

# Transcript

## Q&A

**SONAL SINGH:** We will move onto the Q&A now. And if we can have the panel members on the screen. The first question I would go to would be around, disability has been raised.

We do also have a question in the Q&A around refugees and asylum seekers. We have a question around other priority groups not being included mentioned much.

I would probably get you, Kylie, to start. Because the EPHEA submission had a long list, it covers this as well. What are your thoughts and your responses to that question, around other priority and equity groups?

**DR KYLIE AUSTIN:** I think we have... There has been a lot of research conducted across the sector around cumulative disadvantage, and I think, particularly by our colleagues at the University of Queensland.

We see it referenced in the accord report, particularly around how the needs-based funding model may be developed. However, I think that cumulative disadvantage really needs to be at the front and centre of how we design future equity initiatives, within the outreach, inviting participation space, which is not really touched on.

As well as how we support students to complete their university studies. I think our position, whilst we understand the need to have a really targeted approach that can result in impact, by spreading funding too thinly. I think across multiple equity groups, we certainly have those conversations.

However, I think the focus on the four equity groups doesn't really reflect the richness and diversity of our higher education institutions. If we are taking, if we are particularly looking at place-based approaches and things like that as well, our communities, our institutions are really diverse.

We know as practitioners that often providing a particular service to a student, because they are from a low SES background, isn't always the best strength-based approach to targeting support.

And so, I think we really need to - I think this is a really great opportunity for us to involve, moving away from basic notions of equity, and recognising the richness of what a really diverse population of students bring to our institutions and how we effectively identify, target and support, a holistic approach to access university but also to student support.

**SONAL SINGH:** Thanks Kylie. Shamit, there is a question in the Q&A which focuses on, what do you think will be the equity barriers?

**PROFESSOR SHAMIT SAGGAR:** In short, all the existing barriers, and probably many more we have not thought of. This sort of extends Kylie's point about disadvantage.

It is one thing to think about 4 discrete groups which we are familiar with, and get to grips the underlying causes of disadvantage, particularly in trying to get into and succeed in higher education. That is in itself a hard thing to get your head around.

But why would we just limit ourselves to those for groups? We should be asking a question, who is at risk of getting-- not getting through? And who is at risk of not getting anywhere near university? That is why I am open to the argument that Chris was pushing earlier on, which is that we should be far more agnostic about who runs a university, who is a provider.

We have 39 universities, they are remarkably familiar institutions. This is a time for some fresh thinking. But these barriers, to answer the question, will be complex. I don't want to avoid answering the question, but they often times to do with people's finances, interacting with their transport, interacting with their prior education, interacting with their social networks.

Quite a lot of things going on at same time. And I think ATEC, I keep emphasising, needs to have its own understanding of those new intersectionalities, sometimes they are transient sometimes they are permanent, I just call that a life chances model. You can use any word you want. These are actually the reasons why people trying to navigate modern markets and public services in Australia don't do very well, and I don't think university is any different.

If we understand those things, we start to understand the barriers to disadvantage, to participation and we can be on the front foot about those things. For example, if Australia goes into deep dive recession seven years from now, I've entirely made that up. To have any understanding about the ones who aren't least able to get into university or succeed? Or the ones least able to get labour market outcomes, and commence with their degree? We should know this. This is the benefit of having a centrally managed, Stuart a--stewarded ATEC. This sense of the system, not individual players, important though they may be.

And I am just in favour of trying to get ahead and looking a little bit at those things. Some of these things are in the foreground, we know them already. There are all sorts of internal dynamics in Australia right now.

Barney is still a Vice Chancellor in Western Sydney, a good example of that. The demographics and economics of Western Sydney are changing in front of our eyes, dramatically. Is it place that is marginal economically, which perhaps it was once in relation to Sydney or is it actually the new Sydney? And old Sydney comes marginal? I don't know.

But places are changing all the time. And people are in those places. And I think these are sometimes the sources of disadvantage, or if you want, of advantage. Being a great place at the right time.

And I could go on. You see the point I'm trying to make, I really think that our ATEC, partnering with our 39 universities, not just in Canberra. Alongside the stewardship role that is shared with the universities, not for them by ATEC. We need to be across disadvantage.

And current, future, and ongoing. People have made the point themselves, I'm just trying to wrap all of these points up. And by the way, while we are at it, if we did nothing at all, if we didn't do any of these fancy things that we are all in favour of. Are we actually certain that all 39 universities, all of the time, our running policies, procedures and practices that are equity friendly?

There is also less of barriers that crop up. Disability is an obvious example, but there are many others. How you run an institution can be unfriendly to students, and probably very unfriendly to equity students, and exceptionally unfriendly to people who have never been to university and don't know people who have.

These other day-to-day things that cause barriers. The solution to that is extremely student centric universities, using the Accord, using this moment, and pivoting towards universities for the benefit of students. Not for the benefit of providers. Not for the benefit of people like me, I'm a professor. Historically, it was set up for the benefit of me, and the students were somewhere in the background. I think we should try and turn that around so that it becomes student centric as universities. I think you got my point.

**SONAL SINGH:** Thanks. Does that - that goes back to the question that was raised in the UA, are we the problem? That is open to anyone in the panel to answer.

**PROFESSOR SHAMIT SAGGAR:** I'll jump in, I think we are part of the problem.

**SONAL SINGH:** Barney?

**PROFESSOR BARNEY GLOVER AO:** I'm not sure if I can respond whether we are part of the problem. I want to respond to some quick things. Darlene has some very strong arguments and criticism of the Accord, I think they warrant some serious attention. I'm sure that Darlene will advocate powerfully, as she always does, but I think there is a clear message for the sector in this. And I think further practitioners in this room, in their institutions, should reflect on that.

We are in a period now where the government is no doubt considering just what they are going to do, in relation to this.

John Ross asked the question, what happens if all they put in place is a Tertiary Education Commission? Well, I think there is some value in that. But the stewardship of the Accord implementation is a hell of a lot more of importance than the implementation of a tertiary education commission.

So, I think it needs to be expressed in that way. But there is a moment of advocacy that is going on at the moment, and it will continue in the design phase. I think we should appreciate that that budget will, I hope, provided big picture view of whether governments see short and medium term on implementing recommendations, and their priorities as they see fit.

I think we look forward to seeing that. But beyond that there is going to be some detailed design work done, the implementation phase of this is a next ordinarily important part of that. Where the sector broadly, and I think we talk about student voices, definitely included, needs to begin to influence the design of the elements that are articulated in the accord.

Even in the context, as Nadine was talking about, my comment, in a very quick moment, between the national skills passport and the jobs broker. I think there is a problem to be solved. But let's get into the design phase. What is the problem? Is this the best solution? Are we doing some great things locally? And let's be conscious of that and respond to it, rather than necessarily investing in a national approach. I think it's a very valid comment that has to be tested in the design phase, that needs to ensue beyond this budget process in just a few weeks time, and then beyond that leading to what I hope will be significant implementation of the first flush in 2025.

So, I have really appreciated the opportunity to come back, to explain why I dropped out, to go from sublime to the ridiculous I had to sit in on the defence trade control bill discussion about changes there, coming from a far more important conversation here.

But we have a very important foreign interference context for defence trade control, so I apologise for dropping out. I have appreciated it. And I think the 408 pages and 47 recommendations need to be seen in the totality of the package, and importantly what we are trying to do to support equity. That doesn't say, as Darlene made clear, that it is in any way shape or form hit its mark on some very key areas. And I hope that discussion goes on. I hope it makes a difference in the way in which we implement.

**SONAL SINGH:** Thank you Barney. Thank you to our panel members for keeping the conversation going. We will keep the conversations going and the recording will be shared with everyone. And we will share the slides as well. And you will also be given a feedback form to fill out as well. And this will help inform the design, and we will be showing that with your input as well. Thank you, everyone. Enjoy your afternoon. Bye.