



Refugee Education Special Interest Group

Mary O’Kane
Chair, Australian Universities Accord
Higher Education Division
Australian Government Department of Education

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Dear Mary O’Kane and the Australian Universities Accord Panel

REFUGEE EDUCATION SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP (RESIG) feedback

We are grateful for the opportunity to respond to the University Accord’s Interim Report. We are excited by the commitment to rethinking the way we ‘do equity’ in Australia. We commend the panel on its focus on developing a truly inclusive higher education system that considers the needs of ‘emerging equity groups’ (p.42 of the interim report). We strongly endorse the immediate action of the five priority areas and provide further considerations for the Accord Panel below.

This [Refugee Education Special Interest Group \(RESIG\)](#) submission is informed through sector-wide consultation with advocates and educators (higher education, TAFE, schools), as well as students with lived experience of forced migration. RESIG, representing over 400 members working across the education and settlement sectors, offers three ideas for the Accord Panel to consider in its completion of the Final Report under this broad suggestion:

- Expand the current so-called equity groups to include people with forced migration experience/ refugee-like experience¹ as a priority learner/ emerging equity cohort.
1. We propose that universities be mandated to develop policy that specifically includes people with forced migration experience/refugee-like experience (recognise refugees as one of the equity target groups).
 2. Considering the interim report’s call for “more granular and practice-relevant data” (p.42), we propose that universities be impelled to gather sophisticated data on students from a refugee background for up to 10 years after a person’s arrival in Australia to capture:
 - (a) A variety of visa pathways that include but are not limited to humanitarian visas, so that people with experience of forced migration but who arrive on other visas (such as spouse, orphan) are recognised.

¹ To be clear, at this point we are referring to people with permanent protection (refugees) and/or permanent residency status (refugee-like), thus qualifying as domestic cohorts who can access Commonwealth Supported Places (both groups) and HECS (for humanitarian visa holders).



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(b) Changes in visa status (e.g., when refugees obtain citizenship).

We also propose that Australian higher education follows the example set by Aotearoa NZ educational policy in recognising people who hold a temporary visa and have made a claim to be a refugee or protected person as eligible for Commonwealth Supported Places:

<https://www.tec.govt.nz/funding/funding-and-performance/funding/funding-conditions-by-year/other-valid-domestic-enrolments/>.

3. We propose that with the collection and granular analysis of such data, equity funding can be distributed on a needs basis that takes a 'whole-of-study' approach, so that refugee students' needs regarding participation, attainment and transition out are more fully considered, funded, and evaluated. This should also drive university provision of specific supports, including nominated support personnel to aide students navigate their transitions, systems, spaces, and entitlements.
4. We also propose that changes to the HESA should be considered regarding creating an entitlement for people with refugee-like experience (on permanent residency visas) and people who have made a claim for protection to be able to access HELP/ HECS so that they can defer the costs of their studies.

Recommendations for the development of the Final Report

RESIG received feedback from our members on the need to enhance the voice of students and communities in the Accord Process and can support such opportunities should the panel wish to further engage with those we serve.

Thank you for your time and ongoing work. Please contact me if you have questions or wish to discuss any of the points made within our submission.

Best wishes

Sally Baker, Co-Chair of the Refugee Education Special Interest Group (RESIG)

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