



Office of the Mayor

Cr Peter Flannery

T (07) 3480 6250

E mayor@moretonbay.qld.gov.au



3 April 2023

Professor Mary O’Kane
Chair
Australian Universities Accord Panel

Via - online submission

Dear Professor O’Kane

HIGHER EDUCATION REVIEW / AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES ACCORD

I am writing in support of the submission by the University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC) in response to the Australian Universities Accord Discussion Paper.

Until a few years ago, no other region in Australia with similar proximity to a major city was as poorly serviced by universities as the Moreton Bay region, Australia’s third largest local government area with a population of 500,000 residents. As a result, our region had tertiary participation levels well below the Queensland and Australian averages. In response, Council secured The Mill site at Petrie in August 2015 and in March 2020, the UniSC Moreton Bay campus opened, the first greenfield campus to be built in Australia in 20 years.

UniSC Moreton Bay has been a success story and has made major inroads into lifting tertiary participation levels in our region. Enrolment levels to date have exceeded all expectations. In 2023, UniSC Moreton Bay is delivering over 80 degrees to more than 4,000 students. Enrolments are expected to grow to 10,000 students by 2030. In 2023, 40% of students are first in their family to study at university, 72% of students are from our region and 4% identify as Indigenous.

UniSC has a second campus in the Moreton Bay region at Caboolture, which is co-located with TAFE Queensland. This campus serves a very particular need in a part of the Moreton Bay region with even lower higher education participation rates and low socio-economic status. It also demonstrates the benefits of co-located training and education facilities for local communities, including streamlined articulation pathways between the two sectors, an objective of the Higher Education Review.

However, despite Moreton Bay’s tertiary participation rate lifting from 9.3% in 2011 to 11.4% in 2021, it remains below average (14.2% for Queensland and 15.4% for Australia in 2021). Much work remains to be done to ensure our residents have the skills to take advantage of the jobs of the future. It is vital therefore that, through the Australian Universities Accord, regional and peri-urban universities like UniSC are supported with **long-term, flexible, sustainable and transparent base level funding models** so they can allocate their budgets according to the needs of their regions and better manage industry peaks and troughs. Such a model could include:

Customer Service Contacts

PO Box 159 Caboolture QLD 4510 | T (07) 3205 0555

E mbrc@moretonbay.qld.gov.au | W www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au

- Better recognising the unique operating costs and funding needs of regional and peri-urban universities, e.g. due to student types resulting in higher cost of delivery and student support programs, diseconomies of scale leading to greater reliance on revenue from Commonwealth Supported Places (i.e. less income from international students, research, philanthropy and investments). Moreton Bay is a case study of a region with a population of 500,000 spread across over 2,000km² with very diverse needs and complications relative to the neighbouring capital city;
- Reviewing measures of success tied to performance funding, with a stronger focus on teaching quality, student satisfaction, graduate outcomes, employer satisfaction and nuanced for regional and peri-urban universities (e.g. allow for longer study durations and higher attrition rates due to student types/choices);
- Reviewing the use of ABS definitions of 'regional' when deciding eligibility for education, research and infrastructure funding programs i.e. eligibility based on program objectives (e.g. lifting higher education participation rates in a particular region, not the physical location of a campus). The current approach is particularly punitive for UniSC's Moreton Bay and Caboolture campuses, which are not considered 'regional' for many higher education and infrastructure funding programs, despite Moreton Bay clearly mirroring many of the challenges of more regional communities. These include lower higher education participation rates and socio-economic statistics;
- Re-introducing a dedicated higher education infrastructure grant program, with a quota for regional and peri-urban universities and scope to include digital asset investment (e.g. cyber security); and
- Deploying research funding to regional and peri-urban universities in a way that plays to their strengths, with additional support for industry partnerships and commercialisation with SMEs given their prominence in regions such as Moreton Bay. We have a plan for our economy towards 2041 and we need UniSC as a strong partner to achieve our goals of achieving a \$40 billion economy and creating 100,000 new jobs.

Reinforcing the critical role that regional and peri-urban universities play and the need to maintain our region's access to comprehensive university status across teaching and research is another priority for the Accord. Universities are great economic enablers. UniSC Moreton Bay has contributed to increasing the profile and business reputation of the region and increasing the innovation opportunities in the region. Most importantly, the productivity benefit to the local economy of the 873 local students who studied at UniSC and the first in their family to go to university is \$42.3 million (in 2022). By 2031, it is estimated that 5,324 students would be first in the family to go to university and would earn tertiary degrees, creating a local workforce productivity benefit of \$258.2 million.

Another key priority for the Accord should be to **develop innovative solutions to increase higher education participation and completion rates amongst under-represented groups/regions**. This is in line with a resolution carried by Queensland councils at the 2022 LGAQ Annual Conference, which calls on the Federal Government to increase funding for each Commonwealth Supported Place in areas where tertiary participation is below the national average (Resolution 76).

I wish you success in your ongoing work reviewing Australia's higher education system to deliver the Australian Universities Accord and urge you to pay particular attention to the needs of areas with low university participation rates.

Yours sincerely



PETER FLANNERY
Mayor

Our ref: 66644783

cc: Professor Helen Bartlett - Vice-Chancellor & President, UniSC