ATEC – Role and Functions

- **Formal independence** will be established through enabling legislation
- The Minister for Education will guide the ATEC through a regular, **published statement of expectations**
- The ATEC will work in **close collaboration with the sector**

It is proposed the ATEC will have functions and powers to:

Decide	Advise	Monitor	Implement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Negotiated Mission-based Compacts for publicly funded universities, including:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Domestic Student Profiles (DomSPs)○ International Student Profiles (ISPs)✓ Agreeing DomSPs and international limits with NUHEPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Government on the system wide pool of Commonwealth Supported Places✓ Government on meeting demand from under-represented cohorts✓ Cost of teaching and research✓ Pricing and student/Government contribution amounts✓ Ministers (Cth and S/T) on alignment between higher education and VET✓ Long-term strategic direction of the tertiary sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Achievement of tertiary and higher education targets✓ First Nations outcomes, representation and self-determination in higher education✓ Higher education sector and individual provider performance✓ Higher education sector sustainability and emerging issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Managed growth funding✓ Needs based funding✓ Enhanced mission-based compacts✓ Reporting on the state of the sector and progress towards Government objectives

Demand Driven Needs-based Funding

“The Review recommends that **core funding for Commonwealth supported places** differ not only by discipline but also, depending on student characteristics, through the **introduction of student needs-based loadings**. These loadings ... would **help higher education providers give additional support to students from target cohorts** who need it, and address their barriers to success in higher education.”

Accord Final Report

Recommendations

13 and 41

Demand Driven Needs-based Funding

- From 1 January 2026, higher education providers will receive Needs-based Funding contributions for students in Commonwealth supported places from the following cohorts:
 - **low SES background and/or First Nations (equity component)**
 - **studying at regional campuses (regional component).**
- Needs-based Funding is intended to support more students to participate in and succeed at university. This funding is intended to address:
 - **persistent discrepancies in retention, success and completion outcomes for students from under-represented backgrounds.**
 - **higher costs to teach students in the regions.**

Demand Driven Needs-based Funding

Needs-based Funding **increases overall funding** for higher education activities that support equity outcomes.

- Needs-based Funding is **demand-driven**, meaning that providers will attract the applicable contribution amount for each student enrolled who meets the criteria.
- A student can attract both the equity component and regional component if applicable.
- This funding arrangement is different from the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP), which is shared amongst providers from a fixed total amount.

! **Note:** With the introduction of Needs-based Funding from 2026, the existing HEPPP and Regional Loading Program will cease at the end of 2025.

Demand Driven Needs-based Funding

Needs-based Funding will be used by providers to deliver **student-centred** academic and support services, and to support delivery of higher education in regional Australia.

	Equity Component	Regional Component
Targeted to	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• First Nations students• Students from low-SES backgrounds	University campuses located in regional and remote areas.
Purpose	<p>To support students to access and complete their studies. This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ academic tutoring and mentoring✓ culturally appropriate inclusion and belonging activities✓ direct financial assistance (like scholarships or emergency grants)✓ systemic changes to teaching and learning, such as universal design for learning or inclusive course delivery models <p>A <i>Framework of Equity Support Activities</i> will be developed as a comprehensive guide to best practice approaches which support stronger student outcomes (expected 2027).</p>	To support high-quality, accessible higher education in regional and remote Australia.



Next Steps for Needs-based Funding

The interim ATEC will soon commence engaging with higher education providers regarding implementation, including more information on:

- **definitions** for the cohorts that will attract contributions
- **contribution amounts** for each student cohort
- **Estimated allocations** for 2026
- **performance reporting**, including the ATEC's active role in monitoring equity outcomes through Mission-based Compacts
- **legislation** approach

A targeted focus on outreach and aspiration

New Outreach Funding

- From 2026, **\$44 million** per year will be available in a new Outreach Fund. This targeted focus on pre-access will support our shared agenda to drive growth through equity.
- Funding will be used to support initiatives that engage people from underrepresented backgrounds (First Nations, low-SES, regional and remote) in higher education and build aspiration for further study.
- For 2026, this is expected operate in a similar way to existing HEPPP funding, with each provider receiving an allocation to deliver outreach initiatives. More comprehensive changes are expected from 2027, to be developed in consultation with the sector.
- The department is currently finalising arrangements for 2026, with more information to be provided shortly.

Other recent equity investments

Quadrupling the Disability Support Fund

- Quadrupling of the Disability Support Fund - increasing funding by approximately **\$40 million** per year (indexed).
- Providers are expected to **transparently report expenditure** in line with a **nationally-consistent framework** to increase accountability to the disability community and enhance the evidence base to support ongoing improvements

Expanding University Study Hubs

- \$66.9 million to establish additional **Regional University Study Hubs (RUSH)** and expand the model to outer metropolitan locations by establishing **Suburban University Study Hubs (SUSH)**.
- There are now 71 University Study Hubs across both programs, with 53 now open and operating.

Expanding Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) Eligibility

- Previous eligibility requirement that students had to commence tertiary studies within 12 months of completing Year 12 has been **removed** with effect from 1 January 2025.
- Students can apply through Services Australia from 1 January to 31 December.



Thank you

Contact: equity@atec.gov.au

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