

5 September 2024

Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Committee Members,

APS response to the *Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024* inquiry

On behalf of the Australian Psychological Society (APS), we are pleased to respond to this inquiry which is a critical outcome of the Universities Accord review. We acknowledge and commend the introduction of the *Universities Accord (Student Support and other Measures) Bill 2024* (hereafter *The Bill*). In particular, we support higher education providers being able to apply for grants to make payments to support students undertaking mandatory practicums as part of a course of study (the Commonwealth Prac Payment). Yet we are deeply disappointed that this payment, as currently articulated in Schedule 4, is available only to a narrow list of specified priority areas. Critically, this current conceptualisation excludes psychology students.

The APS is the leading professional association for psychologists in Australia and is dedicated to advancing the scientific discipline and ethical practice of psychology. Our work is informed by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals¹, which champion inclusive education and the promotion of health and wellbeing. Psychology is an essential component of holistic healthcare and is associated with better health outcomes and overall wellbeing².

Given that it is estimated that the psychology workforce in Australia is meeting just 35 per cent of projected national demand³, we urgently need support to ensure the health of future Australians. To this end, we advocate on behalf of our diverse profession and community for support for psychology students to undertake the crucial final placements as required by the Psychology Board of Australia (PsyBA) to become Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) registered practitioners⁴. Anything that can help to increase the numbers of qualified psychologists is a critical priority for Australia.

In addition, the decision to leave provisional psychologists out of this program conflicts with the [National Mental Health Workforce Strategy](#). Furthermore, it undermines the recommendations from the [Universities Accord](#) which singled out psychology students working more than 300 placement hours as needing more support, and findings from the [Women's Economic Taskforce](#), given that psychology is one of the most feminized workforces in Australia, with more than 80 per cent of psychologists being women⁵.

We strongly believe that studying psychology should be based on merit, not a student's ability to afford to live as they complete compulsory unpaid placements hours, and urgently call on you to include psychology students on full time placements as potential recipients of the Commonwealth Prac Payment.

We are confident that this will enhance the evidence-based reform that your government is already leading, to place Australia at the global forefront of mental health service delivery. We look forward to meeting with you to further discuss how to progress these ideas at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Catriona Davis-McCabe FAPS GAICD
President

Dr Zena Burgess FAPS FAICD
Chief Executive Officer

References

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