

23 July 2021

The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN), in collaboration with The University of Newcastle, welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Department's consultation on the Foundation Program Standards.

ATN is the peak body representing Australia's five most innovative and enterprising universities: Curtin University, Deakin University, RMIT University, University of South Australia (UniSA), and University of Technology Sydney (UTS). The University of Newcastle is an important research-intensive anchor institution in the regional gateways of the Hunter and Central Coast.

Our universities also have partnerships with Navitas and Kaplan for the delivery of foundational programs and ATN has provided feedback through those organisations. ATN's submission should be considered alongside the joint Navitas, Kaplan and Study Group submission.

Supporting Australia's foundational studies sector will be important for Australia's recovery from the disruption caused by COVID-19. We should ensure that we are doing all that we can now to ensure the settings for Australia's international education sector are calibrated for recovery and growth.

This acknowledges that Australia's international sector will be focused initially on recovery from the unprecedented disruption caused by COVID-19. This phase will extend to five years at a minimum and Government measures ensuring adequate provider and student support will be critical. In the second phase of the strategy flexible measures that ensure Australia's continuing global competitiveness will need to be embraced.

The work conducted by the foundational studies sector in Australia is an important pillar within Australia's international education sector and sets up student success in their learning journey. Given its importance to Australia's international education sector any additional regulation or changes to its governance architecture need to be robust, proportionate and have student success at their core.

Despite media reports, this vital component of Australia's international education sector has successfully shepherded millions of students onwards in their learning journey having provided important language skills.

Assuring student preparedness

A student's overall readiness for university is the ultimate aim of their participation in the courses offered by Australia's foundational studies sector and is a robust measure that puts students' success at the forefront. A focus on critical thinking and academic rigour and integrity is certainly a core part of preparing students for university.

ATN universities that partner with external foundational studies providers highly regard and value those partnerships.

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Modern delivery methods

ATN supports the proposed change from 'exams' to 'significant formal assessment' – this is consistent with an overarching principle ATN members have embraced of tailoring assessment methods to suit students' learning and the intended outcomes, as shown in our work on authentic assessment. ATN is committed to innovation in teaching, learning and assessment to best prepare graduates for further study and the workplace.

The changes to online delivery should bring foundational studies sector in line with the rest of Australia's higher education sector, particularly with the ESOS Act. COVID-19 has demonstrated the need for flexibility in delivery and shown how capable providers are when allowed to innovate. We should learn from our experiences over the last 18 months and consider the broader changes being developed through the Australian Strategy for International Education 2021-2030.

In terms of mandating a percentage for exams - to be as robust as possible this should be agreed to between the provider and the university, as this ensures that the assessment adequately prepares the student for university.

Consistency with ESOS framework

Consistency across the governing architecture of higher education and related sectors is important where it makes sense to do so. Ultimately, the needs of the student should be paramount to any changes made in this area.

Extended programs

We support packages that tailor the program to the student's needs. The duration need not necessarily be reflected in any change to the standards.

Enquiries should be addressed to:

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