

# National Office for Social Mobility: Proposal

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## PURPOSE

To meet the vision and goals of the Universities Accord Panel, a National Office for Social Mobility (NOSM) should be established.

The NOSM will:

1. Lead a national approach to career advice and widening participation that empowers communities and equity groups to create their own approaches to drive parity of tertiary education participation across Australia.
2. Coordinate a national pathway and admissions scheme.
3. Lead a national scheme to address placement poverty and financial inclusion of students in the higher education sector.
4. Act as the interface between industry and education to drive industry to engage in WIL that will prepare people from equity cohorts for the high-value jobs of the future.

The NOSM will be cross government in its areas of responsibility and would address both the social justice and economic imperatives to enable a more highly skilled Australian population.

## CURRENT CHALLENGE

There have been large increases in overall access to higher education; however, the gap in the level of participation between the most affluent and most disadvantaged students has remained. Despite >\$1 billion investment in demand-driven funding and university-led HEPPP initiatives, students with a disability, first in family students, students from low-income families and students from regional, rural and remote areas continue to obtain post-higher education full-time and meaningful employment at a rate lower than students who are not underrepresented in higher education.

The current model of university-led widening participation has not achieved social mobility for the most vulnerable student populations as it:

- Has allowed universities to use funding to meet their own institutional agendas rather than drive the social mission of parity of participation and equity of access to all Australians.
- Allows ‘impartial’ career advice to be driven through institutional priorities, both in terms of access and quality. Long term it will be difficult to measure the quality of such approaches if the same institution who provides career advice, subsequently benefits from it.
- Driven the social mobility agenda through universities, leaving national policy open for institutional interpretation resulting in inconsistent access to widening participation, financial support and access to meaningful employment. Resulting in the current approach being inequitable across the student population as access to such supports is at the whim of institutional priorities.
- Has been focused on access to higher education, as opposed to supporting students to complete their studies and gain employment. As can be seen in government HEPPP reporting less than 10% of HEPPP funds are spent on enabling students to gain meaningful employment, yet increasing the skills and participation of equity cohorts is a key priority of the Universities Accord

## PROPOSAL

The National Office of Social Mobility will provide an independent and nationally led approach to support increased participation access and employment for those from underrepresented backgrounds, while providing the mechanism for community nuance and local adaptation to need.

Modelled from the [UK's Social Mobility Commission](#), it will be the key enabler and driver of the equity targets espoused by the Universities Accord:

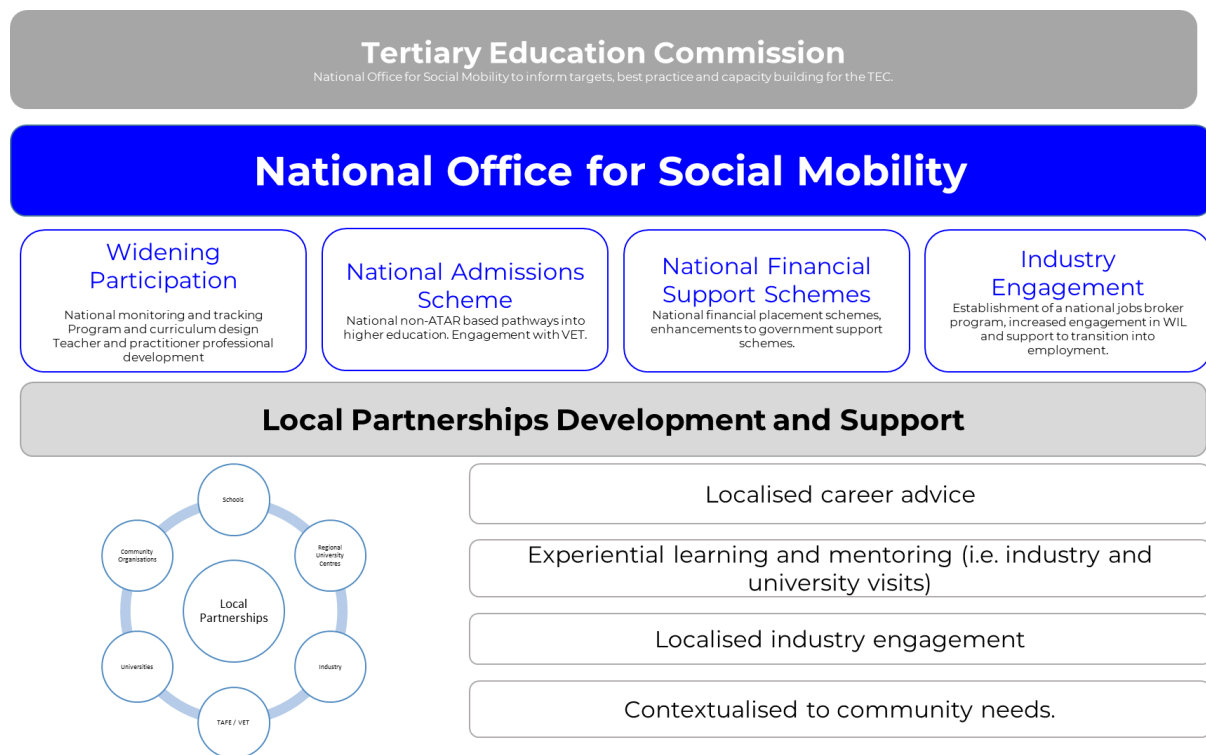
- National coordination of Widening Participation across Australia, enabling every student to access effective career advice and exposure to a range of higher and further education environments to make

informed decisions about their post-school education and employment pathways. It will be collaborative, working across states and higher education providers to establish equitable and seamless non-ATAR based pathways into higher education.

- Establishing national schemes to address placement poverty and financial support for students to progress in their higher education studies.
- Developing strong linkages with industry to launch a national job brokers program and increase access to WIL.
- Development of a Social Mobility Outcomes Framework (SMF) metrics for Widening Participation initiatives to be guided by specific, measurable targets for access, participation and student success outcomes, with a clear timeframe for when they should be achieved, this office will drive initiatives to meet the bold equity targets set by the Universities Accord and the Commonwealth.
- Capacity building to the Tertiary Education Commission, including providing guidance on contextualised institutional targets, across access, completion and employability; the quality and variation of provision nationally and penalties for institutions who are non-compliant.

This national approach would balance local and community needs, engaging with local industry, education providers and community organisations to take regional responsibility of the post-school and post-university outcomes of people in their communities.

Figure 1: Proposed Model for National Office of Social Mobility



While National in focus, the structure of the NOSM will allow local adaptation and partnership creation that is reflexive to context. Local NOSM staff are independent but could work out of, and alongside:

- University Campuses
- Regional Study Hubs
- Metropolitan Study Hubs
- TAFE/Vocational providers
- Community Centres

This provides a close relationship with educational institutions, yet retains independence to meet the strategic goals of the NOSM through locally nuanced execution.

### **Worked Example: Utilising Existing Infrastructure**

The Australian Government has made significant investment into the Regional Study Hubs Program and is expanding the model to metropolitan areas as part of the Universities Accord Interim recommendations. There will be 68 locations across Australia that the Commonwealth has invested in to provide face-to-face support to equity students. The NOSM can utilise this existing Commonwealth investment in these study hubs as bases for local staff who can expand the impact of the study hubs to lead further WP, careers advice, industry WIL that meets the needs of the local community and students and drives the targets of the Universities Accord.

The Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program (RPPPP) is currently taking this approach, which draws on the Regional Study Hubs to develop locally-led outreach and widening participation activities in partnership with universities. It has allowed consistent widening participation activities to occur in small regional communities rather than one-off visits from universities. Universities are a key component of this work; however, they are positioned to be partners for activities rather than drivers.

The RPPPP is demonstrating that in the WP space, regional communities can have greater access to sustained widening participation activities that are community-led, and do it in a more cost-effective way than universities. This concept can be translated and expanded to include other priorities.

The RPPPP model is an example that the NOSM model could utilise to drive social mobility outcomes and the vision of the Universities Accord through existing Commonwealth investments. It can drive community-led approaches to WP, admissions and pathways, financial support schemes, and WIL with industry.

### **FUNDING**

The core costs of the National Office for Social Mobility could be funded by:

1. Federal Government Department of Education funding the staffing of the National Office for Social Mobility.
2. Federal Government departments with an invested stake, including Treasury and Productivity Commission could invest and subsequently be included in the governance of the NOSM.
3. Universities contributing funding to the National Office from their Maximum Basic Grant Amount (MBGA). University contribution is by formula linked to the characteristics and size of the equity cohort population in the areas covered by each partnership.
4. Redirecting the 'partnership' component of the HEPPP funding program and National Priorities and Industry Linkages Fund (NPILF) to the National Office to fund a national approach to widening participation and social mobility.

Projects based funding could be sourced through philanthropic and industry sponsorships driven by a CEO.

### **GOVERNANCE**

The National Office for Social Mobility could be led by a Chief Executive reporting to the Equity Commissioner as part of the Tertiary Education Commission.

The National Office for Social Mobility would be overseen by an Advisory Board comprising of (1) Australian Government Department of Education; (2) State and Territory Education Departments; (3) University Vice-Chancellors; (4) TAFE representation; (5) Peak Bodies for enabling and equity; (6) Industry; (7) community organisations, such as the Smith Family and (8) students.

The Equity Commissioner would also be a member of the board with special status, including a longer term than the average board member and the right of veto on Access and Participation plans, to ensure that long term social mobility is looked at in a continuous way across the lifecycle.

Support would be provided by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), as the evaluative tools produced by NCSEHE would be used to measure impact.