

## UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

### SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO THE AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES ACCORD TERMS OF REFERENCE

December 2022

Dear Australian Universities Accord Panel

The University of Wollongong (UOW) greatly welcomes the announcement of the Universities Accord by the Honourable Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education, to build a long-term plan for Australia's higher education system. UOW aims to play a strategic role in this review and we look forward to working with key stakeholders across the sector, government, industry and community during consultations.

The Accord provides a tremendous opportunity to reimagine the nation's higher education sector, with a special focus on inclusion, equity and sustainability. This work will also demonstrate how universities continue to play a crucial role in providing significant social and economic development opportunities to the communities in which they serve. The Accord is also an opportunity to reset the relationship between governments and universities. Universities are trusted partners of government at all levels and are at the forefront of helping to address major local and global challenges.

The value proposition of universities has never been more greater – in meeting Australia's knowledge and skills needs now and into the future, improving access to education, attracting global talent, and building international connections. Australian universities foster creativity and diversity as they continue to grow ecosystems that drive innovation, investment and jobs.

UOW plays a key role in our local communities and is an active civic participant in collaborations that are increasing the capabilities of these communities. Our role as an anchor institution underpins our approach in contributing to the review as part of the Universities Accord.

#### **RESPONSE TO THE ACCORD'S TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The University agrees that the draft scope of the key areas for review are all critical to the sector, and to Australia's productivity and prosperity.

The University suggests that the Terms of Reference explicitly acknowledge and address the following matters:

- The distinct role and responsibilities each university has to its communities and to their respective regions.
- That the Accord recognises the vital role of regional universities in the equity agenda, in addressing skills shortages and for serving the communities in which they operate.

- Funding stability and sustainability to enable universities to progress national priorities specifically, funding and resourcing of a sustainable national research system and greater alignment between state and federal funding models and priorities.
- The importance of the inclusion of First Nations peoples in the Accord process.
- An articulation of an internationalisation agenda of universities particularly in respect of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Fostering of models to fuel partnerships and the capacity to address the wicked problems facing society.
- Promoting models of collaboration and articulation between the VET and higher education sector.
- Developing a funding model to allow sustainable planning in universities to address critical skill shortages as well as fostering a knowledge economy and sovereign security.
- Demonstration of the role of universities in a productivity agenda.

## UOW'S ROLE AS AN ANCHOR INSTITUTION

### **Supporting diverse and inclusive communities**

While commonly considered a regional university, UOW has an enrolment footprint of more than 30,000 and is distinctive as a research-intensive university embedded as an anchor institution in the communities it serves. Strongly committed to issues of equity and social justice, UOW applies global solutions to local problems. The University leads positive change by maximising regional assets to bring benefits to our communities. Our teaching, research and civic engagement are aligned with national priorities and local needs, providing a platform for significant economic and social benefit.

UOW has long been committed to increasing access and participation in higher education for students from all backgrounds. Around 50% of our students are 'first in family' and we have a proud history of working closely with our communities to drive increased participation and attainment among underrepresented groups.

As of 31 December 2021, 18% of our domestic undergraduate cohort were from a low SES background, 29% were from regional and remote areas, 3% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and 12% were living with a disability. Many of our undergraduate courses attract a high proportion of equity students including early childhood, engineering, science, nursing and primary education.

In 2023, UOW is offering over 1,500 undergraduate domestic student scholarships. This offering includes the Aunty Linda Cruse Scholarship that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who aspire to achieve a higher education or vocational qualification through study at UOW College. This scholarship honours Aunty Linda, a committed activist who successfully lobbied for funding to establish an Aboriginal Education Centre on the Wollongong Campus in the early 1980s.

UOW is dedicated to the promotion of safe, respectful, and socially inclusive communities and to equity, diversity and reconciliation. Supporting the aspirations of its diverse communities is reflected in our relationship with UOW College. The College provides various pathway programs for domestic and international students to study and was the first Australian university college to offer Foundation Studies in 1989. Over the past 30 years, the College has assisted more than 29,000 students to continue their education.

### **Creating value for our communities**

Established out of demand from its local community and industries, UOW's strong commitment to a better future has shaped its direction and impact since inception. The University's broader economic contribution and social impacts include human capital development, research and innovation, enterprise and business development, and enhancing social and cultural life within its communities.

UOW is among the top employers within the Greater Wollongong region, and provides economic leadership to grow and develop vibrant, prosperous and globally competitive communities. Generating over \$2.5 billion in gross output annually, the University's campuses are continually enhanced and its facilities are aligned to changing centres of population and emerging regional priorities. Education, research, community, and business linkages are integrated at both the global and regional levels to value-add economically, socially, environmentally and culturally.

This commitment is augmented by regional campuses in Nowra, Batemans Bay, Bega and Moss Vale, with over 600 students currently enrolled across this footprint. The University also boasts excellent success rates, with over 3,500 graduates in 22 years of operation. In addition to teaching and research, regional campuses serve as community service hubs, with the MIND the GaP initiative at Nowra and the Nursing Clinical Learning Facility at UOW Bega as two examples. In 2020, the campuses provided vital support to the impacted communities during and after the bushfire crisis, and now have programs to support students and businesses to recover from the pandemic. The University's newly established *UOW Local* initiative facilitates connections between external stakeholders and the University, builds a deeper awareness of the scope of the University's activities, and fosters and maintains links with business and industry, local community organisations and groups, educators, research collaborators, donors, and volunteers. It also raises awareness of the depth and breadth of work being carried out in communities.

### **Delivering research with a local and global impact**

UOW's focus is on creating research with impact through industry collaborations. These include the Facility for Intelligent Fabrication, the Industry 4.0 Hub in Nowra, UOW Energy Futures, Advantage SME, the Steel Research Hub, the Sustainable Buildings Research Centre, iAccelerate business incubator and accelerator, and The Translational Research Initiative for Cellular Engineering & Printing (TRICEP). UOW has engaged with more than 154 companies and government institutions in commercial research since 2012, and has been awarded over \$1 billion in research and innovation income from a variety of government and industry resources. From 3D bioprinting, materials engineering and medicinal chemistry, to social transformation, UOW's impactful research addresses complex real-world problems.

Our research collaborations are also working to transition the Illawarra from its industrial heritage to being at the forefront of Australia's renewable and clean energy future through the UOW Energy Futures Network. The innovative Hysata technology, which enables the production of green hydrogen, originated in ARC Centre of Excellence for Electromaterials Science based at UOW.

UOW's commitment to improved health and wellbeing outcomes for people living in regional, rural and remote Australia areas has seen it become a leader in this space. Our research collaborations are strengthening our outcomes and community-focused approach in areas such as aged care, mental health, primary health care and tackling antimicrobial resistance. Both the Graduate School of Medicine and the School of Nursing programs are known for their excellent academic and clinical outcomes and focus on the specific needs and challenges of Australia's rural and regional communities.

We thank the panel for the opportunity to provide comment on the Accord's Terms of Reference and to engage in this significant and timely review. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require further information.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Patricia M. Davidson  
Vice-Chancellor and President