GROUP OF EIGHT AUSTRALIA

MEDIA RELEASE

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Universities Accord legislation delivers for student choice, transparency and institutional autonomy

The passage of the latest Universities Accord legislation is an important step forward for students, ensuring universities can better respond to student demand while strengthening transparency and accountability across Australia's higher education system.

The Go8 has consistently argued that Australia's higher education system should support student aspiration and choice, rather than impose arbitrary constraints that prevent students from accessing places at the universities they wish to attend.

The legislation has significantly improved following constructive engagement with the Parliament and crossbench members. An important improvement is the extension of the over-enrolment buffer to all universities to allow them to enrol up to 105 per cent of their allocated domestic student places. For most Go8 universities, this is an increase on the proposed limit of 750 places.

Group of Eight Chief Executive Vicki Thomson said the change will help ensure students are not unnecessarily turned away when they have earned a place at their university of choice.

"One of our principal concerns throughout this process has been protecting student choice."

"Universities need the flexibility to respond to fluctuating and sometimes unpredictable student demand when more students seek to enrol than originally anticipated. Extending the 105 per cent buffer to all universities provides that flexibility and will allow thousands more students to access places at Australia's leading universities."

"Student demand should be met wherever possible. The higher education system should be designed around opportunity and aspiration, not arbitrary enrolment limits."

Ms Thomson said the removal of the originally proposed section 39-65 was also an important outcome. “This preserves an appropriate balance between government oversight and institutional autonomy."

"Universities are publicly accountable institutions, but it is equally important that broad discretionary powers are not used to impose conditions on funding grants that could undermine institutional independence."

The Go8 also welcomed the stronger transparency measures included in the final legislation.

"Greater transparency around funding allocation decisions will improve confidence in the system and provide universities with a clearer understanding of how decisions are made. Transparency and predictability are critical if universities are to plan effectively for students, research, workforce needs and long-term national capability."

Ms Thomson said the legislation had been strengthened through the parliamentary process, with the final bill incorporating a number of practical improvements that addressed concerns raised by universities.

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"While there is always more work to do in implementing the broader Universities Accord agenda, these changes represent a constructive outcome for students, universities and the nation."

"Research intensive universities are national assets. The right policy settings should enable them to meet student demand, drive research and innovation, and contribute to Australia's future prosperity and competitiveness."

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