

Luke Sheehy
Chief Executive Officer

21 May 2026

The Hon Kate Thwaites MP
Federal Member for Jagajaga
Secretary of the ALP National Policy Forum

Dear Ms Thwaites

Submission to the 2026 ALP National Policy Forum

Universities Australia (UA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Australian Labor Party's draft 2026 National Platform. The draft platform rightly recognises the central role universities play in Australia's future prosperity. Throughout the platform, universities are positioned as critical to lifting productivity, educating the future workforce, driving research and innovation, supporting sovereign capability and delivering Labor's ambitions across Future Made in Australia, advanced manufacturing, clean energy and emerging technologies.

UA strongly supports these aspirations. However, the draft platform relies heavily on universities to deliver these national objectives without adequately addressing the policy settings needed to support them. Most notably, the platform does not grapple with the growing sustainability challenges in higher education funding.

The Morrison government's Job-ready Graduates Package (JRG) remains the single most significant policy challenge facing students and universities. Labor opposed JRG in opposition, recognising the inequities and damage the policy was causing. Four years into government, students and universities continue to live with the consequences of a policy Labor itself argued was flawed. The time for review and consultation has passed. Meaningful reform can no longer be deferred.

Every year JRG remains in place, students pay more and universities receive less. Further, the policy has failed to achieve its core objective. Evidence shows the dramatic fee increases imposed on students have not meaningfully shifted student choice or addressed workforce shortages. Instead, students in some disciplines continue to face fees of more than \$50,000 for a three-year degree, while universities are around \$1 billion worse off each year.

At a time when Australia is seeking to lift productivity, expand tertiary attainment and build the skilled workforce needed for future industries, the nation cannot afford a funding system that increases costs for students while reducing the capacity of universities to educate the workforce Australia needs. If Labor is serious about expanding opportunity, achieving its target of 80 per cent tertiary attainment by 2050 and delivering the workforce and research capability outlined throughout the draft platform, reform of JRG and a broader commitment to sustainable university funding must be national priorities.



UA welcomes the draft platform's continued support for equity, participation, research, innovation and a more connected tertiary system. We also welcome the recognition of international education as a critical national asset. However, these ambitions must be matched by policy settings that strengthen, rather than weaken, the institutions being asked to deliver them.

International students help deliver Australia's productivity, skills, research and economic objectives. They support research capability, strengthen critical workforce pipelines, enrich campuses and communities, and contribute billions to the Australian economy. If international education is truly a national asset, policy settings should be designed to attract students to Australia, not deter them.

Ongoing uncertainty, instability and efforts to constrain international student growth risk undermining the university sector's sustainability and one of Australia's most successful export industries at precisely the moment the nation is seeking to lift productivity, build future industries and strengthen its global competitiveness. Likewise, stronger commercialisation, innovation and industry engagement depend on sustained investment in the foundational research capability that underpins them.

Ultimately, the draft platform demonstrates that Labor sees universities as central to Australia's future. The next step is ensuring the policy framework surrounding universities matches the scale of those expectations and ambitions. UA looks forward to continuing to work constructively with the Australian Labor Party on these reforms. If universities are expected to help deliver Australia's productivity, skills, research and economic ambitions, they must be equipped with the policy certainty, sustainable funding and long-term investment needed to succeed.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Luke Sheehy', written in a cursive style.

Luke Sheehy

Chief Executive Officer, Universities Australia