

By email: AustralianUniversitiesAccord@education.gov.au

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**Australian Academy of Science submission on the
*Australian Tertiary Education Commission***

The Australian Academy of Science (the Academy) supports an Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) in principle, but the proposal outlined in the consultation paper will not be conducive to ATEC's intended leadership and stewardship role and is not aligned with the vision in the *Universities Accord Final Report*.

The Academy proposes the following amendments to support an effective ATEC:

- Establish ATEC as an independent authority to give it independence from the Department of Education.
- Remove barriers to the ATEC recruiting the higher education system experience it needs to be effective. The appointment criteria for Commissioner roles should be reconsidered to allow experts and leaders from the sector to be appointed.
- Consideration should be given to how the ATEC can best use the expertise of Australia's Learned Academies and professional bodies to develop advice that informs policy and decision-making.

[The ATEC needs governance structures that enable independence, effective collaboration and access to knowledge of the higher education system.](#)

Universities are complex institutions that serve vital purposes for education, research and society—they deliver tertiary education to equip the future workforce with the skills Australia needs, and they provide the resources and administrative support and host the research infrastructure that Australia's science system relies on.

Establishing the ATEC presents an opportunity to improve coordination, provide advice on higher education and research policy, and build trust between the government and the higher education sector.

The Academy does not see how the proposed structure will allow ATEC to achieve its proposed functions.

ATEC requires people with the knowledge, skills and capacity to understand the tertiary education system in all its complexity - and implement a new vision for the sector.

ATEC clearly must have access to people who deeply understand the practical implications of policy decisions, and who can give advice and provide a bridge between government and the higher education system.

The model for the ATEC must enable knowledge exchange and mobility between higher education and the public service. It should explore innovative governance structures that would allow experts from universities to move into the organisation, and back, to cross-fertilise knowledge and perspectives and so build confidence in its capability.

Commissioners should report to the Minister and be selected on merit as expert advisers to government who have the confidence of the university sector. The proposed appointment criteria for the Commissioner roles are overly rigid and should be changed to allow leaders who have the right experience and knowledge to be involved in the ATEC.

The requirements that "the Commissioner positions must be held by people that can demonstrate their independence from the tertiary sector, for example by not having worked in a leadership position in the tertiary sector in a set number of years" and that they should "retain sufficient distance from narrow, sectoral views" are odd. All they do is create a barrier to ATEC's ability to appoint the expertise required to provide the leadership the sector desperately needs.

The proposed structure and situation of the ATEC within the Department of Education is also concerning. Statutory office holders for the ATEC need to have a direct, trusted relationship with the relevant Ministers that is not mediated by the Department of Education.

The ATEC should be established as an independent authority, as recommended by the *Universities Accord Final Report*, with its funding appropriations reported as a separate entity in the Portfolio Budget Statements.

The functions of the ATEC should be refined and staged.

The consultation paper contains a broad list of stewardship, policy advice and administrative functions, and appears to transfer the responsibilities and higher education and research program management currently managed by the Department to the ATEC.

Greater detail on the programs and roles that the ATEC would take on should be provided for comment. The ATEC will require adequate resourcing to execute these functions and deliver on the creation of a unified tertiary education sector.

The full range of consulted officials, Learned Academies and professional bodies should be considered to inform the development of the ATEC's policy advice.

While the listed consulted officials in the consultation paper is not exhaustive, a complete list would be helpful to understand the breadth and depth of expertise and perspectives the ATEC will draw from. In addition to the Australian Research Council, the list of consulted officials for ATEC should include the Chair of the Council of the National Health and Medical Research Council.

The proposal for the ATEC should also consider how best to routinely use the expertise of Australia's Learned Academies and professional bodies to develop advice that will improve policy and decision-making.

To discuss or clarify any aspect of this submission, please contact Mr Chris Anderson, Director Science Policy at Chris.Anderson@science.org.au.