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**Australian Academy of Science submission on the
*Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024***

The Australian Academy of Science welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024*.

The Academy makes the following comments:

- The provisions of the Bill are measured, and elements like HELP adjustments and the Prac Payment will benefit science students at universities.
- The Bill fails to address urgent issues for university science, such as the systematic underfunding of undergraduate science and fixing Australia's broken university science research funding systems.

The Universities Accord (Student Support and Other Measures) Bill 2024 contains provisions that make technical and worthy amendments to the calculation of HELP debts, adjustments to debt already accrued, introduction of the Prac Payment, use of the Student Services and Amenities Fees, and recognition of the merger of the University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia.

The Bill begins implementing the recommendations of the University Accord's final report. However, the response to date has not addressed two broad themes that were key to the Accord's final report: funding for undergraduate science and the state of university science and research.

This Bill makes no attempt to fix the egregious elements of the Job Ready Graduates scheme passed by the Australian Parliament, which cut funding for undergraduate science. The scheme has had the effect of seeing a substantial decline in the resources available for universities to teach science—an outcome that places the country's future at risk. The Academy calls upon the Government and Parliament to act to redress this appalling situation with more energy than is currently being displayed.

The University Accord made several largely minor recommendations about university research. The Government has announced a Strategic Examination into Research and Development (SERD). The Academy welcomes this and expects SERD to lead to significant, genuine, actionable outcomes. In particular, SERD must be genuinely whole of government – with scope to examine R&D wherever it is funded and performed, to set a national R&D target, address workforce, ensure strategic alignment across other government initiatives and portfolio responsibilities, address the entire R&D pipeline including discovery research and genuinely engage all stakeholders.

While the SERD does its work, there are other recommendations which should be progressed urgently, namely:

- Secure research careers by boosting nationally competitive research grants and making their terms longer
- Better support PhD candidates by increasing stipends and making stipends tax-free
- Implement the recommendations of the Pathways to Diversity in STEM review, including investing in First Nations scientific talent

To discuss or clarify any aspect of this submission, please contact Mr Chris Anderson, Director Science Policy