

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE SUBMISSION

Priorities for the Australian Universities Accord



The University of Newcastle welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Expert Panel on areas of focus under the Terms of Reference for the Australian Universities Accord.

The University welcomes the Accord Process, and views this as an opportunity to work with the expert panel to consider the role of universities in shaping the future of our nation, in concert with business, unions, community and education providers.

The University has a more than 50-year history of investing in access, equity and success for people who are underrepresented in higher education, and we have a proud history of leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education, with the largest cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the country. We particularly welcome the opportunity to provide input to the Panel in these areas.

The University is a member of the Australian Technology Network of Universities and provides this feedback in addition to the ATN Submission, which we fully support.

Overall Priorities

The goal of the Accord should be to position higher education as a national priority, a core asset for **national reconstruction** and industry development, and for creating an inclusive, prosperous, sustainable and healthy Australia. In particular, universities are key to Australia's global positioning and economic success, through the development of sovereign capability.

For this University and others, **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and advancement must underpin all considerations in the Accord.**

Key Priorities Under Terms of Reference

1. Meeting Australia's Knowledge and Skills Needs, Now and In The Future

Proposed University of Newcastle Priority Areas of Focus:

- **National workforce planning strategy** including:
 - strategies towards full participation from underrepresented groups,
 - **cohesive migration pathways** for international students.
 - role of universities in regional transition and structural adjustment
- Broad participation must be underpinned by high quality student support, experience and outcomes.
- **Equity, measured by supports and outcomes** for underrepresented students.

2. Access and opportunity

Proposed University of Newcastle Priority Areas of Focus:

- Access and opportunity are not end goals in themselves; the focus must be on **outcomes and success, best practice in student support, rather than enrolment.**
- A **broad definition of educational disadvantage** must be adopted.
- **Enabling Programs** should be considered as an important national strategy for improving access and success in higher education among students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **Community engagement**, is inextricably linked to equity outcomes.

3. Investment and affordability

Proposed University of Newcastle Priority Areas of Focus:

- **Needs-based funding model**, based on educational attainment, not postcode – directing resources to universities that serve students from areas with low attainment rates
- **Reconsidering the block grant model** to provide universities with a source of funding tied to research impact, community and economic need.
- **Infrastructure funding**, and can only be funded through capital investment, debt, philanthropy or commercial partnership, with **capital unevenly available** depending on location.
- **Funding for community engagement** as part of teaching and learning and research.
- Supports the review of Job Ready Graduates in the context of the Accord, and urges the Panel to prioritise **re-legislating enabling programs in this context.**

4. Governance, accountability and community

Proposed University of Newcastle Priority Areas of Focus:

- Define and articulate the role universities play as a member of their community, and consider how funding models can appropriately support these embedded activities.
- **Define microcredentials as a national, atomic unit** to genuinely enable lifelong learning, and flexible, stackable modes of learning. Australia is at risk of having seven or more models, and an unworkable national system.

- **Reconsider the State-University-Commonwealth relationship** - Universities are created through state legislation, regulated through states but funded by the Commonwealth. This creates a potentially uneven environment between nationally funded institutions.
- Consider the model of **professional accreditation in areas of major skills shortages**. There are diverse approaches to accreditation, which can be a rate limiting factor in developing novel approaches to education.
- Workplace settings - consider how Australian universities can have workplace settings that provide staff with high quality, secure jobs and also **enable universities to rapidly develop and deliver new content** and innovations to respond to fluctuating industry and skills needs.

5. The connection between the vocational education and training and higher education systems

Proposed University of Newcastle Priority Areas of Focus:

- Improving **alignment between VET and universities is a priority** – regulatory barriers, e.g. cost sharing, are a major impediment to collaboration. We would support major reform in this area, including exploration of a single regulator and mechanisms to facilitate more seamless pathways between vocational and tertiary study.

6. Quality and sustainability

Proposed University of Newcastle Priority Areas of Focus:

- **International students – how to ‘build back better’** – consider novel models of redistributing the benefits brought to Australia by international students, and in particular how to ensure benefits from international student migration flow to areas with low educational participation and low SES indicators. This could include rebalancing international student distribution geographically, or reinvesting profits from international student market in the sector.

7. Delivering new knowledge, innovation and capability

Proposed University of Newcastle Priority Areas of Focus:

- **How to best leverage CSIRO** - an underutilised resource in the university sector, with and full engagement possible through physical colocation and collaborative infrastructure.
- **How research can create value (social, environmental and economic) at a regional and national level**, including how block grants can be reshaped to create regions of strength in engaged research under National Reconstruction Priority themes.

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

At the University of Newcastle we are guided by our [Looking Ahead Strategic Plan 2020-2025](#) which is underpinned by our four core values: excellence, equity, engagement and sustainability.

The University has a long-standing commitment to equity and social justice. Our student population reflects the diversity and demographics of our community, with nearly 70% of the University’s undergraduate students falling into at least one equity category. We run Australia’s largest and oldest Enabling Programs, which have supported 77,000 students over 50 years. One quarter of our students enter our University via our Enabling Programs. Almost half of our students are first in family, and 4.2% are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander- the largest cohort in the country. Every student with drive and aspiration is supported to succeed at the University of Newcastle, regardless of their background.

Alongside our strengths in supporting equity cohorts, we harness our global expertise and connections to educate our future workforce and deliver research that benefits the community. We are 197th in the world by QS World University Rankings and number 1 in Australia for industry collaboration. We are a magnet for talent and innovation, and our operations are a catalyst for economic activity across our regions in Newcastle, the Central Coast, Sydney, Singapore, Tamworth and Taree.