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Professor Mary O'Kane AC  
Chair, Australian University Accord Panel  
Department of Education

Dear Professor O'Kane



Re: Australian University Accord Terms of Reference

I appreciate the genuine willingness from the panel to collaborate with the sector and its broader stakeholders – commencing with this consultation around the Accord Terms of Reference. I believe the 'tone' for consultation has been set and as a non-aligned institution, Victoria University looks forward to working with you on what could be a significant generational review of the sector.

### About VU

Victoria University is committed to being *a global leader in dual sector learning and research by 2028*.

What do we mean by this? We are an institution that brings together the finest and most relevant skills and marries them with the best possible career-focussed degrees through our First Year College™ and VU Block Model™ of learning. We embrace our dual sector capability – as a great asset to be valued for the benefit of our students and, therefore, we are not encumbered by the traditional designs of vocational or higher education. We are offering dual-track education in a new, concurrent way. Examples include our National Centre of Excellence in Paramedicine. Sitting alongside this is a strong research profile that is thematically-focused but is also pragmatic – delivering real impact that benefits people, place and planet.

At the same time, we have a deep and unwavering commitment to inclusion, to respectful relationships and to diversity. We support our students to realise their potential and aspirations. We recently won the **Good Universities Guide First Generation Award**, with no other metro-based university performing as well as VU in this rating over the last five editions (currently 51% First in Family). This proves our enduring service to first-in-family students and their success. This is an enterprise-wide commitment, with our TAFE division awarded the **Victorian 2022 Inclusive Training Provider of the Year**.

**Equity and excellence** is evident in all that we do. However, we need a system and funding model that can enable us to innovate further, leveraging our dual sector nature and to be more creative – in collaboration with industry and our partners in the region we serve (the west of Melbourne) – to deliver the best possible learning experience for our students and to meet future workforce needs.

**Our Initial Response to the Terms of Reference (ToR)**

**ToR1:** Meeting Australia's knowledge and skills needs, now and in the future

**ToR2:** Access and opportunity

**ToR3:** Investment and affordability

**ToR4:** Governance, accountability and community

**ToR5:** The connection between the vocational education and training and higher education systems

**ToR6:** Quality and Sustainability

**ToR7:** Delivering new knowledge, innovation and capability

Our comments in regard to the ToR are summarised below.

**Significant Reform is Required**

- A. Our strong recommendation is that this should be an adventurous and progressive review which looks at all aspects of the system. This is not a time for minor adjustments around the edges of post-secondary education. This review should look at the core values and deliverables which underpin teaching, research and skills at all stages of life. To paraphrase a hackneyed expression, 'the system is broken and does need fixing'. (*ToR1-7*)
- B. Dual sector universities recognise the 'gift' they have to offer qualifications across the AQF but are hampered by long term, entrenched historical and structural barriers. At present this limits choice, opportunity and ultimately potential. (*ToR1-7*)
- C. At this University we are committed to 'One VU', encompassing our singularity and difference, and our poles of complementarity equality – this is about parity of esteem. However, cultural change can only go so far. A truly integrated post-school tertiary education sector would harness significant unrealised potential in the system; improve youth transitions to tertiary education and to the workforce; and would impact significantly Australia's future productivity. This must be addressed through the review – policy, funding and governance architecture must be reformed. (*ToR1-7*)
- D. One of the core problems is that the pedagogy of learning has not kept pace with the essential skills of 'doing'. (*ToR1 & ToR5*)
- E. We believe the way in which a subject area is taught (irrespective of equity background, skill and age level) is just as important as the content that underpins it. That is why a radical mode of student-focussed teaching – like the VU Block Model™ – is crucial. This research-informed innovation required an enterprise-wide effort and focussed investment. Yet –pedagogically speaking – almost all Australian universities (with some notable exceptions) adopt learning and teaching principles which are relatively identical and are far from perfect. We believe this review should call out the need for true pedagogical innovation which could be systemically and systematically applied. If we are serious, we have to acknowledge that the time of the 20<sup>th</sup> century approach to lectures plus tutorials has come and gone. It certainly is not skills and industry-focussed. (*ToR1-3 & ToR5*)

### Learning Continuum rather than Post-Secondary

- F. We also cannot look at the tertiary sector in isolation from secondary schooling. There is a need for greater interoperability across all of the sectors, focused on measured outcomes. We believe that we need to be talking about learning continuum starting from the middle years of secondary schooling (Years 9-10). Put simply, a tri-sectoral, integrated university could be the model of the future.
- G. We require enduring AQF reform (as an enabler) starting with the senior secondary curriculum. This implies better recognition for pathways and credit into tertiary education – possibly a national underpinning statement for senior secondary.
- H. Transitions are critical too and require eco-systemic reform. This call out the need for career decision-making – within and outside of the curriculum. Students from the middle years need to be supported to navigate complex pathways whether it is into TAFE, HE or the workforce.
- I. Establishing this learning continuum will present structural reform opportunities – a single regulator; a national admissions centre; and potential funding changes (State – formal schooling and Federal post-formal schooling). This is easy to state in a sentence but is hard to achieve without concerted effort.

### Defining Research Differently

- J. We believe institutions can be research intensive **and exemplars of** true learning and teaching experimentation and reform. The solution is not to create a category of 'teaching only' universities. That may represent no advance at all from a student, skills or employer point of view. (*ToR1-2, ToR5 & ToR7*)
- K. Impact is a term thrown around in the sector. We believe it requires more specific definition. For example through our commitment to Protecting Country, together with our focus in key thematic areas of research strength and a pragmatic approach – we subscribe to research-informed, measurable, trackable and traceable forms of impact. This too also has strong connection to the regional context within which an institution is located (for VU this is the west of Melbourne). (*ToR7*)
- L. VU is a global 'solutions hub' based in the west of Melbourne, working with our partners in co-defining and co-creating research to address the needs of our communities locally, nationally and globally. For VU, research with impact is about taking that next step:
  - a. more than knowledge but ethical knowledge;
  - b. more than strengths but solutions;
  - c. more than the West but the world; and
  - d. more than us but together. (*ToR7*)
- M. Research needs to be less about delivering new knowledge and more about the impact of that new knowledge. Our national research agenda needs to be nation-framing and nation-forging. We are pioneering that approach with our research emphasis upon key thematic clusters. One of the best-known of these at VU is the field of Sports Science (incorporating everything from research in women's sport; sport integrity; sports technology and 'prehabilitation' to public health and disease-prevention). We were recently-ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in the world in this key research cluster. (*ToR7*)

**Primacy and Priority of First Nations Knowledge**

- N. First Nations Peoples and Indigenous knowledges, epistemologies and ontologies, need to be given primacy and priority through the terms of this review, reflecting the national commitment to the *Voice*.
- O. Victoria University has adopted a cogent and progressive approach to working with First Nations students, scholars and communities on issues which they have prioritised. For example, our world-leading Aboriginal History Archive is one of the top collections globally on First Nations political and protest movements, with a particular focus on the situation over the past 60 years in Australia. Our Strategic Plan, [‘Start Well, Finish Brilliantly’](#) is one of the few in the sector which calls out ‘Protecting Country’ (the Indigenous term, gifted to us with permission) as one of our top 5 institution-wide priorities. We would be pleased to work closely with the review to weave the narrative of possibility in this area into real, measurable and proud outcomes – one of which could be the auspicing of the first Indigenous-led First Nations University in Australia.

**Summary**

We see ourselves as radical reformers at a time when radical reform is essential. We would be pleased to work closely with the review panel at all levels and stages of its work. Feel free to call on us – and on me personally – if we can assist in any way.

Sincerely



**Professor Adam Shoemaker  
Vice-Chancellor  
Victoria University**