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Australian Universities Accord  
Chair: Professor Mary O'Kane AC

Dear Accord Panel members

James Cook University (JCU) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the *Australian Universities Accord Discussion Paper: February 2023*.

The Accord process has fostered healthy debate about whether tertiary education is working well, and if not, how do we define the issues and what might the solutions be?

We contend that whilst the system may not be fundamentally broken, there is considerable room for improvement. In effect, do not let good prevent us achieving great!

We believe the sector needs governance and policy settings that support cooperative federalism, that bring industry and community into decision-making, and that enable place-based agreement making that can hold stakeholders accountable for the part they play in achieving the educational goals that each community holds for itself, whether that be Melbourne or the Torres Strait.

We simply cannot afford for the oft stated desire for regional participation and equity to translate into a paternalistic, missionary-style, rescue mentality where things are 'done to' rather than 'done with' the regions and their communities. More than ever, JCU is hearing language from metro-based stakeholders that presupposes the regions are devoid of educational opportunity. In effect our regions are seen as somewhere that is an educational 'green field' to be saved. It is regularly assumed that if regional aspirations were simply raised, then the problems would be solved. This is to fundamentally misread the landscape and undermine anchor institutions such as ours, and it is morally wrong short-term thinking that can never address the real issues.

The idea of place-based and mission-based compacts has gained momentum in 2023 but there has been little discussion about how this could work at a system level. What would be the rules, who are the parties to compacts, how would we know if it is working? Much of the discussion has been impoverished; the concept of place-based has been conflated with institution-based, it needs to be far more than that.

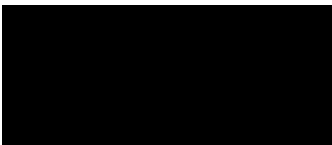
At JCU, 'place is powerful' as it nurtures a deep commitment to our people, their communities, the regions we serve, and local industries. We recognise that 'a sense of place arises not just from a location, but from

interrelationships between people and place'<sup>1</sup>. By locating students and academic staff meaningfully in place, we utilise opportunities and experiences in communities, cultures, environments and landscapes to build knowledge, skills and applications to create brighter futures for life in the Tropics. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the interrelationship can enable our shared commitment to Indigenous self-determination and assigns critical elements to identity, designating a sense of belonging to, as well as cultural responsibilities for, place.

JCU ascribes a great deal of importance to experiential learning<sup>2</sup> that includes experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting in familiar and unfamiliar settings (real and simulated). We strive to base our partnerships with local experts and consultative groups on reciprocity, and focus on serving our regional, rural, and remote areas. Our students are strongly connected to a sense of Place, understanding their responsibilities. JCU graduates make a difference in the north that can't be made from anywhere else in Australia.

This is what we mean by place. We all have a place and a clear purpose – it's time for our university system to support and enable this mission.

Sincerely



Professor Simon Biggs  
Vice Chancellor and President

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson, M.D., Sprowles, A.E., Goldenberg, K.R., Margell, S.T. & Castellino, L. (2020) Effect of a Place-Based Learning Community on Belonging, Persistence, and Equity Gaps for First-Year STEM Students. *Innovative Higher Education*, 45:509-531. p. 523.

<sup>2</sup> Kolb, A. Y. & Kolb, D. A. (2012). Learning Styles and Learning Spaces: Enhancing Experiential Learning in Higher Education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 2005, Vol. 4, No. 2, 193-212.

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## Executive Summary

JCU has responded to the questions in the *Australian Universities Accord Discussion Paper: February 2023* using five linked submissions, each focussing on different areas of opportunity.

Submission # 1. An ongoing Accord: ways forward	p 2
Submission # 2. The proportionality principle: funding models and regulatory fairness	p 8
Submission # 3. Leadership: Self Determination and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	p 20
Submission # 4. Powering Australian development: mobility that works	p 25
Submission # 5. Powering regional development: research and industry	p 31

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Submission #1 recommends **new machinery of government** to enable sector-level governance that is responsive to the different needs of different places. We contend that **clear accountability** for educational outcomes requires **place-based agreement making** that brings governments, educational providers (schools, VET/TAFE, universities), industry and community into alignment through partnerships. We provide a **conceptual framework for thinking about ‘place’** that can be applied to both metro and regional areas.

Submission #2 draws on the **principle of proportionality** to outline how one-size-fits-all, volume-based funding creates scale distortions leading to a form of market failure for anchor institutions headquartered in regional areas. We outline the **serious consequences for regional communities** when students are pulled towards metro locations because of these distortions. We propose a new, cost neutral, **universal service provision guarantee** based on a block grant amount paid at the same level to all institutions regardless of size, with variable per-student funding covering the marginal costs of delivery as scale is increased. We make the case for school reform and a **Schools and Community Outreach Capability** loading that can move beyond raising aspirations to seriously engage the needs of the communities being served. We contend that sector attainment targets need to prioritise regional areas and underrepresented groups.

Submission #3 sets out the significant **impact of Indigenous leadership** within the University sector, and the importance of scholarship that matters for **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination**. We provide detail on effective school and university-based **capability and support programs** and the importance of **cost-of-living support** to enable timely progression. We recommend a **National Centre for Indigenous Best Practice in Higher Education**.

Submission #4 articulates the **concept of mobility**, both social and patterns of movement/migration, and the relationship between student mobility and regional development. We outline the importance of **belonging to place**, the benefits of educational engagement and the unacceptable costs of social dislocation. We set out the necessity of **schools and community outreach** to build educational capability and the enablers of student success. We note the **important social, political, cultural and economic contributions** that regional centres, regional academics and regional students make to Australia and internationally when quality, research-informed, educational opportunities create the necessary fertile ground across a broad range of disciplines, including the humanities and social sciences.

Submission #5 makes a case for **place-based research missions and capability development** that has impact for local and international communities. JCU’s unique social and geographical location is the context for research that has **broad importance to Tropical communities worldwide**.

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## Submission # 1. 'An ongoing Accord: ways forward'

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It is our contention that a systems approach requires a conceptual underpinning of place-based missions, and that this idea shapes the relationship between individual institutions and the communities they serve.

We note that 'place' is important for every university, not just those based in regional locations, although it may be conceptually easier for regional universities to articulate their roles, responsibilities and relationships in the communities they serve.

It is our observation that the current lack of differentiation between universities, particularly in crowded metro markets, stems from disincentives for institutions to work together strategically within a system to optimise benefits for the local population. Funding rules and the lack of incentives that enable agreement making between universities leads to duplication rather than specialisation. This, in turn, results in a lack of clarity on individual institutional roles and no clear responsibility for defined community outcomes across different market segments and priorities.

The discussion paper notes that higher education providers have diverse missions, with different operating contexts driven by the communities they serve (Q. 2). We explicitly seek to understand "what regulatory and governance reforms would enable the higher education sector to better meet contemporary demands?" (Q. 36), and "what a more coherent and dynamic national governance system for higher education could achieve?" (Q. 37). We focus Submission #1 on how placed-based leadership and governance can be enabled through machinery of government and agreements, and the benefits of clear accountability for educational outcomes.

### A fundamental question for Australia

The ideas discussed in this submission are dependent on answering a fundamental question about how regional communities are positioned within Australia, and specifically within the Higher Education sector. For JCU, this is expressed as:

*Should people living in northern Queensland have access to campus-based, research-informed, full educational experience at a university that is local to them?*

If the answer to this is in the affirmative, then there are obligations on both government and on JCU. If the answer to this is in the negative, then this change in direction has consequences that will need careful management of community expectations.

### Thinking about place

We believe JCU provides an interesting case study within the Australian sector demonstrating how 'place' links to, and defines, research and education within the notion of a civic university.

Within our traditional catchment area, from Mackay northwards, JCU serves a population of 760k people across 1.4m km<sup>2</sup>. Setting the Queensland Outback aside, this represents a population density of 3.5 people per km<sup>2</sup>. We serve 42 local government areas, and 11 regional/economic development community-based advocacy bodies. More than a quarter of the population is in the most disadvantaged socio-economic status (Quintile 1) and just 15% of the population have a Bachelor degree or higher.

There are dozens of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language groups in northern Queensland<sup>3</sup> – Kalaw Kawaw Ya, Torres Strait Creole, Kalaw Lagaw Ya, Meriam Mer, Djagaranga, Yir Yiront, Gundang, Uradhi, Yadhaykenu, Angkamuthi, Tjungundji, Anghimri, just to name a few. The region JCU services has similar levels of language diversity as South-East Queensland (where language diversity is driven by immigration). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 11.4% of the population in JCU’s catchment and 7% of our students.

In contrast, South-East Queensland’s population of 3.8m people is spread across 23k km<sup>2</sup> and has six universities (UQ, USQ, Griffith, Bond, QUT and USC) headquartered within the region. The population density is 164 people per km<sup>2</sup>. Fifteen percent of the population is in the most disadvantaged SES, and 25% of the population have a Bachelor degree or higher. 3% of the population in South-East Queensland is Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Geography and demography have manifestly shaped JCU as well as the South-East Queensland universities.

### *JCU’s place – A University for the Tropics*

JCU was established in 1970 under an Act of the Queensland Government, specifically to serve the people of northern Queensland, and the Tropics more broadly. Beginning as a branch campus of University of Queensland in 1960, JCU has developed to provide access to on-campus, research-informed, learning experiences for students across 10 broad Fields of Education (FOE) over the past 60+ years.

Our operations provide significant insight into the cost of delivering on-campus, research-led, university education in regional locations. Our experiences provide case study information that can be used by Government to forecast the minimum investment needed for a viable university with a universal service guarantee of on-campus learning opportunities based in regional and remote Australia. Submission #2 *The proportionality principle: funding models and regulatory fairness*, provides further detail to enable full deliberations on the cost/benefit.

JCU graduates fill the professional ranks across northern Queensland with 76% of recent graduates working in outer regional and remote locations, and 86% of students who were from remote locations staying to work in in outer regional and remote areas. Put simply, students who study in northern Queensland are retained in regional and remote workforces. Conversely, regional students who move south are more likely to establish careers in metro areas than return to where they come from. This aspect is discussed in Submission #4: *Powering Australian development: mobility that works*.

Thousands of JCU graduates have had profound impacts on the communities where they live and work, with the testimony provided by [Phillip Obah](#)<sup>4</sup> (B.Arts/Business) a compelling example of family, lore and cultural responsibilities in relationship to education. Likewise, the commitment to place of staff at JCU comes from deep community knowledge and connections. Regional institutions are not, and cannot, be reliant on casual teaching workforces in the way that metro universities are. Many JCU staff are from the north, and others have committed to make the north home. The work of JCU academic, [Ines Zuchowski](#)<sup>5</sup> PhD, is just one compelling example of how the qualities of our workforce are the foundation of the quality of the University’s work with the communities we serve. Dr Zuckowski’s deep experience as a social worker, and as a Coordinator of community-based human service providers prior to her academic career, has directly resulted in embedded critical research in work-integrated learning innovation – this matters profoundly to community development and the longer-term viability of regional communities.

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<sup>3</sup> See language map available from <https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/discover/first-nations-cultures/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-languages>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxknYcS0Uwc>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.jcu.edu.au/news/releases/2023/february/social-work-students-lend-a-hand-to-gps>

## Conceptualising 'place' – Regional Learning Systems

A 'Regional Learning System' approach involves identifying geographical regions that can, or do, operate as a system. Note that the word 'regional' is not limited to 'regional areas' but is being used to geographically segment populations regardless of whether metro or regional.

For example, Northern Queensland can be understood as a Regional Learning System. Within that system are anchor educational providers who are headquartered there (schools, TAFE NQ & FNQ, JCU, RTOs) providing opportunities across a lifetime learning trajectory. Collective and coordinated engagement between providers and broader stakeholders (government, industry, community) is, and will be, required to deliver the educational attainment outcomes needed for Australia's regional development. It is absolutely needed if we are to meet the previously established target of 70% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples aged 25-34 years having completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) by 2031 from the earlier National Agreement on Closing the Gap.<sup>6</sup> In JCU's region this is currently sitting on 38.4%: by contrast the attainment rate of the non-Indigenous population is at 69.6%. In the next 8 years, to meet the target, an *extra* 3,500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are currently aged between 17 – 26 years need to attain a Certificate III or above. Submission #3. *Leadership: Self Determination and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples* sets out the scale of this when just 0.26% of the total Indigenous student population in Far North Queensland schools pass through to university studies. ***Shifting the dial requires us all to work differently.***

South-East Queensland can also be understood as a Regional Learning System. Within this system the six anchor universities headquartered there, if enabled with the correct sector settings, have a population density that enables greater institutional specialisation of course offerings, while still comprehensively meeting the needs of the geographical region.

The Regional Learning System approach has been described in research produced as part of the 2018 Intergovernmental Shared Inquiry Program<sup>7</sup> and is championed in the Regional Australia Institute's *Regionalisation Ambition 2032: A Framework to Rebalance the Nation*<sup>8</sup>. In defining distinct Regional Learning Systems it is important to understand that 'place' as a concept is adaptive – geographical regions will form differently sized systems. As indicated earlier, some regions may be geographically large with small populations (for example the communities JCU serves), some will be geographically small with large populations (for example South-East Queensland).

The concept of 'local' is also adaptive. In places like Northern Australia and Tasmania, people may consider themselves to be studying locally when they go 'up the road' 500+km to their 'local university'<sup>9</sup>. This is different to South-East Queensland and more populated states like New South Wales and Victoria where kinship, allegiances and loyalties may map to institutions differently across distance.

The benefit of a place based, or Regional Learning System approach, is that it enables markets to work efficiently through identifying where competition is effective, at the same time as identifying where market failure (low population density, or low population capability or demand) requires service guarantees and collaboration within a system, or with other systems, as the most effective way to meet the educational attainment needs of distinct communities within the geographically-defined region.

Adopting a Regional Learning System approach does not preclude learning networks being mapped outside of geographical boundaries. Mapping networks is important to enabling a systemic approach to institutional

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/national-agreement-closing-the-gap>

<sup>7</sup> [https://regionalaustralia.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/Files/RAI\\_SIP-2018-2-1-2\\_FutureRegionalJobs\\_Booklet\\_Print\\_3.pdf](https://regionalaustralia.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/Files/RAI_SIP-2018-2-1-2_FutureRegionalJobs_Booklet_Print_3.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://rebalancethenation.com.au/RF/RF/Regionalisation-Framework/Regionalisation-Ambition-2032.aspx?hkey=97c1464b-25a4-40d5-a18b-78555e09a3ab>

<sup>9</sup> Lucy Brown, Veterinary Student JCU, from Clermont. "So [JCU] was sort of a prime place to be and up here 5 hours away. So it's not bad all all...5 hours is fairly close in the country" ... "I'm definitely going back to the bush, I'm rural at heart, so I want to head...probably back out at Clermont, do some repro out there." ABC North Queensland, Rural Report. 8 March 2023, 6.15am. Broadcast ID R00097977890

specialisation within the sector, particularly areas of research focus and specific cohorts. For example, Indigenous PhD candidates in Australia are a community that, when networked, provides important support and opportunity across geographically-defined Regional Learning Systems.

#### Enabling Regional Learning Systems – systems architecture and machinery of government

JCU suggests that Regional Learning Systems enable place-based ways for Government to support coordination between educational providers, industry, governments and community to meet the educational attainment needs of local populations in highly accountable ways. (Noting that such an approach also supports place-based coordination to other ends, for example research priorities.)

#### *Machinery of Government and Agreements*

At present, Government and institutions have a ‘compact’ as the primary expression for the agreement between that individual universities and the Commonwealth about what is to be delivered by the institution. There is not, however, an explicit link between the compact and the funding mechanisms for universities. There is obvious potential then for these compacts to evolve to enable much stronger alignment between funding and place-based mission, with clear accountability against mutually understood outcomes for our communities. If done correctly, this can provide a route to support increased and beneficial differentiation between institutions.

Outside of compacts, the Commonwealth has a range of agreements with the States that impact on different parts of lifetime learning trajectories – for example, the National School Reform Agreement, the National Skills Agreement and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. These agreements are made through different Commonwealth Government Departments with State Governments who themselves have various departmental structures.

All these agreements come together in practice at the local level within a defined population, for example, northern Queensland. A Regional Learning System approach would explicitly recognise that place-based planning, activation and accountability can be facilitated to ensure that investment and activity works at a system level for a defined population across lifetimes. Specific Regional Learning Systems will require different activities depending on the needs of their populations across any given period. In Northern Queensland, for example, intergovernmental priority setting, agreement making and accountabilities between the school system, the university, TAFE, and Jobs and Skills Australia could be coordinated to meet the identified workforce and community development needs of the population, including the National Agreement for Closing the Gap, targets 3 – 8 and the Developing Northern Australia agenda.

*The question is: How could place-based coordination for Regional Learning Systems occur?*

In the short-term, compacts provide a partial mechanism. The Commonwealth’s Department of Education is organised along portfolio lines of Early Childhood and Youth; Schools; and Higher Education, Research and International, and this structure potentially allows some brokerage through relationships with the States, and with other Commonwealth Government Departments, and agencies – most importantly Jobs and Skills Australia.

A bold solution to enable ongoing place-sensitive accord making would be to establish a **Learning Systems Commission** that can orchestrate the efforts of different levels and agencies of government and educational providers in the service of reaching lifetime learning educational attainment ambitions held by community and industry. Such a Commission could offer longer-term strategic policy making, brokerage, agreement making and most importantly of all, strong accountability for outcomes from the educational institutions (schools, VET/TAFEs, Universities) involved. Strong governance, including Indigenous leadership, will assist to align the agenda of a Learning Systems Commission with other key social systems, for example, health and

housing. A Learning Systems Commission, if placed in historical context<sup>10</sup>, is a predictable continuation of different ways to structure the system.

In *Rethinking Higher Education*<sup>11</sup> Professor John Howard argues that the sector lacks coherent governance mechanisms (with funding rules being a blunt lever) and that an overarching Commission would provide the governance structure necessary to grow and transform several distinct provider groupings, with each having 'strong distinctive capabilities addressing specific market segments within a clearly defined range of education'. Howard's idea was for a Commission focussed on universities, rather than the broader idea of a Learning Systems Commission interested in lifetime trajectories, as we have outlined above, but the market segmentation identified in his work provides a useful way for thinking about how differentiation between universities could work 'in place', that is, within Regional Learning Systems. The segments he identified included: research intensive; advanced technology; specialisation in large cities slow growth areas; specific charters for regional universities to regional development – particularly innovation; hospital and medical research embedded in regional innovation ecosystems; non-university providers in disciplines not driven by research or scholarship such as creative practice. Professor Greg Craven outlined other potential collaborative groupings that he predicted (in 2013) could possibly emerge post Bradley for example, a technology, a research-intensive and what he describes as an 'equity' university<sup>12</sup> – arguably such groupings have not emerged to date, except for perhaps in Western Sydney, but such collaboration could be enabled with place-based structures.

A Regional Learning Systems approach where agreement making between educational institutions is facilitated would provide an intervention in the undergraduate domestic market, enabling a shift in marketing priorities (and expenses) for this market segment, allowing institutional resources to be redirected to articulating the broader value of each university through a focus on partnerships and transparency of mission with the communities being served.

This submission addresses Questions No 2, 35, 36, 37, 45.

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<sup>10</sup> Historically Government have relied on a range of coordinating bodies to support Ministers and the Department. The Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC 1977-1987) was responsible for policy and funding for universities, colleges of advanced education and TAFE. CTEC was abolished during the Dawkins reforms, to be replaced by the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET 1988-1998), a ministerial advisory board made up of industry, unions and sector. NBEET, a Higher Education Council (and the Australian Research Council of NBEET) provided Ministers with advice apart from that given by the Department. State Joint Planning Committees sorted through Commonwealth – State relations between Colleges of Advanced Education and Universities. These structures were dismantled in 1998 under the Howard Government in favour of operating through Department of Education and funding agreements. The Bradley Review (2008) recommended Commonwealth and State mechanisms for sharing responsibility for educational outcomes.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/2021-02/Rethinking%20Australian%20Higher%20Education%20-%20towards%20a%20Diversified%20System%20for%20the%2021st%20Century%20%28UTS%20Final%29.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Craven, G. (2013) 'The Politics' Chapter 15, in *The Dawkins Revolution 25 years on*. Edited by Croucher, G, Marginson S, Norton A, & Wells, J. Melbourne University Press.



Summary of ideas presented:

- **Place matters** for all educational providers.
  - All educational providers operate within 'Place', that is geographically – definable systems, where interrelationships between people and place matter. Taking a **Regional Learning Systems** approach leverages this reality, works across educational sectors (schools, VET/TAFE and University) and enables differentiation and market efficiencies.
- **Increased policy coherency and activity coordination** of educational providers, government, industry and community is required to **increase accountability** for educational outcomes.
  - Enhancing compacts provides a partial mechanism in the short-term.
  - A stronger solution would be a **Learning Systems Commission** that can facilitate an ongoing accord, featuring agreement-making within Regional Learning Systems. It would enable strong governance, including Indigenous leadership, that can align the agenda of a Commission with other key social systems.
- That obligations or contingency plans flow from settling the fundamental question of:

***Should people living in Northern Australia have access to campus-based, research-informed, educational experiences at a university that is local to them?***

## Submission # 2.

# 'The proportionality principle: funding models and regulatory fairness'

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## **Proportionality, accountability and fairness**

Several discussion paper questions ask how diverse missions can be funded, and how funding sustainability can be achieved over the next few decades in Australia.

JCU argues that it is 'place' that best informs the split and quantum of funding required to deliver an accountable and fair system across different geographical areas, and with different populations and missions.

Different institutions have widely different abilities to compete based on their location, the population they serve and their mission (for domestic student load, for international students, for competitive grants). Likewise, there are multiple place-based characteristics that explain the different cost bases of teaching per student across universities, and students themselves have different capacities to financially contribute to the costs of their studies.

The principle of proportionality can be applied to better level the playing field between different universities, between different sites of education (school, VET and university), and between students graduating from different disciplinary areas. The principle opens the way to have a guaranteed universal service provision across Australia ensuring that regional populations are not disadvantaged by one-size-fits-all resourcing.

Institutions needed a minimum of 2,000 EFTSL to join the Unified National System under the Dawkins reforms and mergers were promoted to gain efficiencies. Today there are single campus institutions with more than 50,000 students (EFTSL). Institutional size has a number of implications, as set out below.

### *Scale – link to international education*

Scale in Australia is strongly correlated to the ability to compete for international students. International students are overwhelmingly centred in metro areas, with regional areas attracting relatively small numbers of international students to campuses, often to study in world-leading research areas (for example, at JCU in areas of marine science, environmental studies/ecology, tropical health sciences).

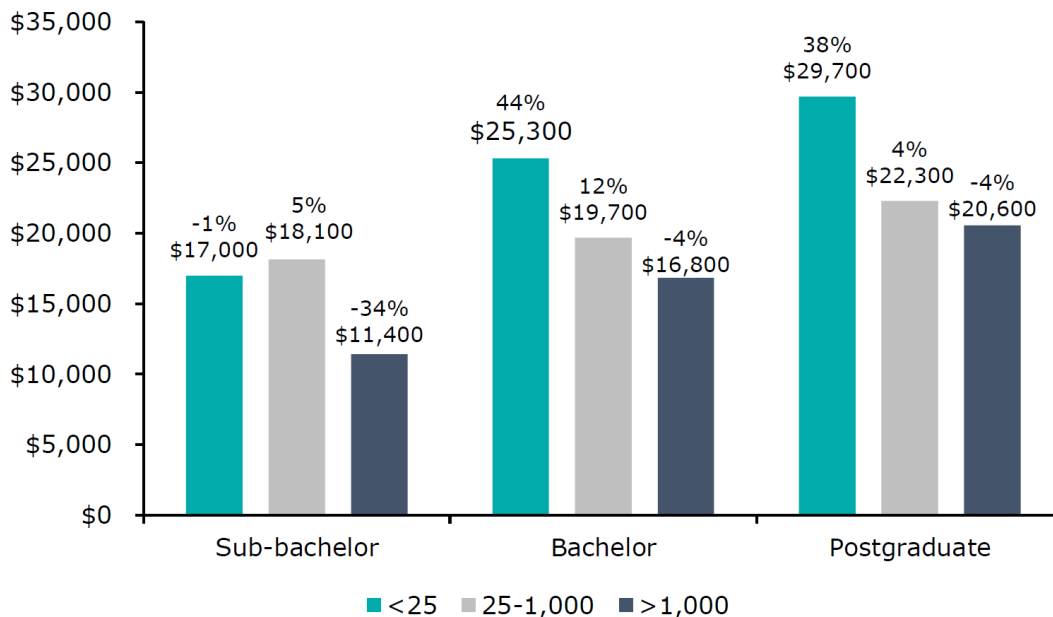
### *Scale – link to regulatory burden*

At present, a university of 50,000 students is required to provide the same reports and acquittals across a range of functions as a university with 20,000 students. Applying a principle of proportionality to meeting regulatory burden would ensure that all universities, regardless of scale, are similarly equipped to respond to regulatory requirements.

Government currently seeks to shape institutional direction primarily through funding rules, resulting in too many small, highly conditional programs (the National Priorities Industry Linkage Fund, for example). Accountability for what is delivered, rather than micro-managing how it is delivered, reduces regulatory burden and supports innovation. Place-based agreement making, either through enhanced compacts or a Learning Systems Commission, would enable effective monitoring of agreed institutional outcomes. In addition, it is important to have ongoing processes to reduce overall regulatory burden and find regulatory efficiencies across the sector, for example overlaps between TEQSA and professional accreditation bodies.

### Scale – link to teaching costs

The 2016 Deloitte Access Economics' report: *Cost of delivery of higher education*<sup>13</sup> included a detailed econometric analysis of the drivers of cost. A key finding from this analysis and report was the significance (statistically and materially) of scale as a determinant of unit costs. Graph 1 provides further clear evidence for the existence of 'economies of scale' in the provision of higher education, whereby an increasing quantum of teaching delivery in a given Field of Education is associated with declining unit costs.



Graph 1: Unit Costs and deviation from average using different EFTSL

### Scale – link to regional provision

Regional university costs manifest themselves due to the typically smaller scale and usually greater student support requirements.

Universities operating in regional areas currently attract a regional loading, which mitigates some, but not all of the scale costs. At present regional loading is paid on campuses where there is a minimum of 50 internal and/or multi-model CSP EFTSL. JCU receives loadings for students who are studying from its Cairns and Townsville campuses (10%), Mt Isa and Thursday Island study centres (20%) and our Mackay study centre (5%). For JCU, this loading amounted to \$16m in 2021 which is the highest amount distributed to any university within the sector, reflecting our predominant teaching model and student population. The loading does not, however, cover the full costs of regional delivery.

A recent working paper from the Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education titled *What does it cost to educate a university student in Australia*<sup>14</sup> based on 11 regional institutions, calculated the additional cost of delivery as one fifth more once smaller subjects are accounted for. The study also found that class size seems to be a major determinate of cost in regional areas, but that regional campuses appear to have additional costs when controlling for class size and need supplementary financial support to operate

<sup>13</sup> Deloitte (2016) Cost of Delivery in Higher Education Report <https://www.education.gov.au/download/3630/cost-delivery-higher-education/5274/document/pdf>

<sup>14</sup> [https://melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/3952110/what-does-it-cost-to-educate.pdf](https://melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/3952110/what-does-it-cost-to-educate.pdf)

effectively. This aligns with the finding of the *2016 Cost of Delivery of Higher Education* report that regionality was correlated with higher costs, even after controlling for scale, suggesting that regional provision involves greater expenses.

### Sustainable Regional Provision

In Submission # 1, JCU made a case that stronger educational outcomes in Australia can be most effectively achieved by strengthening institutional accountability requirements through coordinated agreement making that is place sensitive (locally responsive and responsible). We argued that new machinery of government could usefully support longer-term strategic policy making, brokerage and agreement making between government, industry, community and educational providers (schools, VET, university) in place-based ways.

In this submission, we build on this idea to outline funding and regulatory reform opportunities. We use our experiences at JCU as a case study, to set out a way that compacts and funding agreements could respond to place-based imperatives through setting a sector-wide **Universal Core Grant Amount**. Universal core grant funding can better level the playing field between universities and address the market failure that occurs in thin, highly dispersed markets particularly when sustainability is tied exclusively to scale, as it is now.

The key issue is that Northern, Outback and Central Queensland has very low population densities, and retention of students in the regions is a key priority. When domestic student load is fully contestable through competition, as it is now, experience shows that metro universities seek additional load from the regions either by drawing the youngest, most capable, and most mobile candidates to the city or through online offerings. This has negative economic impacts on regional areas with, for example, low success/completion rates from fully online offerings adding to regional private debt, often amongst those least able to sustain this debt. The loss of outstanding young talent to metro universities is detrimental to the growth and sustainability of a region and regional universities face diminishing capability in key disciplinary areas as a result.

The negative impacts on regional universities, such as JCU, who seek to sustain access to campus-based, research-informed, educational experiences locally with declining student load and capability is profound. It also puts immense pressure on some key disciplinary areas needed for a healthy community, such as the Humanities and Social Sciences.

JCU's Submission #4 provides a conceptual framework for thinking about provision, equity, social and spatial mobility from a place-based perspective and examines the kinds of quality educational mobility experiences that work to serve Australia's interests broadly as well as the interests of distinct Regional Learning Systems. We note that mobility out of the regions is fuelled by generous scholarships that can be provided because of the scale of the providing university, something smaller regional universities can't match. Careful analysis is essential to avoid the pitfalls of well-resourced universities putting in place policy and programs that are well-meaning, but counterproductive to the regions we serve. We seek others interested in shifting the educational dial in northern Queensland to work with us, not in competition with us.

#### *Regional University Centres*

The systemic underfunding for regional education in the current system creates sustainability tensions on service provision to very important, but small, remote populations; especially in regions where there is a larger Indigenous population. At JCU, the Indigenous population whilst large, is distributed and there are challenges in maintaining essential delivery when there are significant distances between population centres.

It is noteworthy that the Regional University Centres program was established at the same time as underfunding the cost of delivery for anchor institutions like JCU through regional loading, and this has restricted the range of possible educational delivery options.

Regional University Centres have been established to support smaller communities. In northern Queensland centres are being established in Cooktown, Mt Isa and Atherton – all communities for whom JCU is effectively the local university. If Regional University Centres act as discount shopfronts for metro universities, then the burden of engagement for the local business and community sector, for example through work-integrated learning, can be increased. Without careful partnership-making, the Regional University Centres program design has the potential to further erode the student load of anchor institutions and weaken the social contract with our communities. With careful partnership making between the anchor local University and VET/TAFEs, the Regional University Centre program could support increased service provision and choice, and better success for online and multi-modal students. Again, taking a place-based approach to design and deliver programs such as the Regional University Centre program would lead to solutions that are more locally appropriate but also nationally consistent with the principles of proportionality, accountability and fairness.

#### A universal service provision guarantee – Universal Core Grant Amount

The current one-size-fits-all, volume-based funding has been ineffective, as it has created significant competition and hindered meaningful differentiation in the sector. Institutions are more focused on pursuing volume rather than fulfilling mission, which ultimately undermines the sector's long-term success. Attempts to adjust the funding system have added complication, contradictions and burden and despite increased reporting requirements, there has been no improvement in outcomes.

Stable and predictable funding and regulation that is constructed to ensure equitable access to quality education for all regardless of background or location is highly desirable and achievable. A very simple mechanism that provides a minimum level of access would be a Universal Core Grant Amount.

JCU, as one of the smallest universities in the sector with a long history of internal mode on-campus education, provides a robust case study to model the cost of delivering an on-campus, research-informed, learning opportunity for students across 10 broad FOE (2 digit). Uniquely within the sector JCU does not have any significant domestic student load from capital city campuses, and we do not carry extensive online-only load. Whilst the model JCU operates reduces our ability to build scale, we believe it has enabled a sharp and beneficial focus on the regions we serve. We have been true to our founding Act.

Briefly, our experience suggests that a minimum workforce capacity of 400 Academic Staff FTE are required to teach a range of courses across 10 broad 2-digit FOE (excluding Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Sciences), with Professional and Technical staff and overhead contingent in 2023, this model equates to \$250m per year.

A Universal Core Grant Amount (\$250m) is a standard commonwealth funded amount that is guaranteed to all universities regardless of location and enrolments. This will ensure universal service guarantees in regional locations, especially in areas such as northern Queensland, Tasmania, and the Northern Territory. The Universal Core Grant Amount would need to include clear obligations on universities in designated regional locations to offer the broad, on-campus option across the fields of study. There would also need to be clear efforts to maximise the uptake of provision across all FOE, consistent with goal setting through a compact agreement.

In short, the Universal Core Grant Amount provides the number of academic and professional/technical staff to teach across 10 FOE (but not medicine, dentistry, and veterinary sciences).

The Universal Core Grant Amount will be adjusted by a limited number of factors (regionality, student capability and success, health programs, and research block funding) to establish an overall Block Grant Amount.

The model is depicted in Figure 1 (p. 16), with discussion of the adjustments to the Universal Core Grant Amount following:

- **Regional Loading** is added to reflect the higher cost of delivery in regional locations due to the geographical distribution of campuses, and Staff Student Ratios being higher in regional locations where there are smaller class sizes. As noted earlier, the current regional loading does not fully account for the additional expenses of operating in a regional context and needs to be increased to reflect the true cost of regional education provision.
- **Schools and Community Outreach Capability Loading** is added based on the demographic characteristics of the population being served, and what is required to reach national educational attainment targets. This is effectively the schools and community outreach component of the current Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) - see Background box below, and Submission #3 for further detail on the focus of this loading.
- **Research Block Grant** is the current Research Support Program (RSP) and Research Training Program (RTP).

The Universal Core Grant Amount, combined with the Regional Loading, Schools and Community Outreach Capability Loading, and the Research Block Grant constitutes a block payment to the university (Block Grant Amount) that is not linked to the number of enrolled students.

The Block Grant Amount model provides a guide that allows governments to forecast required expenditure for additional comprehensive service provision if/when new universities are established.

The actual **per student funding** – tied to EFTSL load and FOE – would be reduced from current Job Ready Graduates (JRG) amounts to reflect the marginal or variable costs of delivery as the Block Grant Amount represents the fixed cost. The Commonwealth contribution and student contribution can be set and adjusted at a sector-wide level to reflect priorities, and incentivise particular outcomes, such as reaching nationally set attainment targets or focusing on particular discipline areas. The per student funding can effectively enable a demand-driven system that recognises the marginal costs of adding student load.

Furthermore, in addition of the per-student funding described above, the Indigenous Student Support program, Medicine/Dentistry/Veterinary Science Loading, and University Student Success Loading would provide further per-student funding, as outlined below.

- **Indigenous Student Support Program.** This loading is the current ISSP. We provide further detail on this loading as it currently works in Submission #3.
- **Medicine/Dentistry/Veterinary Science Loading** – This loading is based on designated places and recognises the high cost of teaching these courses and that not all institutions teach these courses.
- **University Student Success Loading.** This is paid per student (not EFTSL) to provide university support services to students in underrepresented groups (Indigenous, Low SES, First in Family, Arrived as a Refugee, Student with a Disability). This funding formula should recognise compounding disadvantage and costs for students who have more than one factor. Regionality should be a factor in the formula that assesses compounding disadvantage, but it should not be counted as an underrepresented group in itself given the *Regional Loading*. The University Student Success Loading should only be paid for students who fall within an Institution's Regional Learning System, this is to ensure that there are not perverse incentives to compete for these students in ways that impact on

regional areas. This loading is effectively the university support component of HEPPP. In Submission #4 we provide detail on the focus of this loading.

It is important to note that the *Schools and Community Outreach Capability Loading*, with demand driven *Enabling and Foundational* course funding, are necessary steps towards students from regional areas, and underrepresented groups being ready to engage in university studies in similar ways, with similar levels of support, as their metro and more representative peers. Quality interventions at this early stage reduce the need and cost of later stage support.

*Background: Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP)*

It is worth noting that HEPPP objectives have been a) outreach to widen aspiration and promote higher education to persons from a low SES background, persons from regional and remote areas, and Indigenous persons, and b) the extent to which persons from a low SES background, persons from regional and remote areas, and Indigenous persons access, participate and succeed in higher education and obtain higher education awards.

To date, outreach attention has been on initiatives across the school sector to help raise *aspirations* of students. Initiatives to build the *capability and ensure the preparation of students* for the educational challenges of further or higher education were of lesser focus despite their obvious value in driving successful lifelong benefits. The Bradley Review's recommended 4% of teaching grant funding for HEPPP initiatives in schools also failed to achieve full support in the budget, which meant that the reach of the school focused strategy to address capability and preparedness for higher education was cut short in the early stages. It took the Napthine Review<sup>15</sup> to reveal that it was, perversely, schools in regional, rural and remote regions of Australia that missed out on the schools' outreach work, regions which also have high populations of Indigenous people.

It is time to reinstate *support for capability building* of school students and the community, and not just *raise aspirations* for higher education studies. The program logic set out in the *Student Equity in Higher Education Evaluation Framework* begins with Pre-Access that includes academic preparation and mentoring.<sup>16</sup>

JCU supports Government allocating 4% of the overall teaching grant funding (as recommended by the Bradley Review) to capability building within schools, with the funding distribution proportionate to the school outcomes in each Regional Learning System. This will lead to improved sustainability of such initiatives in regional, rural and remote Australia.

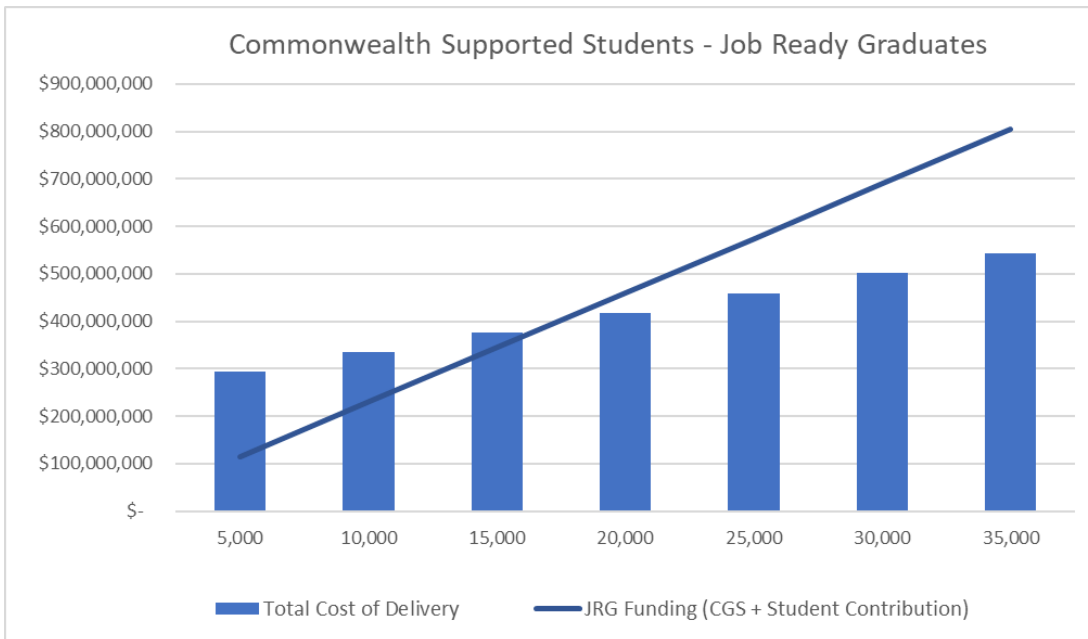
The model, as described, can address some of the factors that are embedded in the current one-size-fits-all, volume-based funding model. It supports diversity in the sector by balancing incentives so that operating at smaller (but still large scale) is possible, whether that be in a regional or metro location.

<sup>15</sup> National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy: Final Report. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. 2019.

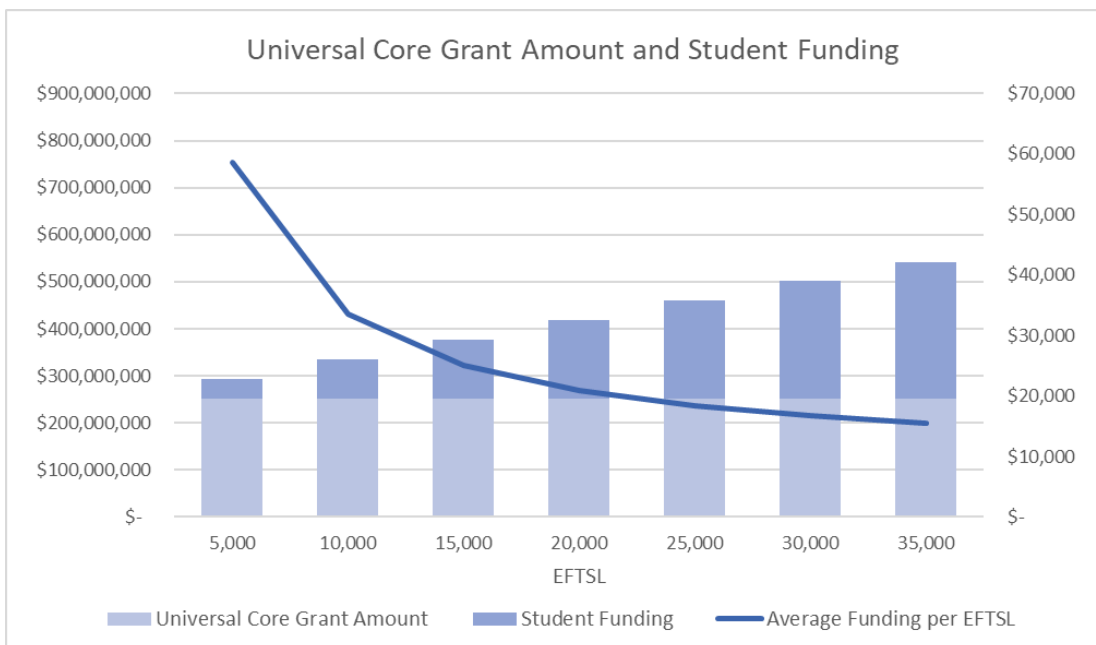
<https://www.education.gov.au/access-and-participation/resources/national-regional-rural-and-remote-tertiary-education-strategy-final-report>

<sup>16</sup> Robinson, M., Tomaszewski, W., Kubler, M., Johnstone, M., Clague, D., Zajac, T., Povey, J. & Salom, C. (2021) *Student Equity in Higher Education Evaluation Framework* – Final Report. <https://www.education.gov.au/hePPP/resources/student-equity-higher-education-evaluation-framework-seheef-final-report>

The following graphs illustrate the impact of the model. Graph 2 shows the current perverse economies of scale under JRG funding. Graph 3 shows the Universal Grant Amount & Student Funding (excludes all additional loadings).



Graph 2: Cost of Delivery & Job Ready Graduate Funding



Graph 3: Cost of Delivery & Universal Core Grant Amount



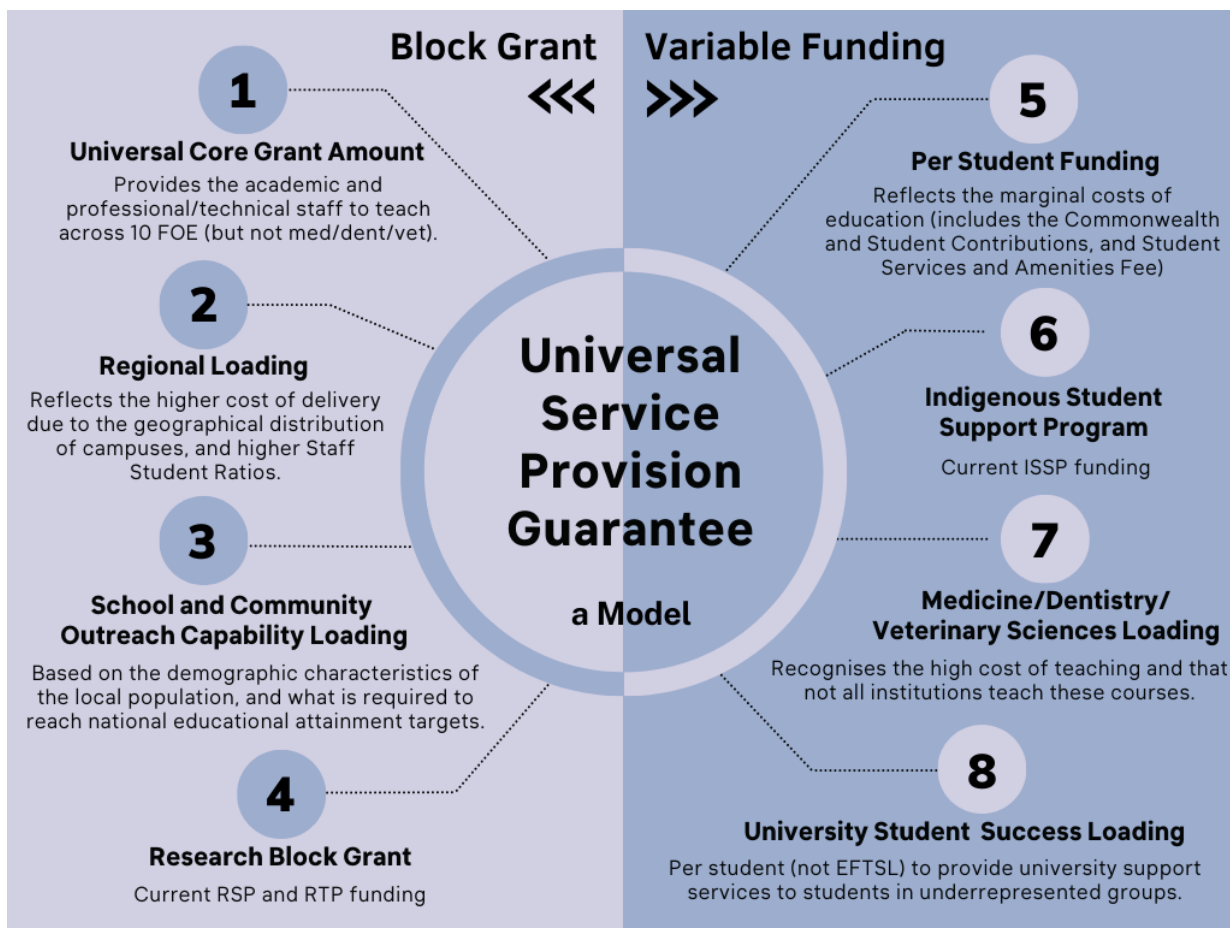


Figure 1: Universal Service Provision Guarantee – a model

System expansion – national attainment targets and asking ‘who benefits’

JCU understands that the Government operates within set budget envelopes, and that increasing participation and attainment in education, and financial sustainability of universities will require (re)distributed and alternative (mixed) funding sources. At a systems level, JCU argues it is important to look at the private/public split of educational funding across the lifetime learning trajectory (school, post school, professional development) to find appropriate balance at all stages. This ensures that private debt, and business and government investment, work together at a macro level over the long term to enable sustainable expansion of educational opportunities.

The discussion paper asks “how the university system may be expanded to cater for more students?” JCU argues that this needs to be decided using place-based agreement making. We do not agree with the recent Productivity Commission suggestion that the system should become fully demand-driven by simply charging students more, in order that the Government contribution can be spread further.

Australian students already pay significant contributions for their undergraduate studies.<sup>17</sup> Shifting further from the universal provision of education supported in part by public contributions, to a more stratified set of economically segregated pathways will not obviously improve outcomes for low SES and disadvantaged student groups. Privatising educational debt in this way risks greater socio-economic stratification, not less. Australia’s progressive tax system provides a proven way of recouping public expenditure on education.

A strength of the Australian university sector is the expectation for public provision in recognition of the

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/b35a14e5-en.pdf> Education at a Glance 2021 p. 285

public good. All students pay the same for similar degrees regardless of where they attend and have access to HECS-HELP. All students should have access to the learning support they need. The public interest in the university sector is worth protecting, across all universities, despite the significant differences in reserves between the institutions that have been established the longest and the rest. It would be disappointing if student support moves further towards patronage models of philanthropic scholarships as redistribution mechanisms, not least because access to philanthropic funding is concentrated in those universities who already have significant reserves.

Within the constraints of restricted additional government investment into tertiary education a) regional areas, and b) cohorts who are underrepresented, should be prioritised. Student Success loadings should be restricted to students studying locally to avoid perverse incentives that drive migration out of the regions.

If nationally agreed targets are set (for example, 50% of 25 – 34 year olds having a Bachelor degree) then funding for undergraduate places within each Regional Learning System (metro or regional, whatever the case may be) needs to match the needs of that population in achieving the target. There seems little purpose in having national attainment targets if those communities that are furthest from the target are not prioritised.

#### Student – Student contributions, repayment thresholds

JCU supports recalibration of the JRG funding clusters to address the unfair burden that has been placed on Humanities and Social Science students, and so that students make relatively higher contributions in those discipline areas where higher lifetime graduate earnings can be expected.

Further work is needed to address the differential impact on women of student contributions, debt and expected income across the VET and university sectors (see Mark Warburton’s analysis)<sup>18</sup>. A Learning Systems Commission, if established, could undertake this kind of policy leadership on HECS-HELP, including working with agencies like Jobs and Skills Australia to tackle graduate earning differences between men and women in the same discipline area (women earned more than men in two of 21 fields in 2020)<sup>19</sup>.

JCU supports the principle that students should not continue to attract debt when consistently failing subjects. The JRG 50% pass rule, however, in practice operates as a punitive measure, given that it is the most disadvantaged students who may need to repeat subjects, and that capability building programs (enabling and foundational) are currently not consistently available. There is a broad issue of declining number of students who are adequately educationally prepared to commence university (with a declining number taking ATAR subjects across all school systems across Australia).

At present the distribution of funds for enabling places across the sector is inconsistently linked to place-based need. For example, JCU has 96 enabling places, or \$333,418.00 per year to fund these essential programs, whilst the University of Newcastle has \$5,625,266. With these funding constraints JCU has enrolled students into a Diploma of Higher Education (attracting Student Contribution fees) with very good outcomes for student progression but adding additional student debt and time to completion for this cohort. This has resulted in students in northern Queensland having a greater student debt, and opportunity cost, than students in other parts of Australia where institutions are funded to provide fee-free enabling programs. The Student Learning Entitlement of 7 years also has an impact for disadvantaged students, particularly in high stakes, capped courses, like medicine. Enabling an additional year of study for equity reasons could be beneficial.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://theconversation.com/hecs-help-loans-have-become-unfair-for-women-but-there-is-a-way-to-fix-this-200546>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.wgea.gov.au/resources/publications/higher-education-enrolments-and-graduate-labour-market-statistics>

## Schools Reform

Although schools are outside the scope of the Accord, JCU believes that a systems approach must include schools as partners in ongoing place-based agreement making. Schools are particularly important partners in transforming the educational disadvantage.

Australia was 4<sup>th</sup> highest in the OECD for socio-economic school segregation in 2015<sup>20</sup>, and has one of the highest rates of private school education in the world (30% of primary, 40% of secondary). Only 50% of families pay for private school fees from disposable income, the rest take on debt: this is an important structural economic factor. Median private school fees range between \$8,748 (South Australia) and \$14,140 (Victoria), with highest fees ranging from \$28,190 (ACT) to \$43,660 (Victoria)<sup>21</sup>.

An Australian Education Review report indicates Governments would have saved \$2 billion per year over the past four decades if all students attended public schools<sup>22</sup>, and public recurrent investments in non-government schools increases, rather than decreases overall costs to governments<sup>23</sup>. The Schooling Resource Standard (part of Gonski Review recommendations) has been introduced in such a way that every private school will reach the standard by 2023, and many non-government schools are overfunded well beyond the standard (with a target date of 2029 for reduction to the standard)<sup>24</sup> with fees coming on top of government funding. Conversely, the majority of government schools are yet to be fully funded, with State Government time commitments to reaching the target varying (New South Wales and Tasmania by 2027, Victoria by 2028, and Queensland by 2032)<sup>25</sup>.

The funding system outlined above has important implications for equity. Increasing educational segregation of students along socio-economic status has been facilitated through commonwealth investment into private schools (that are educating better-resourced families) growing at significantly faster rates than state investment into public schools<sup>26</sup>. Socio-economic status has the biggest impact on student educational success, and family background is related both to the likelihood of attending a private school and academic achievement<sup>27 28</sup>. The Gonski report noted equity within an education system ensures that “differences in educational outcomes are not the result of differences in wealth, income, power or possessions”. In other words, all children have the right to access similar learning opportunities irrespective of who their parents are, where they live and which school they attend<sup>29</sup>.

We recommend:

- a) The Government looks at policy options to address the (currently increasing) level of social segregation within and between public, and non-government schools and considers bringing all school funding together at one level of government<sup>30</sup>,
- b) that the funding transition to needs base Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) be fast-tracked, to bring public and non-government schools into line by 2025, and
- c) introduce caps on private school fees, given the private debt load, to bring schools into line with tertiary education. Schools can become fully private and not attract government funding.

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<sup>20</sup> [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/pisa-2015-results-volume-iii\\_9789264273856-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/pisa-2015-results-volume-iii_9789264273856-en)

<sup>21</sup> <https://edstart.com.au/report>

<sup>22</sup> <https://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1024&context=aer> Connors, L, & McMorrow J. (2015) *Imperatives in Schools Funding: Equity Sustainability and achievement*, Australian Council for Educational Research. P 57

<sup>23</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ajs4.38>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.education.gov.au/quality-schools-package/fact-sheets/how-are-schools-funded-australia>

<sup>25</sup> <https://theconversation.com/still-waiting-for-gonski-a-great-book-about-the-sorry-tale-of-school-funding-178016>

<sup>26</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ajs4.38>

<sup>27</sup> <https://theconversation.com/going-to-private-school-wont-make-a-difference-to-your-kids-academic-scores-175638>

<sup>28</sup> Gemici, S. Lim, P, Karmel, T. 2013 The Impact of Schools on Young People’s Transition to University, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 61, NCVER.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.education.gov.au/school-funding/resources/review-funding-schooling-final-report-december-2011> p 105

<sup>30</sup> Competition among schools is related to greater socio-economic segregation among students. [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/when-is-competition-between-schools-beneficial\\_5jz0v4zzbcmv-en\\_p3](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/when-is-competition-between-schools-beneficial_5jz0v4zzbcmv-en_p3).

## Other redistributive / efficiency mechanisms for the University Sector

### *University Infrastructure Pool*

A University Infrastructure Pool would support fairness across communities in infrastructure development and remove important strategic decisions from political interference and (short) election cycles.

A pool that is jointly funded through matched Commonwealth and State contributions, as well as potential university contributions could be established. Legislation and caveats across States could be liberalised to enable universities to sell excess land or property assets for the purposes of investing in their own infrastructure needs. Universities which have total assets and average 10-year surplus value/per student of less than an established ratio could be eligible to receive matched funding from the University Infrastructure Pool. Universities which have total assets and average 10-year surplus value/ per student above the established ratio could have restricted access to the pool, receiving lower proportions (sliding scale) of funding.

### *Scale levy*

A scale levy could also be applied on international student fees (a set %) as a focused redistribution mechanism to fund government priorities for the sector. Such a levy would recognise that domestic undergraduate student load forms a different proportion of different institutional budgets, and that regional universities are simply not able to compete for international load.

### *Shared services*

There are opportunities for universities to explore shared services models to gain efficiencies in scale and delivery. Areas could include, for example, administration of research training or research commercialisation offices.

This submission addresses Questions No 10, 11, 14, 16, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 43, 44.

Summary of ideas presented:

- **Universal Core Grant Amount** – addresses funding and regulatory issues related to scale in current funding system and provides a universal service provision guarantee for regional areas. This represents the fixed costs of delivery.
  - The per-student funding would be reduced from current JRG amounts and can effectively enable a demand-driven system that recognises the marginal costs of adding student load.
- **Proportionality Principle be applied:**
  - That funding is proportionate to the costs for regional delivery.
  - That Schools and Community Outreach Capability Loading, and University Student Success Loading are proportionate to the needs of the groups being served.
  - Student contributions, repayment thresholds and living costs:
    - Student contribution bands adjusted to reduce inequalities across disciplines, particularly Humanities and Social Sciences.
    - Address gendered impacts of student contributions and debt across post-school education.
    - Provide adequate student living support, equivalent to minimum wage during placements.
  - Schools
    - that policy and funding options to address the currently increasing level of social segregation between public and non-government schools be considered.
    - The transition to Schooling Resource Standard be fast-tracked to 2025.
    - Caps on private school fees to bring schools into line with tertiary education, or schools become fully private and not attract government funding.
- **Attainment Targets/Systems Expansion** – the **focus should be on regional areas and underrepresented groups** ensuring that public provision of education is valued and recognised.
- **Other redistributive/efficiency mechanisms**
  - University Infrastructure Pool – serves to depoliticise infrastructure planning, freeing up capacity of institutions to reinvest in their estate and contribute to and benefit from Infrastructure Pool based on capacity and need.
  - Scale Levy.
  - Shared Services.

## Submission # 3.

# 'Leadership: Self Determination and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'

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## Leadership, Place and Self-Determination

Indigenous Australians are a proud people with histories and knowledge traditions that extend back tens of thousands of years. Having struggled under colonial institutions for the past two centuries, Indigenous people are more experienced and knowledgeable than others about the contemporary situation facing Indigenous peoples, and how to solve the complex challenges of today.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people hold senior governance and leadership positions in Australian universities. The profound impact of service contributions to the sector – in governance and management, educational and research endeavours - and to communities' self-determination, is disproportionate in relation to the small cohort size of this key group. Strategically and sustainably growing governance and leadership impact is essential to Australia's national ambitions. It will take 70 years to get to just 3.3% Indigenous workforce in the university sector at current rates of change, this rate of change needs to shift.

At the time of writing JCU is welcoming a new Chancellor, Professor Ngiare Brown, who will lead our University Council and University community through JCU's next stage of maturation and development in all our endeavours. It is without doubt that the Chancellor elect is arriving at JCU at a time where her deep experience with national level reform can guide the university and community, as we aspire to be world-leading in matters of significant importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the north.

At JCU, Professor Martin Nakata, Deputy Vice Chancellor Indigenous Education and Strategy, has led the University's Indigenous Education and Research Centre (IERC) since 2016. Professor Nakata's research projects, across his 40+ year career, provides an evidence base that not only informs the operations and activities at JCU but are a roadmap for supporting student success for Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students in place-sensitive ways across Australia. Professor Nakata was the first person from the Torres Strait to be awarded a PhD in Australia (alumni of JCU). Forty percent of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population live in JCU's catchment, and we have the second highest participation rate of Indigenous students in Australia.

This submission outlines the three key barriers we observe to the improved participation and successful completion of higher education qualifications by Indigenous people and makes recommendations relating to each.

We also recommend a **National Centre for Indigenous Best Practice in Higher Education**, equivalent to the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE)<sup>31</sup>, to provide national leadership on policy priorities, as well as support and coordinate systematic development of best practices in the sector to improve the access, participation and outcome levels of Indigenous students and staff.

### Barrier #1: Student capacity to learn

Family experience and educational data provide evidence of issues in the early years - registering educational gaps from Year 3, widening in Years 5 and 7, and by Year 10 only one-third of cohorts remain in schools. The very few remaining students, who complete Year 12, rarely have the requisite grades for their chosen area of study in the higher education sector. In Far North Queensland's regional areas, the few students that pass

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<sup>31</sup> NCSEHE at <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/about/>

through to university studies amount to about 0.26% of the total Indigenous student population in schools. This, of course, greatly reduces the numbers who will be able to participate in the anticipated shape of work environments that will arise out of renewables, digitization, automation, and Artificial Intelligence (see Jobs & Skills Summit, 2022<sup>32</sup>). The effects of cumulative factors relating to regionality, low SES, disability and having English as a second or third language have different outcomes across the student lifecycle and need to be considered in context<sup>33</sup>.

In submission #2 we set out the case for a **Schools and Community Outreach Capability Loading** (reflecting the Bradley Review recommendation of allocating 4% of the teaching grant to deliver outcomes for the *preparation and capacity of school students*, and not just to raise *aspirations* of students towards higher education studies).

In this submission we point to JCU's IERC researchers who have developed an approach to improving Indigenous learners' capacity to be more effective in math and science school curriculum areas, from Prep to Year 12. This work began with ARC-funded research (2012-15) and case studies (2010-15; 2016-2020) among undergraduates. Reforms initiated by the researchers on student support practices enabled the IERC to achieve impressive results in the undergraduate area, doubling the annual graduation rate over the 2016-2021 period (to 130 graduates/year) and reducing the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students at JCU to 5% by their final year.

In a more recent longitudinal ARC-funded study (2016-2023), Professor Nakata and the IERC team have developed ways to build the capacities of 4,000 Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners across 19 primary schools and one secondary school in a remote part of Queensland so they can do better in math and science curriculum. Early results from the trials in the original 16 primary schools show a 12.5% lift in math results in 2019 and 22% lift in math results in 2020. We hope to demonstrate through this longitudinal work that all students, when viewed and developed properly as capable learners, can engage effectively and be successful in their studies no matter where they live in Australia.

When the ARC grant for schools research concludes in 2023 there is a need to secure long-term funding. The **Schools and Community Outreach Capability Loading** JCU recommended in Submission #2 could support such initiatives. Without reliable funding JCU has been seeking funding support from philanthropic bodies to sustain this proven initiative.

### Barrier #2: Student support

Family experience and educational data also evidence the slow rate of Indigenous access, participation, and outcomes in the higher education sector today despite the motivation of the inaugural national policy (1989) to achieve equity and parity with other Australians 30+ years ago<sup>34</sup>. The introduction of the demand-driven system in 2012 provided an initial lift in enrolments, but Indigenous access and participation rates remain below population parity. The 2012 Behrendt Review of the progress of Indigenous priorities in the sector recommended more had to be done<sup>35</sup>. The reviewers called for a whole-of-university approach to make a more concerted effort to raise the rate of participation by Indigenous people but failed to provide universities a plan on how to progress students through to completion.

Indeed, and despite the recommendations of the many reviews of the higher education sector, there has been no significant progress with the progression and completion rates of Indigenous students, or the time

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<sup>32</sup> See Jobs & Skills Summit Outcomes at <http://treasury.gov.au>

<sup>33</sup> Tomaszewski, W, Kubler, M, Perales, F, Clague, D., Xiang, N, Johnstone, M, (2020), *Investigating the effects of cumulative factors of disadvantage* Institute for Social Science Research, UQ.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education-policy-1989>

<sup>35</sup> Behrendt, L., Larkin, S., Griew, R. & Kelly, P. (2012) *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Final Report*. Canberra: Department of Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research.  
<https://www.education.gov.au/heppp/resources/review-higher-education-access-and-outcomes-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people>

taken to complete degrees since 2005. Less than 30% of Indigenous students complete their degree programs after four years of study; 47% of Indigenous students complete after six years of study; and less than 50% of Indigenous students complete after nine years of study<sup>36</sup>.

If Indigenous school students are already behind others by Year 3, and if two-thirds drop out by Year 10, and if the one-third remaining to Year 12 exit without the right preparation for university, it is not really a great mystery as to why Indigenous students struggle to complete degree programs.

The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) administers the Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP), which provides base funding for the Indigenous support services in the higher education sector<sup>37</sup>. Funding guidelines initially restricted what services could be provided but later moved towards a mission-based compact in 2017 following persistent calls from Directors of Indigenous Support Centres to liberate the guidelines to address the specific needs of Indigenous students. As explained above, funds are now allocated on a competitive basis and formulated on institutional performance from year to year, as well as against the gains made by others in the sector.

The new arrangements allow funds to flow to where the need was most significant. For JCU, the second smallest university in the sector, this enabled focused work on student progression and completion agendas, with an almost doubling of the graduation rate in four years, and a ranking shift from 12<sup>th</sup> in the country for completions to 4<sup>th</sup>. The work on how to increase progression and completion rates has recently been published by Routledge<sup>38</sup> to assist the sector to advance the same progressive measures towards the same outcomes.

Replicating and expanding the JCU improvements to progress and completion is now only limited by the capped amount of the national budget that was set in 2017. The NIAA's budget for ISSP needs review to reflect current costs of supporting Indigenous students.

**A National Centre for Indigenous Best Practice in Higher Education** would also help provide national leadership on policy priorities, as well as support and coordinate a systematic development of best practices and progressive data sets in the sector. It would provide a tangible outcome from the Accord that is perfectly aligned to the agenda of Indigenous self-determination.

### Barrier #3: Student finance

Family experience and educational data provide compelling evidence that Indigenous people's participation is hampered by the cost of higher education studies. These are costs that Indigenous families can least afford and with no guarantee of a positive outcome.

There is also little to no confidence in pursuing education when, for many, it has been a negative experience from the earliest point in their schooling years, and when the effort is made later in life at the university level more than half fail to complete their degree programs. The cost of failed attempts in higher education, namely owed student fees, over the past 20 years is rarely considered but experienced daily by families as the added burden of debt to an already impoverished situation. When considered fully, these situations speak of an immoral act we have bestowed on families through the guise of equity. Equity costs Indigenous families.

While there is much to be said about the limits of old policies that drove Equality of opportunity agendas, UNICEF makes clear it will adopt policies premised on Equity: "Equity means that all children have an

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<sup>36</sup> See HEIMS data sets at <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/student-data>

<sup>37</sup> National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA). <https://www.niaa.gov.au/>

<sup>38</sup> See Nakata, M. & Nakata, V. (2022) *Supporting Indigenous students to succeed at university*. Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/Supporting-Indigenous-Students-to-Succeed-at-University-A-Resource-for-Nakata-Nakata/p/book/9781032353463>



opportunity to survive, develop, and reach their full potential without discrimination, bias, or favoritism”<sup>39</sup>. The shape of equity agendas in Australia can be influenced by international agencies like UNICEF but also other world agendas on educational priorities (e.g., Education for all, Millennium Development Goals), the privatization of education, evidence-based policies, and Human Rights framework<sup>40</sup>. Dr Linda Leach’s 2013 analysis of equity measures taken in Australia, New Zealand and England following the Global Financial Crisis, warns that austerity measures can also shape equity responses<sup>41</sup>. It is important for equity policies to extend beyond these common influences and shift towards measures that are reflective of the contemporary situation of Indigenous people and responsive to their current needs.

A commissioned study of student finances reported in 2006 that Indigenous students worried about their financial situation more than their non-Indigenous peers, were twice as likely to go without food and other necessities, worked on average three hours more in paid employment than others, regularly missed classes because of their work commitment, were more reliant on the student association’s subsidised services, had taken out loans at rates higher than other students, and many who were studying part time indicated they would much prefer to study full-time if their finances circumstances permitted it<sup>42</sup>. These student experiences are still the same today and are, in the main, managed by students taking a reduced study load or moving to part-time studies. Universities and Indigenous Centres constantly seek sponsorship from the philanthropy and industry sector to stem the move away from full-time studies.

The current allowance for supporting Indigenous students to study is provided by the government through the ABSTUDY program. The initial program (ABSEG) was introduced in the 1970s to address the inequalities in the school sector and was subsequently expanded to support entry to university study as ABSTUDY. Today, it is a shell of what started out as a positive discrimination measure to right the inequitable situation in the education sector. In addition, the level of allowances for financially supporting Indigenous students have not kept up with the cost of living. Navigating eligibility criteria and onerous reporting requirements of ABSTUDY is not something students see value in. For them, it is less of a hassle to be in paid employment. Dr Leach’s 2013 warning is evidence today. The equity agenda in Australia has surrendered to austerity measures, like New Zealand and England, which will inevitably lead “back to a future of selective, elite universities”<sup>43</sup>. JCU contends reinstating the ABSTUDY program to levels of funding that are commensurate with the cost of living and is made available to all Indigenous students regardless of their personal or family income, is required. It is then important to maintain a focus on equity measures based on attainment levels equivalent to other Australians in education, qualification, health, housing, and annual income before changing study entitlements. We propose the government considers these attainment levels as the minimum level of capacities Indigenous Australians need to progress their self-determination plans.

This submission addresses Questions No 10, 16, 11, 33, 29, 29, 30, 31.

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<sup>39</sup> Klees, S. & Qargha, O. (2014, p. 5) Equity in education: The case of UNICEF and the need for participative debate. 2014. *Prospects*, 44: 321-333. DOI: 10.1007/s11125-014-9295-0

<sup>40</sup> Klees, S. & Qargha, O. (2014, p. 322) Equity in education: The case of UNICEF and the need for participative debate. 2014. *Prospects*, 44: 321-333. DOI: 10.1007/s11125-014-9295-0

<sup>41</sup> Leach, L. Participation and equity in higher education: are we going back to the future?. 2013. *Oxford Review of Education*, 39(2), 267-286. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2013.791618>

<sup>42</sup> Australian University Student Finances 2006. Final report of a national survey of students in public universities. <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Australian-University-Student-Finances-2006.pdf> see pages 55-6.

<sup>43</sup> Leach, L. Participation and equity in higher education: are we going back to the future?. 2013. *Oxford Review of Education*, 39(2), 267-286. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2013.791618> p. 268.

Summary of ideas presented:

- That **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' participation** as leaders, academics and students within the higher education sector is required for, and **has a profound impact on, Indigenous self-determination plans.**
- That a **National National Centre for Indigenous Best Practice in Higher Education** could bring together national leadership on policy priorities, on the collection of data sets for improving practice, and aggregated in ways to support and coordinate systemic development of best practices.
- That the **student preparation and capability agenda be supported** in schools and should be at 4% of the teaching allocation. There is a developing evidence base for effective interventions, and schools and community outreach funding needs to focus on and fund this critical activity, rather than a narrow focus on aspiration raising (which has not increased enrolments).
- **That ISSP funding levels be reviewed** from its 2017 setting to reflect current costs and demand in order that Indigenous Student Support Services operating within universities can more effectively facilitate higher student completion rates.
- **That ABSTUDY be reinstated to its original intent**, and be universally available to Indigenous students to enable full time study.

## Submission # 4.

### ‘Powering Australian development: mobility that works’

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#### **Mobility – ‘where do you belong?’**

We deploy the concept of mobility in two ways – social mobility, and mobility related to patterns of movement/migration, to propose specific interventions that can address the underrepresentation of key groups in higher education.

Social mobility is the opportunity to improve socio-economic circumstances and security and occurs through education and a genuine equality of opportunity. Social mobility is highly related to the impact of place. For example:

- The geographical region JCU serves has 27% of its population in Quintile 1 (most disadvantaged) socio-economic status, compared to South-East Queensland where 15% of the population is in Quintile 1.
- The geographical region JCU serves has 15% of the population with a Bachelor degree, compared to South-East Queensland where it is 25% of the population.

Mobility related to patterns of movement/migration also impacts on individuals and regions in various ways. For Northern Australia, the opportunity for students to have high-quality, short-term, mobility experiences, such as a study exchange at an off-shore campus (for JCU, in Singapore), or an intensive specialist elective at the Australian National University, for example, enables international perspectives and networks to be established to the benefit of the local community.

JCU has developed high-quality international mobility opportunities through the New Colombo Plan program. 65% of JCU’s outbound international experiences are for internships/work-integrated learning (national average is 20%). Our participation rate for underrepresented groups is significantly higher than the national average. Indigenous student participation is 20%, (national average is 18%), and provides important strategic connections between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with Indigenous peoples from across the Asia-Pacific. JCU’s low SES participation in the New Colombo Plan is 27%, the national average is 18%. This is a remarkable achievement given we are financially unable to offer institutional scholarships to further support this mobility. High-quality, short-term mobility opportunities have the opposite effect to that experienced when young people leave the north to complete their education in a metro area, this leads them to more likely establish careers in metro areas rather than return home.

It is essential that the sector develops sophisticated concepts around student mobility that locates individualised notions of ‘student choice’ within broader structural contexts, that can:

- a) Take into account the better outcomes for students from underrepresented groups when they are supported to engage in education that is integrated with networks of family and community, and that are local in geographically-relevant ways,
- b) Understand the importance of ‘grow your own’ workforce development strategies in Northern Australia and other regions – to ensure that competition for student load is not leading to loss of talent and population dips in 25 – 34 year age bracket; and,
- c) Enables quality short-term mobility experiences, including international, through programs such as New Colombo Plan.

Within the tertiary sector, the mobility of students from regional areas to metro areas should certainly be possible, but not incentivised. Students who study in the regions, stay in the regions to work, and local

education is absolutely key to regional workforce development. Any system that incentivises competition from metro universities for students from regional areas works against the long-term interests of regional Australia and the country as a whole. Conversely, the mobility of students from metro areas to regional areas can be incentivised (primarily through supply of housing and living support to students) to the benefit of the regions and without harming metro areas.

Place-based approaches to education, such as a Regional Learning System approach outlined in Submission #1, enable coordination of stakeholders (schools, VET/TAFEs, University, Industry, Government) across lifetime learning trajectories, and supports the long-term interventions that are necessary if we are to ever address entrenched disadvantage and ensure accountability. This submission responds to questions about what Australia's attainment rates for higher education should be, the role of higher education in general learning capabilities across all ages, boosting demand for education, and the contribution that regional academics and regional students are uniquely able to make to regional places.

### Targets of educational attainment for Australia

JCU believes that if national educational targets are set, they should serve to focus attention on those places, and groups, at risk of not achieving the target. Long-term modelling to map trajectories for underrepresented groups across 12-year periods 2035, 2047, 2059, would support place-based agreement making at a Regional Learning System level.

Targets could be, for example,<sup>44</sup>:

1. 75% of students in Grade 12 academically ready to engage in post-school education by 2035.
2. 50% of people aged 25-34 years holding a Bachelor Degree or higher by 2035
3. 40% of people 25-34 years holding a VET qualification by 2035.

Consistent with the ideas presented across JCU's submissions, any targets set by the Government for University or VET participation need to be built on targets for schools, and support work with families. It is essential that schools and families are supported in their roles of preparing/enabling students to participate in tertiary education (either VET or university). Strengthening the whole pipeline is the only way to guarantee genuine success. Students, across Australia, are increasingly dropping out of ATAR subjects (in both public and non-government schools), this creates flow-on effects for universities. A Learning Systems Commission or similar could support a lifetime view of educational engagement for national policy development and provide the mechanism in which national targets are achieved in place-based ways through adopting a Regional Learning System approach.

### 'You belong here'

In Submission #2, JCU made the case for a universal service provision guarantee that would have the effect of supporting regional areas. We had previously highlighted in Submission #1 the market failure of a volume-based funding system that occurs when metro universities target student load from regional areas to build scale, and the disservice that creates for regional students, and for regional areas from which students are drawn, as well as the strain it puts on the capacity for anchor universities to provide quality opportunities.

At JCU, our engagement strategy for future students is based on the idea that 'there is a place for you at JCU'. Establishing belonging, and confidence, and simplifying university processes, are essential components of student success. It is important for us to create a sense of belonging and broad educational opportunities in regional Australia. Whilst JCU is a STEM-focused institution, and this is important for delivering on our mission to meet regional health and STEM workforce needs, the benefits which accrue from research and study in

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<sup>44</sup> 58% of school leavers who had finished Year 12 in 2021 were studying for a non-school qualification in 2022, with the majority enrolled in a bachelor degree [ABS](#); 34.6% men, and 26.7% of women aged 25-34 have a certificate, diploma or advanced diploma as their highest qualification 2022 [ABS](#)

the Humanities and Social Sciences are just as important to the future of the north.

JCU was central to one of the most important moments in Australia's history: when working at JCU as a gardener, Eddie Koiki Mabo<sup>45</sup> had conversations with historians Professors Henry Reynolds and Noel Loos and was an active user of the JCU library. These circumstances provided the fertile ground for the Mabo land rights case in the High Court and the trajectory of Indigenous self-determination. The presence of a university in the region directly led to this landmark event.

Self-evidently, the contributions of regional Australians to the social and political life of Australia are made in their regions. Academics working in regional areas know their students in ways that are often quite different to the ways in which academics working in metro locations know their students. This knowing is partly evidenced in the QILT results showing higher levels of student satisfaction around support received in the classroom in regional areas.<sup>46</sup> Academics have a deep understanding of what drives and motivates the students we serve. Often, the quest of regional students entering university, sometimes as the first person in their family, is to understand how their personal experience fits into other knowledge, the social system and world.

Not infrequently, our students may be taking pathways that our academics have taken themselves, as a first in family or mature-aged student. As smaller universities operating in smaller ecosystems there is a dynamism in teaching and research, where connections (including multidisciplinary) can be made that are simply not possible in a university where there are many more people congregated and siloed (having many sociologists instead of less than a handful). But while a smaller scale can provide dynamism, there are real limits to how thin academic teaching staff can be spread. It is not helpful for students to have their full major taught by the same academic, or for an academic to have little capacity to renew research agendas or lead important community engagement work. These issues have been an ongoing agenda for groups like the Humanities in the Regions<sup>47</sup> group, but structural, system-wide attention needs to be paid. Put simply, the sustainability of social and political capability building in the regions requires Australian commitment.

### Supporting Student Success

A key to student success is capability building prior to commencing university. Enabling and foundational programs (that provide fee-free opportunities to students) are critical parts of the system given cumulative educational disadvantage, particularly in regional areas. For example, when considering the following five factors – Low SES, Regional/Remote, Indigenous, Disability and Non-English Speaking Background - the probability of completing a Bachelor degree after commencing is 72% of students with no factors, 66% of students with 1 factor, 60% of students with 2, 48% of students with 3, and 36% of students with 4 factors<sup>48</sup>. These factors combine in different ways across the student life cycle – from pre-access, access and participation and post-graduation.

As outlined in Submission #2, HEPPP directed towards school outreach has traditionally focused on *aspiration raising*. Unfortunately, this focus has failed to deliver expected outcomes in regional areas. Instead, there is clear evidence that effective interventions to address *key capability* criteria of school students is more important. Raising capability and improving the preparedness of students for learning is of critical importance for the development of regional areas, and especially for the self-determination agenda of Indigenous peoples in Australia.

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<sup>45</sup> <https://libguides.jcu.edu.au/mabo-timeline/summary>

<sup>46</sup> See <https://overland.org.au/2023/02/the-promise-and-betrayal-of-arts-and-culture-in-regional-australia/>

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.achrc.net/member-initiatives/humanities-in-the-regions/>

<sup>48</sup> Tomaszewski, W., Kubler, M., Perales, F., Clague, D., Xiang, N., Johnstone, M. (2020) '[Investigating the effects of cumulative factors of disadvantage](#)' Institute for Social Science Research, UQ.

Funding student support services for under-represented groups is critical to ensuring success for students who are low SES, first in family, care-leavers/givers, who have arrived as refugees, or have a disability. Regional parts of Australia have higher proportions of low SES students, more first-in-family students, and higher rates of undiagnosed disability due in part to lower levels of access to health services. Intersectional and compounding disadvantage requires individualised support. Low SES students require approximately six times more support than medium and high SES students for access and completion of higher education.<sup>49</sup>

JCU's work shows that while support must be individualised, it can also be universal, and that for regionally based universities universal service provision may be only marginally more expensive than restricted service provision, and creates stronger communities and reduces regulatory burden.

JCU's Indigenous Education and Research Centre is a best practice model of universal, but individualised, support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students funded through the Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP), and provides an evidence-based case study for student success. The level of funding provided by the ISSP program is formulated on a university's performance from year to year as well as a measure set against the average growth across the sector in the corresponding year. On this competitive basis, JCU received on average \$6,014 per EFTSL in 2019; \$6,191 per EFTSL in 2020; and \$6,470 per EFTSL in 2021.

### The public and personal costs of not addressing educational disadvantage

Recently published research<sup>50</sup> by the e61 group examines youth disengagement in Australia, those groups aged 15 – 24 who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). They report that the average young person is disengaged for longer now than they were in the past (with young men twice as likely to be disengaged during COVID 19 than the Global Financial Crisis). Econometric modelling identifies the three risk factors are a) experiences of disengagement during adolescence, b) minority indicators and c) geographic location. Adolescent history includes periods of not being engaged in school, training or work, failing to complete high school, living separately from both parents, and lower family education.

Disengagement rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are over 8% higher than non-Indigenous populations, after controlling for measures of disadvantage. Health impairment and lower socio-economic status also increases risk of disengagement, and more research is needed on compounding disadvantage. e61 find that youth disengagement in regional areas is higher than metro areas, in some places up to 30- 50% of the total youth population. The study shows that regional differences in youth disengagement reflect geographic variation in underlying risk factors – like socio-economic status and education. These risk factors account for all the variation and focussing on managing risk factors in place-specific ways, such as improving the availability and quality of local education, is therefore critical.

The study showed the costs of ignoring disengagement across the population are significant: for affected individuals these are long-term scarring across 1) reduced human capital accumulation, 2) physical and mental health scarring, 3) social exclusion, 4) reduced earning potential. Socially, this is expressed as higher direct welfare costs and long-term productivity losses, with long-term productivity losses estimated by a UK study at one to 6 times larger than the direct cost of income support.

***The cost of capability building work in schools and the community, and the student success support services in universities that underpin educational engagement in regional areas, are dwarfed by the costs of not providing these interventions, and by the return on investment, public and private, of having people engaged in learning or working.***

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<sup>49</sup> Devlin, M., Zhang, C., Edwards, d., Withers, G., McMillan, J., Vernon, L., & Trinidad, S. (2023) The costs of and economies of scale in supporting students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds in Australian higher education, *Higher Education Research & Development*, 42:2, 290-305, DOI:10.1080/07294360.2022.2057450

<sup>50</sup> e61 Research Note No 4. [Disengaged: The costs and possible causes of youth disengagement in Australia.](#)

### The importance of Student Living Support

The majority of students now 'study around work', and this delays and extends the time taken to qualify. Lowering the independence age for living support from 22 years to 18 years would mean that fewer students have to take a gap year to meet the work criteria for independence.

JCU contends students should receive living support equivalent to the minimum wage whilst completing long term placements of between 1 – 6 months. With most students working to support themselves, long placements cause extreme financial hardship as students struggle to, or are unable to, maintain their usual employment, this in turn impact on degree completion times. Living support will enable students to take on full study-loads, decreasing the time necessary to complete studies. The costs of such provision should be provided by larger industry groups where this is possible, and through a stipend that is added to Youth Allowance, Austudy or ABSTUDY.

### Teaching quality and best practice in learning and teaching

A Learning Systems Commission, if established, could support the ability of Australian institutions to differentiate in line with their areas of particular world-leading expertise, including through achieving a designation as a 'specialist teaching institution' within particular undergraduate disciplinary areas. Such a designation could support specialisation and institutional diversity and could bring outreach funding for collaborative capacity building, or collaborative educational delivery, in the area of expertise with other institutions across Australia. This mechanism could support the kinds of innovations that have previously been seen through the Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT, 1992-96), the Committee for University Teaching and Staff Development (CUTSD, 1997-99), the Australian Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC, 2000-04), the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, renamed as the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC 2005-11), and the Office for Learning and Teaching (2012-2016).

Australia is without an Advance HE (UK), or Ako Aotearoa (New Zealand) to facilitate innovations in quality teaching. Whilst TEQSA as a regulator has taken some steps through Scholarship on Learning and Teaching (SOLT) this is not the same as quality enhancement, and we contend new mechanisms are needed.

This submission addresses Questions No 3, 10, 11, 14, 16, 28,29,30,31,32,33,43, 44.

Summary of ideas presented:

- That any **national educational targets should focus attention on regional areas and underrepresented cohorts** as these are most at risk of not achieving the target.
- That **social mobility through education is essential** to address the place-based disadvantage that is visible in different populations, particularly regional areas.
  - The costs of not addressing underlying factors of disengagement are far higher than the investment required to address them
  - The personal and productivity benefits of engagement far outweigh the costs.
- That **Humanities and Social Science capability of universities and populations are of crucial importance to the social and political futures of regional areas and Indigenous self-determination**, and structural, system-wide attention needs to be paid to sustainable place-based provision.
- That **high quality short-term mobility experiences for regional students** (international exchanges, intensive specialist block learning experiences) **are productive** for individual students and for the regions they are drawn from, **in contrast to the kinds of long-term mobility currently incentivised within the system** which sees students lost to metro areas for study (and subsequently lost to regional workforces upon graduation),
- That **student success is built upon capability building within schools** and community, as a necessary pipeline for post-school education and work.
- **That student support services within universities** should be paid on a per person basis, with universities **responsible for delivering outcomes** with reduced regulatory burden on delivery.
- That students receive **living support** equivalent to the minimum basic wage **while undertaking placements of between 1 – 6 months** to ensure timely completion of studies.
- **That teaching quality and best practice be supported** through a ‘specialist teaching institution’ designation available in different subject areas where an institution is world-leading, with outreaching and collaborative capacity building occurring in line with this designation.



## Submission # 5.

### 'Powering regional development: research and industry'

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Consistent with the themes developed across JCU's submissions, we contend that a proportionality principle needs to be applied to regional research capacity development. Consideration needs to be given to how sufficient scale of research capability can be built with, and for, our industry and business environments to support and grow employment in local communities.

In northern Queensland, the public sector provides most large-sized organisations. Small to medium sized enterprises predominate in the private sector, with important opportunities in emerging industries related to new clean energy and environmentally conscious futures (critical minerals, sustainable aquaculture, agtech, and technology-based services).

For regional universities, research and industry engagement is informed by place-based missions. JCU's research is inspired by our place: not just our environment, but our communities, our region and the greater global tropics. Our unique social and geographical location, in close proximity to the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics rainforests, and with intimate connection to rural, remote and Indigenous communities drives our focus on relevant, impactful research that enhances the communities and environments that we serve.

#### Research that matters

As a research-intensive university JCU contends that research done in the regions, and for those same regions, really matters. Development of stronger socio-economic outcomes is underpinned by high quality research, whether in the metro areas or the regions.

We agree with the Productivity Commission when they call for a change from an overly narrow focus on university research commercialisation to take proper account of other channels of knowledge transfer, such as consulting. For example, the industry-engaged, high-impact work, completed in JCU's TropWATER group and our Cyclone Testing Station are key enablers of industry in the region we serve, and have national and international impact.

- TropWATER<sup>51</sup> (the Centre for Tropical Water and Aquatic Ecosystem Research) amalgamates aquatic expertise from across the university, with over 150 research and supporting staff and over 100 post-graduate students providing solutions for government, communities and industry, with strong collaborations in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and the Torres Strait. It is co-located with CSIRO, and employs custom-built aquariums, water quality laboratories and environmental DNA services.
- The Cyclone Testing Station<sup>52</sup> was established in the mid-1970s through JCU and Monier Colourtile. This university and industry collaboration has led to more than four decades of work finding industrial solutions that minimise loss and suffering through applied research, consulting to industry and government and providing community education focussed on the severe weather effects to the built environment.

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<sup>51</sup> <https://www.tropwater.com/>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.jcu.edu.au/cyclone-testing-station>

## Place-based research funding and industry engagement

JCU suggests that place-based research funding and research training streams can respond to the specific industry and community needs of regional Australia and provides a balance against centralising Category 1 research funding into a very small number of universities.

A national view of research priorities that takes into account established expertise and its intersection with the place-based needs of each university could be used to direct funding and build relevant critical mass that maximises local impact. For example, JCU has established expertise in tropical health and medicine for obvious reasons. If there is an established national need for this then it should make sense for funding routes linked to the place-based compact discussions to provide direct support to underpin capacity outside of competitive research applications.

We contend that research which focuses on regional development and growth is of particular importance in Australia, and we recommend that an audit of capability is conducted to ascertain how this work can be supported. In the UK there is the Centre for Geographic Economic Research<sup>53</sup>, in Western Australia there is the Centre for Regional Development<sup>54</sup>, and Queensland has the Rural Economies Centre of Excellence<sup>55</sup>.

## Ad hoc funding cycles

For smaller and regional universities there is simply less latent capability that can be deployed to respond to short-notice, ad-hoc, government research funding calls. Whilst smaller institutions can be flexible and agile and can have particularly strong abilities to bring together multi-disciplinary teams, there needs to be sufficient lead times and timeframes established if we are to be given a fair chance at establishing our case.

Requirements for industry partners to co-fund grants can also present particular issues in the regions, especially when major government or public sector industry partners are precluded. Once again, a place-based whole system case could be made through the compact negotiations for how and what research should be funded that links to the socio-economic needs of the regions we serve.

## Indigenous-led research

JCU contends that serious sector-wide attention needs to be focussed on building the overall research capability of Indigenous peoples in order to meet national goals of self-determination. The pipeline for research capability is directly related to the capability building required in schools and the student support services provided within universities (as outlined in Submission #3).

We note that Indigenous early-career researchers are expected to complete far more additional management responsibilities and service obligations than their non-Indigenous peers. Early career researchers need additional support to develop their research track records and careers. A new **Indigenous Researchers Development Scheme** should be introduced, with smaller grants that build beginning success for early-career researchers and, in the longer period, a 'track record' to apply for larger, more competitive grants programs. We are keen to see a specific DECRA program for Indigenous researchers introduced by the ARC for this early development of research careers.

Overall, the ARC should set a target of 5% of total research funding going to Indigenous researchers, and increase from the current rate of approximately 3.3% in 2022, with NHMRC committed 5% of the Medical

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<sup>53</sup> <https://www.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/cger/localgrowth/>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.uwa.edu.au/schools/Research/Centre-for-Regional-Development>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.ruraleconomies.org.au/>

Research Endowment Account going towards research to improve the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people, which they exceeded.)

### Research Training

Current PhD stipends are too low and in some cases below the poverty line. Universities with more resources are offering higher stipends which is driving unfair competition across the sector. The APA rate for all Higher Degree Research students should be set at the minimum wage – this would assist students to focus full time on their studies and, in turn, support higher completion rates critical if we are to increase the number of Indigenous researchers in the country.

### Measuring impact and balancing funding streams

The European-based Coalition for Advancing Research assessment<sup>56</sup> has facilitated an agreement making process with more than 350 organisations from over 40 countries to address inefficiencies and failures in research assessment. The Agreement provides useful context for Australia in working through how research should be assessed and valued. The Agreement notes that inappropriate uses of journal and publication-based metrics is exacerbating pressure on research systems due to the limited amounts of funding compared to the pipelines of talented researchers competing for funds. The agreement recommends reform towards qualitative assessments. Crucially, they suggest that sustainable levels of funding, and a balance between competitive and non-competitive funding streams are critical to reform.

This submission addresses Questions No 23, 24, 25, 26.

#### Summary of ideas presented:

- That **research done in the regions matters**, and that impact assessment factors other than research commercialisation and journal metrics are required to power regional development and enable place-based, industry engaged, research decisions and funding (including a place-based research funding stream).
- That **regional areas are particularly disadvantaged by ad-hoc funding cycles** with short timeframes, and by requirements for industry co-funding that excludes government as an industry partner.
- That **Indigenous-led research requires a sector-wide focus**, and is critical to self-determination, and there should be Indigenous specific research programs and research targets.
- That there should be **increased living support for students** undertaking research training, equivalent to the minimum wage.

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<sup>56</sup> <https://coara.eu/>