

19 December 2022

Prof Mary O’Kane
Chair, Australian Universities Accord Panel

RE: REVIEW OF AUSTRALIAS HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM SUBMISSION RELATING TO PRIORITY ISSUES AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the review of Australia’s Higher Education System. The Care Economy CRC is a Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) proposal seeking a 10-year CRC grant from the Australian Government Department of Industry, Science and Resources. We plan to establish an industry-led collaborative research centre to develop product and service innovation in the care and support sector to improve care quality, productivity and end-user experience. The proposal is led by more than 40 industry partners and is closely supported by La Trobe University alongside Griffith University, James Cook University, Macquarie University, the University of South Australia and the University of Sydney. This submission is prepared on behalf of the Care Economy CRC as a collective, industry-led and independent entity. It does not represent the views of any individual member or partner to the Care Economy CRC.

The care and support sector or ‘Care Economy’ is the largest single employer and fastest growing in Australia. It has projected future workforce shortages into 2027 and increasing, with approximately 80% of the Care Economy workforce being women, and around 39% of the workforce being employed in regional areas. The [Care Workforce Labour Market Study](#) outlines the qualifications and skills of the care and support workforce, with over 80% having attained a certificate III/IV qualification or higher, and nine of the 15 occupations requiring a bachelor degree or higher as entry qualification for employment. The number of people entering the workforce through the higher educational pipeline has continued to grow in the last two decades and is largely represented by women. Likewise, whilst enrolments in vocational education and training (VET) pathways for have shown modest growth, domestic completions have declined overall for this sector.

Many of the qualifications of relevance to the Care Economy workforce are in desperate need of being modernised, reflecting the way the “silos” within it were understood and made in the last century (their relatively low status today reflects this, gendered, history). It is timely for universities to consider new hybrid qualifications that enable students to gain core higher education conceptual understandings while building out a portfolio of vocational skill sets. New degrees like this should be available through a flexible set of options that include face-to-face teaching (some foundation courses will need to have face-to-face interaction because of the sensitive nature of the curriculum), as well as on-line material. They should include higher degree apprenticeships, enabling students to begin working as soon as possible so that they are able to build up work experience while learning, with assessments being tailored to work-based issues and problems. They should also involve micro-credentials, enabling students to stack qualifications horizontally and vertically, while building up a portfolio that will help them move upward and sideways into other parts of the care economy (for example, completing a ‘minor’ sequence of study that enables a child care worker to move into aged care).

There is also a need for the Care Economy to re-think its positioning, so that research and development become a progressively larger component of activity. This will bring with it the need for more PhD qualified students to work in the Care Economy into the future.

The Care Economy CRC welcomes the establishment of the University Accord and the review of Australia's Higher Education System. We are supportive of the Terms of Reference and are keen to see the panel engaging strongly with industry and the wider sector particularly around issues facing the care and support workforce.

We strongly support the review of the connection between the vocational education and training and higher education systems. This intersect is of critical importance to the care economy and is necessary to meet the growing workforce needs, increase women's workforce participation and to see our rural and regional communities thrive.

Regards

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