



Department of Education
Commonwealth Government of Australia

Thursday 21 September 2023

Dear Colleagues,

The Australian Pasifika Educators Network (APEN) greatly appreciates the opportunity to provide input on the *Support for Students Policy: Guideline Consultation Paper*.

APEN firmly believes and champions the development and implementation of appropriate and timely support that is culturally attuned to students from underrepresented backgrounds embarking on university study.

APEN's newly released research report¹, *Pasifika Communities in Australia: 2021 Census*, provides an analysis of Pasifika communities in Australia based on the 2021 ABS census; and, identified 63.2% of Pasifika individuals aged 18 and above completed Year 12, compared to 59.1% of Australia's general population. However, university participation among Pasifika individuals remains strikingly lower at 23.5%, compared to 41.6% for the general Australian population pursuing bachelor's degrees or higher. This significant disparity underscores the challenges faced by Pasifika communities in accessing and participating in higher education.

APEN is pleased to see the prompt discontinuation of the 50% pass rule, given its disproportionate impact on students from underrepresented backgrounds in higher education; of which includes Pasifika learners. We emphasise the critical importance for higher education providers to assume greater responsibility for monitoring student progress and offering proactive and innovative support services. This approach is particularly essential for Pasifika students, who experience complex and multifaceted challenges on their academic journeys and, nuanced support can often be the determining factor between attrition and successful completion of their studies.

APEN advocates for timely early intervention support to ensure students are adequately supported through all phases of their student life cycle, from transition into and navigating through university study to completion and graduation achieving their academic goals. Ensuring a comprehensive wrap-around-support system is vital for the all-around growth and achievement of Pasifika students, underscoring the essential nature of early and consistent assistance and interventions.

APEN also strongly supports the need for cultural safety and socially inclusive pedagogy and practise, especially for First Nations and culturally and racially marginalised students², that



goes beyond acceptance or recognition of cultural differences. Cultural safety must encompass a deep-rooted respect for, and proactive nurturing of, the diverse histories, values, and experiences that First Nations and culturally and racially marginalised students bring with them. Ensuring cultural safety means that educational environments are free from racism, discrimination, and any form of cultural bias. This acknowledges their unique identities and empowers them to fully participate and thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Without such an environment, First Nations and culturally and racially marginalised students may continue to feel isolated or misunderstood, which can adversely impact their learning experience and overall wellbeing. APEN contends that for higher education institutions, fostering cultural safety is not just a matter of equity; it is a commitment to holistic excellence in education.

APEN strongly recommends that universities adopt an equity-focused approach that embeds culturally responsive practice and pedagogy when implementing the Support for Students Policy. This ensures that First Nations, cultural and racially marginalised students, Pasifika students and other underrepresented groups receive the necessary support and opportunities to excel in their higher education pursuits.

APEN extends our gratitude for considering our submission and eagerly anticipates receiving the updated guidelines in due course.

Kind regards,

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^[1] DOI: 10.26183/9qbb-cy24

^[2] Trevor Gale & Carmen Mills (2013) Creating Spaces in Higher Education for Marginalised Australians: Principles for Socially Inclusive Pedagogies, *Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences*, 5:2, 7-19, DOI: [10.11120/elss.2013.00008](https://doi.org/10.11120/elss.2013.00008)