

Prof. Mary O’Kane  
Chair, Australian Universities Accord  
Higher Education Division  
Australian Government Department of Education

April 11, 2023

Dear Prof. O’Kane,

**Re: Response to the Accord discussion paper**

Thank you for the invitation to provide feedback on the Universities Accord discussion paper.

Engagement Australia champions the unique role universities have within society to address contemporary domestic and global challenges through teaching, learning, research and partnerships with community, industry and government. Engagement Australia is the peak body for engaged universities in Australia, with eighteen member universities spanning all states and affiliations.

Engagement Australia’s responses to the Discussion Paper have been produced in consultation with representation from our member universities through a workshop held online and in person at Bond University on March 7, 2023. Our responses are also guided by the intellectual framework that underpins our work, the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification.

**Q1. How should the Accord be structured and focused to meet the challenges facing Australia’s higher education system?**

A new economy is emerging, it can be argued, that will supersede the ‘free market neoliberalism’ and globalisation which predominated the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> and first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Along with technological change, new knowledge and new knowledge workers will be needed for the continuous change and uncertainty likely to characterise the world in 2030- 2040. Lifelong learning is virtually an unchallengeable proposition, but its meaning is contested and in fact it has a plurality of meanings. The Australian Accord will need to adopt definitions and policies which clarify the meanings of lifelong learning such that:

- false dichotomies imported into educational debate are minimised such as liberal versus vocational education, economic growth versus social concern and equity
- education must declare its social values and have these judged objectively on measurable outcomes
- educational reform which asserts the value of lifelong learning is latently radical and potentially transformative of existing and established relationships
- there should be a framework of understanding and analysis for learning which can focus in turn on the individual, the workplace, the social and community organisation and the wider society, reflecting the

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different and sometimes competing ideas, interests and identities of the different groups which comprise our society

- lifelong learning needs to be seen alongside other related concepts such as learning cities, learning societies, cultural and creative hubs, regional learning clusters and community learning.

A fundamental re-thinking of some of the characteristics of universities is implied as new circumstances and demands on education emerge with changing demography and changes in the nature of work. New pedagogies and new delivery systems are emerging continuously and new curriculums and frameworks for recognising learning and experience are needed in response. A range of concerns includes the following:

- ensuring modern universities manage the transition from elite systems to near universal higher or tertiary education so that the whole society gains benefits
- redefining educational institutions as part of a diverse and comprehensive learning society where everybody learns
- widening access and participation as a normative expectation of all state funded post-school education
- recognising and exploiting informal learning and lived experience within the pathways of tertiary education
- combatting and over-coming social exclusion in all its forms
- ensuring more democratic management and control by stake-holders and students so that learning is located also within the orbit of citizenship, equity and social cohesion.

Beyond producing graduates and research, the purpose of the modern Australian university needs to be more explicitly connected to *civic outcomes* that advance Australian society and this should be intrinsically tied to the engaged teaching, research, and outreach functions of the university.

Engaged scholarship (in teaching, research, and outreach) should be a core part of the Accord. Beyond 'motherhood statements', engaged approaches need to be built into educational standards, directives, funding and incentive structures. This will ensure that the 'product' of higher education remains relevant to the challenges facing Australia in the next 30 years.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. That universities are federally established and move beyond state-based regulation. With this could be common, continent wide registration for Australian professions. With this registration, there could be clearly explicated requirements for the development of positive and impactful citizens, who have the skills needed to address the environmental and social challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, both within and beyond their professions.
2. Measures of success and metrics collected by government should be focussed on impact and engagement *with* community (community groups/organisations, industry, NGOs, governments) as opposed to a narrower focus on graduate outcomes and research rankings. An appropriately incentivised university will be more impactful on the broader society.

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## The Carnegie Community Engagement Classification: Our intellectual framework of engagement

Engagement Australia, through its delivery of the [Carnegie Community Engagement Classification](#) in Australia, offers the sector the mechanism through which engaged contribution to public good that is transformational and mutually beneficial can be evidenced, and through which institutional accountability can be achieved. Through the Carnegie Network, Engagement Australia provides university members with capability building resources and opportunities to improve their institution's engaged research and teaching and practice.

In its essence, the Carnegie classification defines community engagement as collaboration between universities and their larger communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources. These reciprocal partnerships (e.g., with community organisations, NGO, industry, and government), should achieve mutually beneficial outcomes that,

- Address critical societal issues (i.e., 'transform' society)
- Contribute to the public good
- Prepare educated, engaged citizens
- Strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility (beyond a narrower professional training)
- Enhance curriculum, teaching, and learning
- Enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity

It is through harnessing such reciprocal partnerships, the Carnegie Classification posits, that universities can take up their intended role. With a focus on contributing to public good, the sector can extend far beyond vocational training to become 'engines' for individual and social transformation.

The development of graduates, the professional workforce Australia needs, and high-quality research, can therefore be shaped to simultaneously address contemporary issues in society. By working in partnership, disciplinary knowledge can be combined with lived, contextual and professional expertise to solve the challenges that we face today. Educating and acting in this way, also leads to the development of the type of learning mindset that can take us into the future.

To enact this, institutional purpose, structures, processes, and the outcomes of our teaching and research, require alignment. The Carnegie Classification puts into place the mechanism by which institutions can follow a self-assessment process that is externally verified and results in ongoing growth and improvement.

The implementation of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification pilot in Australia demonstrates the value of this sector driven approach. The initiative brought together ten higher education institutions as founding partners and an additional eight institutions as observers. The implementation of the pilot resulted in:

- Identification of sector level gaps, which now offer opportunities for collaborative systems change and improvement. For example, early conversations are taking place around the development of mechanisms for demonstrating Indigenous engagement

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- Institutional level improvements. There have been cited examples of enhanced evaluation approaches adopted by institutions.
- Capability building of our human resources in order to strengthen our capacity to act. The Carnegie Community Engagement Network offers regular training to member institutions and their community partners.

These pilot results demonstrate that the provision of reward and recognition that works hand in hand with accountability measures can result in the systems change that the Government seeks to achieve.

#### **Q14. How should placement arrangements and work-integrated learning in higher education change in the decades ahead?**

Learning is no longer associated exclusively with classroom traditions and this trend is likely to grow. A learner-centred motivational emphasis is likely to be encouraged by the new technologies and even by the growth of community-based learning and co-operative enterprises focussed on local sustainability.

Workplace pedagogic practice will need to be developed for both advanced learners who are upskilling in response to new technologies and for enhanced access for the unemployed, the self-employed and those cut off from the digital revolution by geography, culture or forms of historic discrimination and exclusion.

Public policy often only recognises educational activity in its institutional contexts whilst simultaneously ignoring the whole world of learning beyond the boundaries of the school, college or university. Yet much learning takes place beyond the boundary and needs recognition and support as it helps build viable communities and identities. The capacity of a university to create strategic alliances with such extra-mural and outside-of-the-university associations should be enhanced and rewarded. A lifelong learning university should take an active part in its community and a diverse system should encourage more variety to exploit different niches in an evolving universal system.

School/college tertiary partnerships need to be re-imagined as near universal tertiary education becomes the norm. A near-universal 'open system' is required which can re-structure the interface between school and university and this is a leading policy issue which demands our attention as the contexts for 2030 appear on the horizon.

Engagement Australia provides a network for universities to advance such partnerships. The adoption of the ground-breaking Carnegie Community Engagement Classification system (could be used as a benchmark for engaged universities nationally, unlocking through engaged teaching, research, and outreach for the Australian HE sector.

This shift in policy and practice would enable an increased focus on the education of citizens with a civic-mindedness and accompanying set of capacities as opposed to the mere production of workers and consumers. Civic-minded and broadly capable graduates can transform society in a manner consistent with the transformational shift the Accord has been designed to promote. In addition to this, the third sector is an important aspect of the Australian economy, employing 11% of jobs in Australia and contributing of

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AUD\$129 billion to the economy. The collective reliance on the not-for-profit sector has been highlighted by recent crisis events. There is a need to include consideration of the future sector-skills needed to ensure the longevity of this sector.

Community engaged teaching and co-created curricula are robust mechanisms by which universities can strengthen teaching and learning outcome through the production of diversely informed and enriched educational content.

Importantly, community engaged teaching and learning offerings are reciprocal in nature. The enhanced teaching and learning outcomes are coupled with direct and immediate outcomes for community and contribution to public good. This benefit is often hidden as a result of lack of measurements in place. The valuing of this form of teaching through investment and tracking can result in real benefits in terms of student outcomes and social good. Community engaged learning ensures that students understand their social and civic responsibilities as an important element of their career development and will result in both a meaningful university experience and outcomes for our community.

### Recommendations

3. Recognition that the skills needed by our students not only include applied job skills, but skills that can help address the social and environmental challenges of the 21st century. Work integrated learning in Australian higher education must explicitly include community engaged teaching and learning, where students work with third sector or community organisations as part of the learning experience.
4. Learning achievements made more flexible and usable through the use of transcripts and credit-bearing awards so that terminal degrees are no longer the only significant recognition of knowledge acquired and used.

### **Q23. How should an Accord help Australia increase collaboration between industry, government, and universities to solve big challenges?**

The importance of partnerships between community, industry and government, and universities has long been recognised. The ARC Engagement and Impact assessment and the introduction of NPILF demonstrate the understanding that evaluation and investment can be used as levers to promote growth.

Community is often left out in the language of partnerships and engagement. This is reflected in the question being posed in this paper – where community is omitted from the reference to collaboration with industry and government. NPILF provides another example. The terms of reference there referred to ‘industry partnerships’. It was not until later when the definition of ‘industry’ was re-written to include ‘community’ and ‘Government’. Irrespective of the adjustment, community has remained hidden through this use of language, with the unintended consequence being that investments in community engagement remain marginalised.

There is ample evidence that solving big challenges requires diversity of thinking and input – including the need to involve contextual knowledge and insights. The rise of asset-based and co-designed approaches to

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solving social challenges speak to this. Accordingly, we recommend ensuring that ‘community’ is included in the language of collaboration in order to act as the initial foundation upon which collaboration can be built and encouraged to grow.

Collaboration requires distinct capabilities. We often focus on investing in collaboration and then measuring the end results, without focusing on the frameworks that are needed in order to progress the work. The Carnegie Community Engagement Network demonstrates the value of investing in this space. The pilot initiative established a community of practice and put in place learning opportunities for member institutions and their community partners. The evaluation of the pilot activities suggest that students, professional staff, academics and community partners alike agree that the capability building offerings have increased understanding of engagement concepts and practices, and have supported them to build the confidence and willingness to apply these to their practice. Accordingly, we recommend that specific investment is made to build engagement capability in support of enhanced collaboration for solving complex challenges.

Our final point is in relation to making financial investment in community engagement explicit. This is argued for across other sections of this document. Here, we would like to draw attention to the fact that collaboration requires resourcing. From the university side, this is often integrated into existing functions – albeit in a diminished way, as argued elsewhere. This cost is often not possible for community to carry, with the unintended consequence of this being that their voice and knowledge is absent from the collective responses to complex challenges.

**Recommendations:**

5. Ensuring that ‘community’ is included in the language of collaboration in order to act as the initial foundation upon which collaboration can be built and encouraged to grow.
6. Specific investment is made to build engagement capability in support of enhanced collaboration for solving complex challenges.

**Q34. How should the contribution of higher education providers to community engagement be encouraged and promoted?**

Primarily, we suggest the adoption of the [Carnegie Community Engagement Classification system](#) as a benchmark for engaged universities nationally. Additional federal university funding could be ‘unlocked’ through demonstrating planning for engaged teaching, research, and practice and ongoing special funding can be provided as a function of demonstrating impact over time. The Carnegie Community Engagement couples the Classification with a Network that builds capability and rewards engaged practice. This three-pronged approach supports encouragement and promotion of community engagement.

There should be an increased focus on the education of citizens with a civic-mindedness and accompanying set of capacities as opposed to the mere production of workers and consumers. Civic-minded and broadly capable graduates can transform society in a manner consistent with the transformational shift the Accord has been designed to promote.

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**Recommendations:**

7. The adoption of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification system as a benchmark for community engaged universities nationally (*see also 'Third Stream' Funding Recommendation 12*).
8. The development of incentive structures that encourage universities, faculties, and academics to prioritise engaged approaches to teaching, learning, and practice that both enrich scholarship and also address contemporary societal issues and further the public good. As a condition of funding and/or the receiving of incentives, both the engaged approach, and the impact and outcomes should be evidenced (*see also 'Third Stream' Funding Recommendation 12*).
9. Support of wide-scale professional development to enable best-practice engaged approaches in teaching, research, and practice functions of Australian universities (*see also 'Third Stream' Funding Recommendation 12*).

**Q35. Where providers make a distinctive contribution to national objectives through community, location-based, or specialised economic development, how should this contribution be identified and invested in?**

Universities are often anchor institutions in their communities. Future funding models should encourage and depend on universities demonstrating wider collaboration with Australian industry and society. The encouragement of funding for place-based compacts that enable universities to tackle local issues with community should be established at policy level.

**Recommendations:**

10. Exploration of funding for place-based compacts between universities and the communities they serve. This could be a component of the 'third stream' funding recommended by this submission (*see also 'Third Stream' Funding Recommendation 12*).
11. Requirements for universities to plan for and action infrastructure that supports community and industry partnerships (e.g. knowledge transfer hubs, industry PhDs, WIL and community engagement placements at scale).

**Q36. What regulation and governance reforms would enable the higher education sector to better meet contemporary demands?**

The mission or function of higher education, how it is defined, expressed, and enabled changes over time and place. In Australia the origins of universities were seen as largely instrumental, that foundation continues to mould current narratives. Nevertheless, in Australia – and across the globe – the function of the university has expanded with a much more explicit push on demonstration of impact to society – beyond teaching and learning and research. Since the late 90s we have witnessed the emergence of entrepreneurial universities and more recently, with the myriad of social issues, uncertainties and risks that surround us, many of which can be seen as wicked problems, there is a recognition for universities to deviate from the pursuit of income generation and economic development alone. We are recognising the need for community engagement.

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This is reflected in the Acts of several universities which require them to engage with communities. This function has been largely placed on regional universities, with few exceptions, such as Western Sydney University and LaTrobe University. The argument detailed in this submission points to the need of the function of universities to include the strategic contribution to the cultural, social and economic transformation of the communities that they serve. The constraints placed on the funding of universities and the largely silent stance on the value of community engagement within the regulatory space has resulted in the work of community engagement being done without adequate funding, recognition or quality assurance. The position of this submission argues for not only the need of third-stream funding but also the inclusion of community engagement within the regulatory space.

Grounded in the core characteristics of the role of the University, the HESF provides a definitive set of requirements for higher education providers. Its framework provides clear guidelines for the internal monitoring of the quality of provider's activities. The current domains of the framework point to engagement without clear threshold requirements on its employment of community engagement within teaching and learning, research and broadly across the university. The work is not valued or quality assured in the same manner as the other two pillars that make up the function of the university. Domain 6: Governance and Accountability is silent on this matter. This submission recommends the inclusion of community engagement within the Academic governance sphere.

Further, while the Australian Research Council (ARC) and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) appear to value community engagement, previously measured by the Engagement and Impact Assessment for the ARC and recently reviewed by the NHMRC (2022), there is no clear funding initiative that platforms its work. An international example in this space is the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) where funding is dependent on the inclusion of community engagement core.

Internationally, the funding of the Civic University Network and the Land Grant Universities and the example of the NIEHS in the United States provide a number of sound case studies on the transformative effect of community engagement that is enabled through a clear narrative of its worth through regulatory frameworks and funding. These national systems are not without their problems, their presence has nevertheless contributed to examples of significant impact across the two geographical spaces.

Engaged scholarship is valuable public purpose activity, contributing enormously to the building of civic and democratic capability, and delivering research and teaching that is responsive to the immediate needs of communities both local and global.

The lack of specific government support for community and civic engagement, has led to the sector going it alone. Across institutions, the sector has partnered to evidence university social impact through frameworks such as the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, developing our own national, data-driven overview of the public benefit of the higher education sector in relation to community engagement. This is work that should be supported through the Universities Accord.

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**Recommendations:**

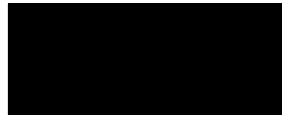
12. The creation of 'Third Stream' funding for Australian universities to support engagement. This funding would be managed through a centralised, independent and autonomous body. Within this 'third stream' funding could exist to support:
  - a. The adoption of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification system as a benchmark for community engaged universities nationally
  - b. Development of incentive structures that encourage universities, faculties, and academics to prioritise engaged approaches to teaching, learning, and practice that both enrich scholarship and also address contemporary societal issues and further the public good
  - c. Wide-scale professional development to enable best-practice engaged approaches in teaching, research, and practice functions of Australian universities
  - d. Place-based compacts between universities and the communities they serve
  - e. Collaborative funding designed for universities to come together to solve relevant national/state based or local based generational issues
  - f. Federal encouragement for universities to further develop philanthropic relationships with 'dollar-for-dollar' matching of initiatives that demonstrate engaged processes and the potential for substantial impact
  - g. The development of targeted federal and state funding streams for engaged activities that support both national and state-based agendas
  - h. Shared and realistic national frameworks for industry, community, and universities to deal with risk, health, legal, and partnership considerations that can support and enable meaningful partnerships
  - i. accountability mechanisms that require the demonstration of both engaged consultation and practices in identifying collaborations with industry and community, and the demonstration of impact
13. Revision of the Higher Education Threshold Standards to ensure explicit and detailed mention of the requirement for universities to be demonstrating civic outcomes that are tied to community, industry, and national objectives.
14. Requirements for universities to demonstrate individual and community diversity in their governance arrangements.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Universities Accord discussion paper. This is a unique opportunity for the sector and we look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely,



Prof. Jim Nyland  
Chair



Prof. Verity Firth  
Deputy Chair

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