

Australian Universities Accord Panel
c/o the Department of Education
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601
Australia

1 Sept 2023

Dear Panel members,

[Boundless Earth](#) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Universities Accord Interim Report. Boundless is a not-for-profit climate organisation chaired by Mike Cannon-Brookes. Boundless uses the levers of philanthropy, investment and direct advocacy to accelerate climate solutions and help put Australia on the path to becoming a renewable energy superpower by 2030.

The new Universities Accord is an exciting opportunity to resource the university sector to create the hundreds of thousands climate professionals needed to decarbonise Australia and the world.

One of the emerging barriers to climate action in Australia, and globally, is having a workforce with the skills and interest to accelerate decarbonisation across the economy. While universities have a critical role to play in addressing these skills issues, this role has been impaired over recent years.

The global energy and industry transition provides the Australian education and training sector with the opportunity to scale-up and be part of the vision of making Australia a renewable superpower. In the 2021 [Sunshot Report](#) released by the Business Council of Australia, Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Australian Conservation Foundation and WWF-Australia, education and training was identified as one of the top six clean export opportunities. Given that in 2018-19 education-related travel services were Australia's fourth largest export, Australian universities have the potential to skill-up both the Australian climate workforce and people across our region and the world.

Meeting the scale of the climate challenge in a short time frame is a momentous task and one that will provide the university sector with both significant opportunity, but also resources. There is a lot of work to do, and much already underway.

The new Accord should support universities to holistically embed climate education across their course offerings and provide a framework for better coordination. It should also be used to focus attention on the likely skills shortages such as in engineering and technology – across all disciplines – required to transform our electricity and industry sectors away from a reliance on fossil fuels.

To that end, Boundless has partnered with Deakin Energy Networks to develop a response to the Universities Accord Interim Report and work with other universities across Australia to advocate for this agenda. Boundless supports Deakin Energy Network's key points and recommendations, which have been provided in the enclosed attachment.

Boundless welcomes the opportunity to provide further advice about how the new Accord can support the Australian university sector to embrace a climate, clean energy and clean manufacturing education and training agenda. Please contact Nicky Ison, Head of Advocacy, at nicky@boundless.earth for further details.

Kind regards

Eytan Lenko
Chief Executive Officer

Attachment A

Key points

The various submissions to the Accord Review and a range of papers prepared by credible industry and environment advocates highlights the following:

- Australia is seen as lagging other nations when it comes to education system readiness for a clean energy economy and transition.
- University education has in the past been a significant export for Australia, training our region's workforce in climate skills will create jobs domestically and help accelerate climate action globally.
- Not meeting workforce demands will jeopardise attainment of Australia's widely supported emissions reduction and energy transition targets and clean manufacturing and export ambitions.
- Australia does not have the technical and professional skills needed to meet its climate ambitions, but the precise deficit is hard to quantify due to inconsistent definitions and data collection.
- Universities have insufficient funding and focus to expand clean energy offerings to meet the demand from international and domestic markets.
- The Universities Accord Final Report should commit all parties to climate ready skills in all relevant university courses.
- Resolution of these issues requires a co-ordinated and intensive consideration of a Climate Education Strategy to guide decision making.
- It is important that the development of this Strategy is an inclusive and open process that includes tertiary institutions – universities, TAFE and VET providers – employers, trade unions, and climate advocacy organisations. This is critical to the buy-in required to deliver a sustainable solution.
- To that end, to kick off the process and as an early demonstration of bona fides, the Government should immediately commit dedicated funding for a Secretariat to manage the development and implementation of the Strategy.
- The urgency of this work cannot be overstated. The Interim Report's focus on improving access and equity, as well as diversity, in Australian universities can be supported by a Climate Education Strategy. A Strategy also aligns with other major public debates about Australia's future, including the:
 - Intergenerational Report 2023
 - Productivity debate and the future directions of our economy
 - Forthcoming Employment White Paper; and
 - A recommendation to establish a Tertiary Education Commission

Recommendations

Deakin Energy Networks urges the University Accord Review to strongly recommend and support the urgent development and implementation of a Climate Education Strategy, and, in doing so:

- Acknowledges the urgency and priority of addressing Australia's climate education and skills deficit, recognising that without those skills Australia risks failing its 2030 interim target and the 2050 net zero target; and
- Recommends that the vital role of Australia's universities in delivering climate careers skills for our national mission be acknowledged through:
 - An immediate review of barriers to and required incentives for students entering and completing engineering and other STEM degrees critical to Australia's renewables transformation and carbon reduction efforts.
 - The urgent development of a Climate Education Strategy by the proposed Tertiary Education Commission, to embed climate skills in all relevant university courses, and to lead work on identifying and funding universities to fill mid-term and future gaps in relevant fields of study and skills development.
 - Government and sector recognition that core and elective modules on climate and climate related knowledge should be included in all relevant degrees, as most fields of study also have a role in preparing Australia's economy and community for a clean energy future and operating in that new environment.
 - Agreement to the 'need' to lift our country's investment in research and development (R&D)

generally and, particularly, in clean economy studies, which touch every faculty in every university.

- Development of the Climate Education Strategy to reflect the current work underway to update, standardise, and publish relevant 'green economy' employment and skills data and forecasts
- Acknowledgement that increased focus and new funding for universities to design and deliver green economy related skills and knowledge will also benefit Australia's international education goals by attracting new students to Australia who will contribute to our future as well as their own home countries' green economy ambitions.