



**The Australian Association of Graduate Employers  
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Secretariat  
Review of Australian Higher Education  
Location 023  
GPO Box 9880  
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Professor Bradley

## **REVIEW OF AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a contribution to this important review.

I am writing to you on behalf of the Australian Association of Graduate Employers (AAGE). The AAGE is the peak industry body representing employers that recruit and develop Australian graduates. We are a not-for-profit association funded entirely by our members. The AAGE has over 230 member organisations including a range of large, medium and small employers from both the public and private sector. Our individual members hire graduates in numbers ranging from a few to several hundred. Collectively, our membership hires thousands of graduates from all of Australia's universities.

Given our membership base, you won't be surprised to learn that our comments and suggestions come from an employer's perspective.

We would like to make the following points:

### **1. Purpose of Higher Education Sector**

We believe that the purpose of the Higher Education sector is to produce people who can make a positive and constructive contribution to both the Australian economy and to society as a whole.

### **2. Structure of Undergraduate Degree Courses**

The vast majority of Australian graduates move into one of three occupations following the completion of their studies:

- Employment (including vocational and non-vocational, in either the public or private sector);
- Research;
- Teaching, lecturing or tuition;

We would like to suggest that all Australian undergraduate degree courses contain an element of each of these three occupations. That is, every undergraduate should complete a period of:

- Employment - every undergraduate should undertake a period of work experience as part of their course, ideally with relevance to their studies. This is currently the case with many vocational degree courses but is not the norm across all faculties.
- Research - every undergraduate should undertake a research project as part of their degree. Again, this is a common occurrence in many courses but is not necessarily a mandatory requirement.
- Teaching - every undergraduate should receive some form of teaching or tutoring experience as part of their degree. This could be as simple as third year students acting as a tutor's assistant during tutorials for first year students.

We believe that including these three elements within an undergraduate degree will help all students make more informed decisions about their future career path. It will also help universities promote the benefits of a research career; it helps all educational institutions to promote a career in teaching and it helps all types of employers to promote their respective industries.

### 3. Grading of University Courses

A common complaint from many employers is the existence of several different grading structures across the Australian Higher Education sector.

Some universities use this grading structure:

*H1, H2A, H2B, H3 etc.*

Some use this structure:

*Higher Distinction, Distinction, Credit, Pass etc.*

Some use this structure:

*A, B, C, D, E etc*

Some use this structure:

*7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.*

For an employer trying to compare several candidates from different universities the situation is unnecessarily confusing and complicated. This is not helped by the fact that the percentage bands corresponding to a particular grade often vary between universities. For example a "Credit" at one university might equate a mark of 60% to 69%, whereas at another university it might equate to a mark of 65% to 74%.

We would like to suggest that there is a *single* grading system used by all Australian universities with each grade corresponding to a *single* percentage band. This would be enormously beneficial to all employers both in Australia and overseas. It might also help universities themselves when they assess applications for postgraduate courses.

As you may be aware, in other countries a uniform system of university grades is common practice. In the UK all universities use the same grading structure:

*First Class, Upper Second Class, Lower Second Class, Third Class and Pass.*

#### **4. Collaboration between universities**

At present, any employer that wishes to hire graduates from across Australia has to have a separate interaction with each of the 37 publicly funded universities. Each of these universities has their own process for providing careers advice and each has their own process for dealing with prospective employers. This makes any large graduate recruitment campaign extremely onerous from an employer's perspective, particularly in an environment where skills shortages mean that employers often need to target a range of universities.

The AAGE has been successful in securing temporary funding from the Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund (formerly Collaboration and Structural Reform Fund) for a series of National Careers Forums. These Forums have been held every six months in different cities around the country. The Forums bring together representatives from every single publicly funded university to meet with a number of employers. The aim of these Forums is to initiate discussions about how the whole Higher Education sector can work with the employment sector to bring about improvements to the national graduate recruitment market.

One recent outcome of these Forums has been the establishment of a national careers fair timetable where employers and universities have worked together for the benefit of students, employers and educational institutions.

We would like to suggest that these Forums (or something similar) are made a permanent part of the remit of the Higher Education sector. We believe that when it comes to students leaving universities to look for work, the Higher Education sector should be collaborating to provide students and employers with a uniform method for interacting with each other.

#### **5. Semester Dates**

Employers commonly wish to plan their recruitment campaigns several months in advance. One major hurdle in achieving this is the inconsistent publication of semester dates for future years. Some universities are able to publish their future semester dates up to four or five years in advance whereas others only release their dates for the next academic year about six months before that year is due to commence.

Universities Australia produces an extremely useful summary of the semester dates for all Australian universities but they typically only release this document in July for the immediately following year. The release of this information is invariably held up by the one or two universities that only plan a year in advance.

We would like to suggest that all universities publish their semester dates at least two years in advance. This would allow employers to plan their recruitment campaigns and it would allow universities to draw up a national timetable of careers fairs.

#### **6. Volume of places on undergraduate degree courses**

Many of our members have considerable difficulty in finding enough graduates with specific degree subjects. Shortages of graduates in IT, engineering, accounting etc. are commonplace. The perception is that for certain degree disciplines there are not enough graduates being produced to meet the demands of the Australian Economy.

4.

We would like to suggest that the Australian Government forecast the Economy's need for graduates across all degree disciplines. This forecast could then be used to determine the number of places for each degree subject that would be publicly funded. At present the perception amongst employers is that this kind of forecasting is not taking place and that too many graduates are being produced in some disciplines and not enough in others.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our thoughts. If you require any further information from us I can be contacted on (02) 9957 3735 or [ben@aage.com.au](mailto:ben@aage.com.au).

Yours sincerely

**Ben Reeves**  
*Chief Executive*