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Emerita Professor Mary O'Kane AC
Chair, Australian Universities Accord

Submitted online via: <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord/consultations/higher-education-review>

Dear Emerita Professor O'Kane and members of the Australian Universities Accord Panel,

APS response to the Review of Australia's Higher Education System Terms of Reference

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the refinement of the Review of Australia's Higher Education System Terms of Reference (*the TORs*). The APS is the peak body for psychology in Australia, representing more than 28,000 members nationally. Higher education is an essential part of the training and qualification requirements for psychologists and it is critical to ensure the sustainability of Australia's tertiary education system to equip the psychological workforce of the future. Furthermore, many of our members work in the Higher Education and research sectors and we also look forward to representing their views throughout the review.

As with all our work at the APS, we consider our response in light of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹ Of particular relevance is SDG 4, which seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"². The Review has the capacity to have a dramatic impact on the direction of higher education in Australia to ensure its sustainable quality and international competitiveness while remaining equitable and accessible. Overall, we support the TORs as they stand and deem them sufficiently comprehensive to raise concerns and provide the input we plan to provide. However, we have identified a few opportunities to refine the TORs to be best fit for purpose. Given this, we have selectively responded to the four most relevant TORs in our brief response.

Meeting Australia's knowledge and skills needs, now and in the future

In addition to the growing number of occupations which require a bachelor's degree, we want to draw attention to the increasing numbers of Australians with postgraduate degrees (for example, research Masters or Doctors of Philosophy)³. It is essential that these degrees are valuable in the workplace and are suitable for a range of industry and professional applications. In the particular case of psychology, it is vital that the diversity of Masters programs (leading to specific Areas of Practice Endorsement) are not lost to ensure the full scope of the profession is practiced and maintained. Ultimately, this diversity is important to equip the full spectrum of our profession that concentrate on preventative and early intervention as well as boosting community wellbeing and productivity.

The connection between the vocational education and training and higher education systems

In addition to strengthening the alignment between the Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education sectors, we suggest extending the scope to consider the importance of all graduates having both 'academic' and 'practical skills' required of all professions and vocations. This would ultimately require greater industry and peak body participation in the development of curricula as well as providing practical training such as supervised placements.

Quality and sustainability

While we agree with the sentiment of this TOR, we suggest that it is restrictive in its concentration on COVID-19 and the international education sector. The quality and financial sustainability of the entire sector is important and we anticipate that some issues that will be raised throughout the review would have pre-dated COVID-19. Similarly, it is important that domestic students in Commonwealth Supported Places are in sustainable programs and that universities are not running at a loss by subsidising 'unprofitable' courses with other sources of income. This is particularly relevant for a number of psychology Areas of Practice Endorsement which, as highlighted in previous advocacy⁴, have suffered due to insufficient funding of Masters programs to be sustainable.

Delivering new knowledge, innovation and capability

As a professional association representing thousands of psychologists, the APS is well placed to assist in the translation of research into practice to help accumulate clinical evidence to further refine prevention, early intervention, and mental health treatment initiatives as well the promotion of wellbeing at both an individual and community or population level. We suggest expanding the scope of this TOR to include peak bodies.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input into the Review of Australia's Higher Education System TOR. If any further information is required from the APS, I would be happy to be contacted through my office on (03) 8662 3300 or by email at z.burgess@psychology.org.au

Yours sincerely,

Dr Zena Burgess, FAPS FAICD
Chief Executive Officer

References

1. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2022). *Sustainable development*. <https://sdgs.un.org/>
2. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2022). *Goal 4—Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>
3. McCarthy, P. X., & Wienk, D. M. (2019). *Who are the top PhD employers?* The University of Melbourne on behalf of the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute.
4. Australian Psychological Society. (2022). *Prevent, Respond, Adapt: Improving the mental health and wellbeing of all Australians Pre-Budget Submission 2022-23*. <https://psychology.org.au/about-us/what-we-do/advocacy/submissions/professional-practice/2022/pre-budget-submission-2022-23>