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Australian Universities Accord
Chair: Professor Mary O'Kane AC

Dear Accord Panel members

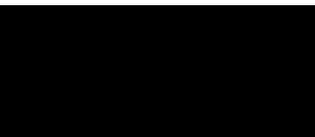
James Cook University (JCU) appreciates the opportunity to provide comment on the *Australian Universities Accord Interim Report*.

JCU supports First Nations people being at the heart of Australia's education system. For JCU, this means using empirical practice and policy expertise that focuses on lifting attainment rates with Indigenous students as a blueprint for all equity groups, students benefit from an adaptable and responsive system that enables people to flourish.

JCU requests the Panel's final report includes a stipulation that recommended actions must have implementation plans publicly documenting steps taken to address unintended consequences for regional Australia and include review mechanisms that enable adjustment when necessary. This is required to address the risk of systemic market failure when incentives, however well intentioned, increase the likelihood of people moving out of the regions to access education in metropolitan centres. In our experience, this has been the effect of many well-intentioned plans over the last two decades.

We are happy to discuss any aspects in further detail.

Yours sincerely



Professor Simon Biggs
Vice Chancellor and President

1. The demographic opportunity

The Accord Panel's considerations assume that 55% of Australia's working population will require a higher education qualification by 2052 (p. 29). The 2052 working age population, assuming a 15 – 67 years age range, is currently aged between -14 and 38 years. Australia cannot meet a 55% target by 2052 without **a strong plan for Queensland as the state with the largest and most regionally distributed population** unless we are prepared to settle for even greater inequality in educational attainment rates above the Tropic of Capricorn than currently exist.

Leaving aside South-East Queensland¹ - and the six universities that are headquartered there - the estimated regional resident population in Queensland in 2022 was 1.45M people. Currently, only about 13% of those aged 15 years and over hold a bachelor's degree or higher qualification (and only 22% of 25 – 34 year olds - well short of the existing Bradley target of 40%). Additionally, only 52% of those aged 15 years and over have reached Year 11 or 12 as their highest level of education (compared to 71.5% in major cities), while only 7.5% have an advanced diploma or diploma and 25% have a certificate. To get to the 55% target by 2052, using today's population, an extra 16k people living outside the South-East corner of Queensland would need to graduate every year for the next 30 years². **The size of this task cannot be underestimated given around 7,200 students from this region graduate annually (4,800 of them from JCU & CQU in 2021).**³

A clear implication for JCU, as the anchor institution for North and Far North Queensland, is to focus on maximising achievement in every school in our region. We have an important role to play, as responsible education partners, to ensure that every child currently in grade 1 is prepared for post-school education in 12 years-time, and that every child already in the system who has fallen behind is accounted for and supported to catch up. At the same time, in partnership with our regional TAFE, we need to be doing intensive enabling and foundational skills work with the parents of these children, and with every other person currently aged between 16 – 44 years who has left school without the foundations required to undertake further post-school study and skills development. **We need a funding model for regional universities that can support this vital work.**

The JCU student body is, like the community we serve, different to the rest of the country. Latest available sector data (2021) shows JCU has the highest proportion of students from regional/remote areas, the second highest proportion of Indigenous students and the fourth highest proportion from a low SES background. In 2023, 70% of JCU's undergraduates are the first in their family to attend university, and 87% are from regional and remote locations. In 2022, JCU graduates from undergraduate degrees were in full-time employment at 82.1%, and in overall employment at 89.9%, labour force participation was 93.5% and median full-time salary was \$69,500.⁴ **JCU graduates, and graduates from Northern Australia and regional universities generally, are more likely to be in the labour market and to earn higher salaries than graduates from metropolitan universities: This speaks directly to the significant skills shortages in regions as a result of systemic underachievement.** 79% of recent JCU graduates who are working in Queensland are working in outer regional and remote locations and 1 in 5 recent university graduates working across Australia in outer regional and remote locations are from JCU despite JCU graduates making up just 1.5% of the sector total. **This is community development and nation building activity.**

If we are serious as a nation about a 55% target, more needs to be done to address the current gap in attainment rates for a bachelor degree between regional Queensland and South-East Queensland (13% compared to 25%,

¹ South-East Queensland SA4: Brisbane – East/ North/ South/ West/ Inner City, Gold Coast, Ipswich, Logan/Beaudesert, Moreton Bay – North/South, Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba, with Bond, UQ, QUT, USC, USQ, Griffith headquartered here.

² There are currently 166,554 people aged 15 – 24 years, and 351,690 aged between 25 – 44 years living outside of the South-East corner of QLD.

³ Using HEIMS 2021 based on student's permanent home postcode, and ABS remoteness area classification of postcodes (non-major city as a comparator to South-East Queensland SA per Footnote 1). Based on 12,000 commencing Bachelor degree at any university in Australia, and 60% graduating within 6 years.

⁴ [QILT, GOS Short-term Graduate Outcomes in Australia, February 2023](#)

with 75.3% in Brisbane Inner City). It requires a focused plan to invest in education as an industry in northern Queensland understanding that **regional, broad-based economic development can only grow off the back of educational investment, and will definitely stagnate without it.**

The labour force participation rate in Northern Australia has decreased between 2011 and 2021 by 3%, and by 2% in northern Queensland. Non-resident workers in northern Queensland have almost doubled in the same period from 6,489 to 12,633. At same time, Northern Australia's largest import is professional, scientific and technical services, worth \$7.3b per year. Taken together, there is **a massive opportunity for regional Australia to keep this work local through greater educational achievement.**

Queensland is the only state in Australia where net internal migration is coming to both the capital and to the regions. The population in regional Queensland and Northern Australia is also younger, there are more people aged under 20 years, and fewer people aged over 65 years than the rest of Australia. Whilst this demographic skew reflects lower education achievement and poorer access to health care, it also indicates a clear need to drive stronger educational attainment.

2. Responding to opportunity – needs-based funding

JCU's submission to the school's *Review for a Better and Fairer Education System* (Attachment 1) outlines the research and praxis on building student capability and engaging socio-emotional wellbeing to impact on learning outcomes. JCU's partnerships with schools focuses on building the capability of students, alongside (but not after) aspiration raising, and with TAFE/VET on pathways and articulations; this focus strengthens the whole education system. The necessary co-designed **partnership work** between regional universities, TAFE/VET, and schools, requires both machinery of government that can facilitate this work over educational lifetimes via long-term agreement making, and accountability for outcomes, as well as **place-based and needs-based funding that reflects the costs of delivery and demographic profile of the communities being served.** We described this systems approach as *Regional Learning Systems* in our first submission to the Accord.

Mission-based agreements – university compacts

JCU supports mission or place-based funding mechanisms and suggests regional provision of on-campus learning across a broad range of 2-digit Fields of Education requires **a place-based compact with a universal service guarantee.**

JCU draws the Panel's attention to the benefit of **revising the Regional Loading** that is designed to offset the additional costs of operating in regional and remote areas. A 2016 Deloitte report⁵ found teaching regional students costs on average 17% more than teaching metro students (holding other factors constant). We know that other factors such as distributed estates and small class sizes also increases costs. With the loading set at 7%, regional universities have navigated tensions around equity and delivery given hard decisions must be made to keep costs within budget, a point noted by the 2011 Review⁶ about the difficulty arising therefore in identifying funding disparities with precision. The 2021 CSHE report⁷ outlined the impact of supplementary support so universities can 'deliver the social benefits accruing to a region...In addition to the multiplier effects on business and schools, other likely benefits include...(connection) to advances in knowledge and the latest scholarship. *This should be factored into the cost-benefit analysis of regional campuses*, including determining the minimum enrolment size for subject viability' (p.7 italics added). A reset of the current funding to somewhere between 15% and 20% would cost an additional \$90m to 140m per annum. This would have a significant and positive impact across all regional providers.

A revised **Regional Loading** formula may also provide a targeted mechanism to support focused work on the significant **regional demographic educational gap**, enabling and requiring regional universities to do the

⁵ Deloitte (2016) [Cost of Delivery in Higher Education Report](#)

⁶ [Review of Regional Loading Final Report](#) p. vii

⁷ [CSHE report](#) (2021) What does it cost to educate?

necessary work in partnership with schools and TAFE/VET to build capability in the population to succeed in post-school study. We described this as a 'Schools and Community Outreach Capability loading' in our first Accord submission, but this could simply be a factor in the Regional Loading formula. A formula based on highest level of educational attainment rate in the population aged 15 and over, the percentage of school-leavers with qualifying ATARs, and the gap at Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 NAPLAN results, averaged across Australia, within a set Regional Learning System (geographically defined) could target resources so universities can work in partnership with regional and remote schools, TAFE/ VET and other providers to measurably lift attainment rates in a systemic way across the education system.

Further distributed delivery of higher education to outreach locations is possible via small volume, high impact models that leverage mechanisms such as Regional University Study Hubs, and other high-touch programs.

Demand-driven enabling places (with associated loading) is required for school-leavers and post-school cohorts to de-risk the option of preparing for study for those students who have experienced educational disadvantage. JCU has only 106 enabling places allocated, compared to Murdoch 217, UNE 273, SCU 416, CDU 579, CQU 843 and Newcastle with 1615. This allocation is a historical anomaly that has had, and continues to have, serious compounding equity implications for northern Queensland, and JCU.

University Student Success Funding for equity cohorts paid per student (not EFTSL) is a key requirement for ensuring students are supported to graduate in a time-appropriate way. JCU's Indigenous Education and Research Centre provides a blueprint of socio-wellbeing and learning support, that builds learner identities (capabilities) with proven results. Regionality should be a factor in a formula that addresses compounding disadvantage for equity students but should be paid through the Regional Loading to protect against incentivising competition that draws the most mobile and capable regional students to metropolitan areas. Government funded regional scholarships should match any scholarship offer from metropolitan universities to ensure regional students are not financially penalised when they choose to study locally.

Increasing educational attainment rates in northern Queensland will drive, necessitate, and respond to transitions in the industrial economic base of the north (including Indigenous self-determination, net zero, critical minerals, human services, ecosystem services). In this context, **Student living support and industry pathways** (for school leavers and post-school leavers) are key. Government supported degree apprenticeships, paid placements, bonded scholarships, along with university delivery of flexible study can ensure alignment of workforce supply and demand.

Research-intensive regional universities are essential to underpin economic development and provide research-led teaching for a skilled workforce. The current **Research Block Grant funding** mechanism does not favour smaller and regional universities. We support a tiered model of the Research Support Package (RSP) that acknowledges the base level of indirect costs of research (legal, IT/data, library, compliance etc) incurred regardless of university size, with allocations for **mission-based research, and regional costs of delivery**, topped up with allocations based on research income. Further, we advocate for a **set return of RSP based directly on research income** rather than based on sector share. This will provide a predictable income and incentivise steady growth in research. The current sector-share formula means a university can increase research income (with associated increase in indirect costs) but receive less RSP if their rate of growth differs from other institutions, effectively favouring those that are larger or with greater cross-subsidisation. For the **Research Training Program**, we recommend a CSP-style approach to research education, where government-funded HDR numbers and scholarships are determined by national need and university mission, coupled with uncapped HDR places to enable universities to seek additional funded places via industry or granting schemes. This approach would provide greater certainty in comparison with the current sector-share RTP income and provide opportunities for **consistent investment in HDR student** support.

3. Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) – other machinery of government

JCU advocated for a *Learning Systems Commission* that could facilitate Regional Learning Systems – that is, place-based agreement-making and resourcing between universities, TAFE/VET, and schools, supported by

robust data (including Jobs and Skills Australia) and enabling real targets and accountability for educational outcomes across lifetimes.

If a TEC focussed on the tertiary level is established, with responsibility for negotiating compacts with universities depending on their missions, there would still need to be an interface with the schooling system. For JCU, as a regional university, deeply rooted in place, we see the interface as crucial to long-term outcomes, similarly for the Regional University Study Hub (RUSH) program (see Attachment 2).

The Regional Education Commissioner provides capacity with the ability to set a long-term national **Regional Education Strategy**. Similarly, a federated National Regional University may provide a mechanism for more integrated place-based educational planning to support regional development.

Key Points and Recommendations

1. First Nations people at the heart of education (empirical practice and policy expertise as a blueprint).
2. Implementation plans that address risk of unintended consequences for regional areas, with review mechanisms.
3. Investment in education in northern Queensland underwrites community development and nation building.
4. Place-based partnerships between schools, TAFE/VET and universities requires machinery of government.
5. Mission-based agreements and resourcing that provides:
 - Universal service guarantee for on-campus learning across broad range of 2-digit FOE in regional areas.
 - Revised Regional Loading to respond to the real cost of regional delivery (as per recommendations of recent reports), and introduces a formula based on the regional demographic educational gap, and enables universities to work in partnership with other educational providers in place-based work to lift attainment levels across the education system in measurable ways (a Regional Learning System approach).
 - Placed-based, demand-driven enabling places with loading, to address regional educational under-preparedness for post-school study (whether at university or TAFE/VET).
 - Student Success Funding for regional students from equity groups that can address cumulative disadvantage on a per-student basis.
 - Mission-based research and research training supported by block funding and indexation, and CSP-style approach to research education.

Attachment 1: JCU submission to the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System

Attachment 2: Priority Actions 1 – 5; Regional University Study Hub Program

Attachment 1:



Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System

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James Cook University (JCU) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to the Review.

Australia's education system

In JCU's [submission](#) to the Australian Universities Accord consultation paper, we set out the need for place-based educational planning that can lift educational attainment levels across populations. Place-based planning is especially crucial for regional areas where **a change in approach is necessary** to catch up with the educational levels of metropolitan Australia, and to deliver on Closing the Gap commitments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Interim Report of the Australian Universities Accord flags the creation of a Tertiary Education Commission to navigate expansion and equity priorities in the higher education and vocational education and training sectors. However, Tertiary Education can only succeed in its ambitions if Primary and Secondary Education is also succeeding. In our Accord submission, we proposed a Learning Systems Commission, along the lines of the Tertiary Education Commission, but with the ability to facilitate local-level school, TAFE/vet and university partnerships and agreement-making on lifting educational attainment in place-based ways.

JCU contends that new machinery of government is needed to facilitate **place-based agreement-making** and support partnerships between educational providers - that is, schools, TAFE/vet and universities - to collaborate **on setting explicit targets based on robust data, the allocation of resources, and ensuring accountability for outcomes**.

Chapter: 1 Meeting the needs of all students shaping the nation's future

"Education should support young Australians to become successful lifelong learners who have strong literacy and numeracy skills and deep knowledge of the world, are able to think creatively, logically and inquisitively, can adapt to new ways of learning, and can continue to improve through formal and informal learning. Schools should also be inspiring and rewarding places to work for our best and brightest."

Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System - Consultation Paper, p. 3

JCU also agrees, education should be transformative. Our challenge is how to ensure education for lifelong learning extends to everyone. In July 2023, JCU hosted colleagues from 27 universities around Australia for the first *National Indigenous Learning Support Conference*¹ as part of our commitment

¹ See conference website here: <https://www.jcu.edu.au/nilsc>

to **enabling a national conversation about evidence-based interventions**² to lift educational outcomes. Whilst this conference importantly focussed on Indigenous education, the practice and policy expertise provide a blueprint for lifting educational attainment rates across equity groups and regions. The Interim Report of the Australian Universities Accord talks about putting First Nations at the heart of Australia's Higher Education system. We contend that **First Nations need to be at the heart of all educational systems** – doing so will mean that Indigenous students, and students from every kind of background, will benefit from an adaptable and responsive system that enables people to flourish.

Throughout this submission, we highlight the need for **place-based agreement making and partnerships** between schools, TAFE/vet and universities to support accountability for lifting educational outcomes for all, and this is particularly important for northern Queensland and regional Australia.

Chapter 2: Improving student outcomes

The consultation paper to inform a Better and Fairer Education System acknowledges that schools alone cannot fix existing educational inequities. **Universities, particularly those based in regional areas, are part of the solution.**

It is vital the next National Schools Reform Agreement (NSRA) acknowledge and addresses the **bottlenecks in the school sector**. In a specific region in northern Queensland, for example, there are 12,500 Indigenous school students. In 2021, only 33 of these students enrolled in university studies³. The concerning reality is that Indigenous students who are falling behind in Year 7 will not recover, and by Year 10 two-thirds of Indigenous students in these regional and remote schools have dropped out. **It does not need to be like this.**

Like most universities, JCU has evolved long-standing outreach and engagement strategies with schools as well as partnerships with the school sector that have emerged various projects like the Student Law Conference, Uni-prep and Uni-start courses, Maths Refreshers ATSIMS⁴, STEM School, and many others. These engagements largely help with **raising the aspirations of students** while at school and for them to think about choosing subjects that can align to a future profession. New work is also evolving to address the **preparation and readiness of school students to study at university**. The JCU Indigenous Winter & Summer Schools⁵ and the JCU Engineering Camp are week-long intensives for Years 10-12 students to engage in a range of disciplines (Medicine & Dentistry, Allied Health, Veterinary Science & Biomedicine, Indigenous Studies, Marine Science, Social Work, Nursing & Midwifery, Law & Business, Engineering). With the support of a more strategic funding framework in the next NSRA, to further the reach of federal programs like HEPPP, much more could be done to increase both the enrolment and preparation of school students in northern Queensland for university studies.

JCU also has researchers who have undertaken an important co-designed project to **improve STEM learning capacities for Indigenous students** from Prep to Year 10 that **clearly demonstrates what is possible** with effective and responsive data. A [longitudinal ARC-funded study](#) (2017-2024) led by researchers at JCU's Indigenous Education and Research Centre in partnership with 17 state schools and teachers in a remote region of Queensland attempted an innovation at the system design level to

² See Nakata & Nakata, 2022. Supporting Indigenous students to succeed at university. Routledge.

³ Qld Dep of Education, Table 2, Main Destination, 2021.

⁴ Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders in marine science: <https://www.jcu.edu.au/atSIMS>

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nAUIZI-9Jo>

improve the academic performance of Indigenous students. The co-designed project did not require a specialist teaching or curriculum specialists. The project worked with existing classroom teachers to deliver the Australian curriculum through deeper understandings of the core curriculum concepts and standards, and how to translate these into the learning engagements and in ways that Indigenous students can engage. After three years of focused work in mathematics in the 16 primary schools, the results showed that when compared to the average rate of performance for the preceding nine years, there was a 5% lift in the math results of Indigenous students in 2019, 12.5% lift in 2020, and 5% lift in 2021. This co-designed project has now extended to 19 schools and 4000+ students (and includes 1000 non-Indigenous students).

There are, however, **real issues in transitioning programs like these, from education research funding to secure on-going resourcing**⁶. What is needed is intergovernmental policy and funding regimes that a) enable regional universities like JCU and partner schools to work together, through place-based resourcing and agreement making, over timeframes that allow important empirical work to be validated longitudinally, and b) support the broader rollout of evidence-based approaches to other schools. A future NSRA could do well in establishing the framework whereby intergovernmental policy drives not just innovative work but their extension to benefit other schools. **Innovation and translation to other schools need facilitation by the next NSRA so that benefits can be accrued in schools at a much faster rate.**

In addition, universities like JCU located in regional areas with significant non-school leaver populations who are underprepared for continuing education carry an important responsibility for capability building. There are, however, structural issues with the current distribution across Australia of enabling and pathway courses. This has been a particularly acute issue for JCU and the northern Queensland communities we serve and represents a significant and cumulative equity issue. **Providing post-school enabling and pathway courses, at the level required to meet community needs, needs to be an ongoing and urgent priority** that intersects with this Review.

Chapter 3: Improving student mental health and wellbeing

Understanding **the interconnection between socio-emotional wellbeing and learning outcomes** is an important opportunity for the next NSRA to get right.

JCU researchers have revealed some important work **on the links between students' wellbeing and learning outcomes**. This longitudinal work is based on an ARC-funded study (2012-2016) of Indigenous academic persistence in higher education, which sought initially to understand how students journeyed through their undergraduate studies, the forms and types of persistence used, and the differences in experience of Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students. This study revealed new insights on student learning, motivation, behaviour, anxiety, attitudes, and responses, which added important elements to the growing awareness and knowledge in the collegiate of the range and "combination of external social systems and internal self-influence factors that motivate and regulate behaviour" (Bandura, 2012; Schunk and Pajares, 2002).

Researchers at JCU merged this foundational work with established research knowledge from across the world that consistently show levels of academic self-efficacy positively correlating with level of academic performance (Richardson et al., 2012; Robbins et al., 2004). This was then used as a foundation to devise **a support model for Indigenous learners**. This model was trialled over a 5-year period (2017-2022), and without altering the curriculum or teaching approach, achieved a doubling of

⁶ Our best estimate to extend the STEM project to 40 schools (8,000 students) in regional and remote schools in Queensland is about \$97 per student per year.

the graduation rate in the fifth year. Importantly, and **with 150,000+ data points to show how the socio-emotional and psycho-social domains worked to improve learning outcomes, this empirical work now provides confidence for its transferral to other places** (Nakata & Nakata, 2022).

Following requests from school principals and the regional education office, this model has been adapted for the school sector. The school model is currently (2021-) under trial with small cohorts of Indigenous students across 19 primary and secondary schools in regional and remote areas. The model was also proposed for all five education regions of Queensland in 2022/3 as further trial sites (Yarrabah, Mt Isa, Fraser Coast, Gladstone and Cunnamulla), and in partnership with seven other universities, but failed to gain funding support from the federal government's Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program⁷, creating disappointment and fatigue in the communities after a year of participating in the co-design process.

The trajectory of developing this evidence-based model for improving student wellbeing and learning outcomes, and the complex policy and funding context that has both enabled and inhibited its uptake, provides **a case study demonstrating the need for place-based partnerships and agreement making that can enable schools and universities to collaborate and take accountability for student outcomes**. JCU contends there is a significant opportunity for the next NSRA to support the type of work described above to progress "national wellbeing indicators... [and] enable targets and outcomes to be tracked over time" (p.25), an important outcome if we are ever to move progressively toward genuinely engaging student wellbeing in schools.

Chapter 4: Our current and future teachers

Attracting and retaining highly competent teachers is vitally important to student outcomes, and there are big challenges to overcome if we are ever to address the shortage of teachers in the school system. The development of teacher aides and career counsellors is particularly important in regional areas where they frequently carry additional responsibilities not expected in metropolitan Australia. JCU fortunately has a long history in pre-service teacher education after starting out as a College of Advanced Education some fifty years ago in regional Queensland, and with forty years of delivering Indigenous education programs for graduates to teach in regional and remote communities, there are many lessons from our experience that can help shape the next NSRA.

The first challenge to attract and retain highly competent teachers in the region is to train **them in the region**. More than 90% of JCU Initial Teacher Education students go on to work in outer regional and remote Queensland, and JCU graduates now make up the second-highest proportion of teachers and education professionals working in outer regional and remote locations in Queensland⁸. Cohorts who study education at JCU include students from lower levels of socio-economic advantage, students from regional, rural and remote areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and students who are first in family.

For many students from equity backgrounds the transition to university can be challenging. Kahu, Picton & Nelson (2020) make clear that students' self-efficacy, emotions, belonging and wellbeing are the "mediating variables, or pathways, which increase or decrease the likelihood of engagement" (p. 659) and that a sense of belonging to the discipline has a significant impact on engagement. Evidence-based programs focussing on building self-efficacy and belonging in students, as described earlier in

⁷ The cost of running the 'Building capabilities for success' program over 5 years, in five regional/remote sites, is \$3,305,000, plus software licensing of \$650,000.

⁸ Graduate Outcomes Survey

this submission, respond directly to these to these drivers. It is crucial for the next NSRA to elevate the role regional universities play in this important work.

The second challenge is to address the **low volume of students enrolling in teacher-education programs**. In regional areas, considerable numbers of students exit before completing Year 10. For example, 2/3 of Indigenous students leave before completing Year 10. Of those remaining, and continuing through to Year 12, only 11% of Indigenous students and 35% of non-Indigenous students enrolled in Bachelor programs⁹. Very few of these students enrolled in pre-service teacher education programs in 2021. As a result, the enrolment base in the region for teacher education programs must then be made up from the small number of school leavers and with the addition of non-school leavers. Including the Certificate III in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, and Diploma of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education which embed academic requirements and articulation to the Bachelor of Education under the free TAFE courses would assist with providing an equitable pathway into teaching.

As described earlier, post-school leaver cohorts in regional areas, whilst resourceful, are often educationally underprepared. Notably, **the level of English, Mathematics & Science are not where they should be** for students to function effectively in a Bachelor of Education program. Without these knowledge and skills set the time it takes to complete a teaching training degree can be prolonged, slowing the supply of teachers to the region. As noted in a previous section, this is an area of work JCU researchers have been focused for the past seven years and much can be drawn upon to address the capacity issues. JCU has also operated over the past 30+ years a community-based remote area teacher education program (RATEP), which provides a pathway for Indigenous people across Queensland to train as teachers. 190 graduates have been achieved through this program¹⁰. There is an **opportunity here for the next NSRA to establish a framework for universities and schools to combine their research and program experience** to address both the capacity issues identified in this consultation paper and the low volume of enrolments in teaching programs.

The third challenge is to ensure graduates who exit from teacher-education programs a) have **deep knowledge of the Australian Curriculum** and its design for the development of capacities from one year level to the next; b) have confidence **and agility in translating the national achievement standards, elaborations and content descriptors to regional contexts**; c) are well **practiced in backward planning the schedule of learning engagements**; and d) have **high level of competencies in a wide a range of pedagogical strategies** to ensure students develop the skills set to function effectively in the learning challenges. It is also to ensure that early and mid-career teachers have access to a **system of high quality ongoing professional development**, regardless of how rural or remote the school, rather than relying on episodic or chance opportunities. The NSRA can enable and leverage universities such as JCU to engage continuing professional development with our teaching graduates, and with all school staff, in the communities we serve in northern Queensland.

The fourth challenge is to build on **innovative scholarship in learning and teaching** areas that build on the cultural interfaces between people and their diverse backgrounds, which utilises the many advantages of their differences for improved learning outcomes¹¹. This, for example, has required a rethink of the learning and teaching nexus to allow scope for emerging research knowledge on how

⁹ Qld Dep of Education, Table 2, Main Destination, 2021.

¹⁰ See Salter and Mitchell (forthcoming) for a case study evaluation of RATEP.

¹¹ This scholarship informs the learning and teaching dimensions of the Indigenous studies suite of subjects being delivered to undergraduate, postgraduate, and research students across disciplines at JCU for academics and graduates, who work and will work, in regional, rural and remote communities. The concept of the 'cultural interface' provides a way for teachers to work with different knowledge systems in a dialectical and non-adversarial or oppositional way. The cultural interface repositions teachers and students (literally or conceptually) in their relationship and practices with each other in contingent and non-deterministic ways, and places responsibility on the teacher to build learner capacities. This goes further than the cultural competency framework as set out in the AITSL standards See Nakata (2007) for further detail.

to build engaged learners. The approach clearly differentiates the delivery of the formal curriculum and standards, and the pedagogy of building the capacities and strategies of learners to engage with the teaching. This innovation draws from the socio-emotional wellbeing work by JCU researchers described above and focuses the design of learning engagements in ways that build the critical faculties and abilities students need to engage the learning task. **Active engagement by the student has been found by JCU researchers to be key** to a more effective learning process. It is important to shape the quality of teaching programs in the next NSRA to encourage such innovation in teaching and learning approaches. It must be more than the just the delivery of the formal curriculum and accounting for the achievements. It must also be about what we can do in our professional practice, whether teachers working in schools, or academics working in universities, to **build capacities of learners to engage with the teaching**.

Finally, the retention of early career teachers can be supported in schools by:

- Implementation of the *Induction Guidelines* (AITSL, 2018) by school leaders,
- Reduced teaching workload allocations and the provision of enabling work conditions¹², and
- Access to deliberate mentoring programs.

JCU's graduates teach in what are complex, often isolated and potentially isolating, contexts – both the schools and the communities in which they are located. The opportunity for early career teachers to **learn and grow on the job**; with release time for induction, mentoring, professional learning opportunities, and planning; as well as time to collaborate to avoid feeling isolated are important factors. Social connectedness, a sense of belonging and agency; and work life balance are important retention drivers, as are positive pre-service teaching experiences.

The next NSRA could do well in shaping and incentivising **more effective partnerships between universities and schools to jointly solve the problem of attracting and retaining teachers** in the profession and in the regions. It may well be argued that disconnect between the sectors has delivered the problem. However, for JCU, it is better to argue that a more effective framework facilitating and resourcing longitudinal work between the sectors can deliver the solution.

Chapter 5: Collecting data to inform decision-making and boost student outcomes

While there exists a significant amount of data being collected in Australia, and in many different organisations involved in the schooling process, it is the lack of alignment and access issues that most are concerned with. However, **there are more significant issues**.

The most significant issue is that **schools are not collecting the type of data that can help teachers** to dynamically adapt strategies to improve learning in real-time. As a result, classroom teachers may only discover a student is struggling to make the grade after the term has been completed. The importance of real-time data to dynamically inform teaching practice needs to be much higher on **the national reform agenda**.

As noted above, JCU researchers have been in partnership with 19 schools in regional and remote schools in recent years to co-design a systems platform to bring about a culture of evidence-based practice in classrooms. This partnership entails work to digitally code every national achievement standard of the Australian Curriculum, particularly to do with math and science, as well as their strands

¹² The *Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession* conducted by the House of the Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (2019) noted that Early Career Teachers may benefit from a reduced teaching workload and more time with experienced mentors. Similarly, the House of the Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (2019) supported mentoring programs being funded over the first three years.

and sub-strands, and content descriptors. It includes work with curriculum teams in each school to account for every achievement standard of the Australian Curriculum in their summative assessment tasks, and for every year level and for every term. It also includes work on the marking matrices for each unit of work so that, for example, levels of proficiency in mathematics could be assessed for understanding, fluency, reasoning, and problem-solving skills; and in science, measures of science understanding, science as a human endeavour, and science enquiry. The marking matrices also guide teachers to make informed judgments of context, complexity, cognition, and curriculum knowledge. When all is coded and working on the systems platform, they provide teachers a simple way to account for, and evidence, the steps being made by each student toward the national achievement standard.

Subsequent work includes the development of formative tasks for teachers to achieve knowledge of where students are at during term so that they can act much earlier to address learning issues, as well as the development of pre-entry assessment tasks to help teachers achieve detailed knowledge of their student's current capacity before planning their learning engagements in the coming term. Further work conducted includes the development of a moderation cycle on the systems platform, so teachers are able to discuss/calibrate their grades using data at the systems level and, in turn, achieve higher levels of consistency in their marking levels. The more recent work the team has done includes the incorporation of ACARA's numeracy learning progression into the systems platform, which now enables non-math teachers in primary schools to not only problem-solve areas where students are having learning difficulties but also can access the solutions to catch up students when they get behind.

These are beginnings of work that JCU has progressed in partnership with schools since 2017 that go to the heart of issues raised in this chapter: collecting data to inform decision-making and boost student outcomes. And much can be gained from this early work if we are to progress national agendas to **improve learning outcomes through evidence-based/informed practice in the teaching profession**. The opportunity here for the next NSRA is to build on the early investments JCU has made to **advance the measures and metrics on learning so that the school sector can, in turn, evolve standards and renewal of practice that progressively move towards the learning outcomes** we are all seeking.

Chapter 6: Funding transparency and accountability

JCU's submission to the Universities Accord included comments on the schooling sector, even though it was outside the terms of reference for the Accord. We underscored the need to address the (currently increasing) level of social segregation within and between public, and non-government schools, and proposed bringing all public and non-government school funding together at one level of government. We also suggested that caps on private school fees could be introduced given debt levels carried by families to service fees. This would bring schools into line with higher education and schools, like universities, could choose to become fully private and not attract government funding.

JCU supports greater transparency in funding for Approved Authorities, as this is essential for accountability and equitable distribution of resources at a national level.

We advocate for the transition to needs-based Schooling Resource Standard to bring public and non-government schools into line by 2025. Given the Interim Report of the Universities Accord flags the potential for a needs-based funding model to be applied to higher education, it is essential that lessons learned from the implementation of SRS be taken in consideration. The potential for Unique Student Identifiers to provide longitudinal insight into learning trajectories across lifetimes, and across equity groups, is immense, particularly when place-based analysis can provide important context to

understanding progression. The NSRA may wish to consider the USI and SRS in combination with a learner-centric national data platform.

Recommendations:

1. First Nations are put at the heart of the education system, with Indigenous practice and policy learnings as a blueprint to lifting educational attainment rates across equity groups and regions.
2. Machinery of Government be established that enables place-based agreement making and partnerships between schools, TAFE/vet and universities, to set targets, allocate resourcing and ensure accountability of outcomes.
3. Prioritise leading data sets, and real-time data to inform targeted teaching practice, in the NSRA agenda.
4. Establish effective mechanisms for transitioning and implementing successful programs, from educational research funding sources, to enable place-based school and university co-accountability for improved outcomes.
5. Support teaching workforce diversity through enabling pathways.
6. Expand/distribute post-school pathways and enabling programs to meet the educational needs of regional communities.
7. Ensure teaching graduates have deep knowledge of the formal curriculum and standards, as well as the pedagogy to build active learner capabilities and identities in the students they teach and enable regional universities and schools to collaborate on continuing professional development in regional areas.
8. Reduce the level of social segregation within and between public, and nongovernment schools, and consider bringing all public and non-government school funding together at lone level of government.
9. Cap private school fees, with schools (like universities) free to choose to be fully private without government funding.
10. Greater funding transparency for Approved Authorities to enable equitable distribution at the national level.
11. Implement the Schooling Resource Standard by 2025 and share lessons from implementing needs-based funding with any application to the Higher Education sector.

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Attachment 2.

Priority Actions 1 – 5.

JCU supports the Government's immediate implementation of priority actions 1 – 5.

Action 1: Extending Regional University Study Hubs

JCU requests specific measures to ensure the operations of RUSHs in Northern Australia do not undermine universities that are headquartered in the north.

The [Regional University Centres Scoping Study Final Report](#), 2022, by Deloitte includes advice on its limitations, noting that the Report is *desktop research* and a *partial assessment*, and that the Report's findings need to be validated and refined with stakeholder consultation and engagement. It also notes that the Regional Needs Model and Dashboard is limited and determined by policy maker inputs – “the strategic policy objective to ensure diversity in Northern Australia results in the inclusion of many regions with relatively lower needs assessments and rankings” p 50.

The policy assumption that regions with very low population densities, like Northern Australia, whose communities may rank lower in the Deloitte readiness model would also especially benefit from extra competition between universities ('provider diversity') for this student load lacks coherence. Many of the 35+ LGA areas that are 'local' to JCU aspire for us to do more in-place work. Notwithstanding that JCU has a significantly distributed estate, including student placement housing in 28+ rural and remote Queensland communities, there have been serious limitations on our ability to meet those community aspirations (to the frustration of those communities, and to JCU). The RUSH program, in this context, can act as an enabler for regions **but** if it is premised on, and results in, student load (with its associated resourcing) being drawn away from the north it creates a non-virtuous circle, further weakening the capacity of institutions in Northern Australia to develop and maintain community stakeholder relationships and build capability in the student pipeline that feeds student load and drives educational attainment.

Students in rural and remote Northern Australia need access to online options, with local support, to undertake post-school studies (and sometimes school studies) and there should be universal service provision to ensure a full range of discipline options are available, **but** behavioural assumptions about 'student choice' and 'provider diversity' are misplaced if they result in market failure precisely because of the thin markets, long distances, the digital divide, and educational under-preparedness – creating unproductive forms of competition.¹

Further, there are opportunities for JCU, to support inclusion of students who are studying online through other universities in Townsville and Cairns (and at our campuses and study centres). The success of these students in the north, and the retention of them locally are important economic drivers for regional development. We know that students studying fully online have significantly higher attrition rates, and this adds to gross regional debt being carried for educational non-completions in places like Townsville and Cairns. Innovative policy design in this area could support increased educational attainment in ways that strengthen the institutions who do the long-term heavy lifting *and* supports students studying online locally through in-person student support.

Therefore, a Regional Education Strategy that sets out mechanisms for the kind of place-based partnerships and agreement making between education providers, in the north that is JCU, TAFEs/VET and schools (including to collaborate to meet the distributed needs of the very many rural and remote communities who will inevitably fall outside of the RUSH program) is important.

¹ Minister for Resources and Northern Australia, the Hon Madeline King MP, [2022 Annual Statement to the Parliament on Developing Northern Australia](#). p. 5. “The people of Northern Australia are as remarkable and as resilient as the landscape and environment in which they live. It is a region that presents significant challenges for policymakers. Among them are vast distances, a dispersed population, thin markets and economies of scale that don't always lend themselves to traditional modelling. Significant and sometimes unique challenges require policy responses that are thoughtful and fit for purpose. Responses that might work well in other regions of Australia will not necessarily be the best fit for the north. While the north might be challenging, it also presents unique opportunities.”