



Department of
Education

Shaping the future

Submission in response to the Australian Universities Accord Discussion Paper

Government of Western Australia

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Executive summary

The Western Australian Government welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Australian Universities Accord discussion paper.

A strong, high quality university sector is crucial for the State to achieve its ongoing social and economic development aspirations and to meet current and future skilled workforce needs, including for essential services such as health and school education, and emerging high technology areas necessary to support the diversification of our economy.

The Western Australian Government welcomes the Accord and its focus on the core themes of the discussion paper. The higher education sector is experiencing challenges across these areas and a concerted, collaborative and cohesive effort to address them is required.

It is also important that the Accord reflects a need for flexibility within the higher education sector across the country, to accommodate and adapt to different jurisdictional and regional contexts, local industry priorities, changing circumstances over time, and supporting the economic participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women, people with disability, regional Australians and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

The Accord has the potential to build upon, complement and support Western Australia's strategic use of the publicly funded vocational education and training (VET) system to drive skills reform and workforce supply, strengthen quality and deepen industry engagement and training alignment to industry needs. Strategic linkages already exist between some Western Australian VET providers, universities, industries and public service agencies, and these have been instrumental for key workforce development initiatives and strategies in the state.

The Western Australian Government looks forward to engaging further as the Australian Universities Accord progresses, given the significant role jurisdictions have in funding and overseeing school education and VET, and the need for effective linkages between school education, VET and higher education.

In February 2023, the Western Australian Government appointed an expert panel to undertake an independent review of the State's four public universities to explore how structural change could deliver improved performance and financial sustainability of Western Australia's public university sector.¹ The review will consider what models of structural change can deliver improvements in meeting current and future skills needs, increasing enrolments, attracting and retaining high calibre academic staff, and increasing the State's share of competitive research funding and commercialisation of research. The review will be completed in the second half of 2023.

Western Australia's context

There are five Western Australian-based universities, of which four are public universities (Curtin University, Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University, and The University of Western Australia), and one is a private Catholic university (University of Notre Dame Australia).

¹ Government of Western Australia (2023). *Media Statements - Independent review to assess Western Australia's university sector*. [online] [www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au](https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2023/02/Independent-review-to-assess-Western-Australias-university-sector.aspx). Available at: <https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2023/02/Independent-review-to-assess-Western-Australias-university-sector.aspx>.

All five universities have their main campuses in the Perth metropolitan area, with four also having campuses in regional Western Australia:

- Curtin University: Kalgoorlie
- Edith Cowan University: Bunbury
- University of Western Australia: Albany
- University of Notre Dame: Broome.

Some of the universities also have partner institutes and/or learning hubs.

Three Western Australian universities also have overseas campuses:

- Curtin University: Malaysia, Singapore, Dubai and Mauritius
- Murdoch University: Singapore and Dubai
- Edith Cowan University: Sri Lanka.

Universities and university colleges based outside of Western Australia occasionally establish campuses in the State. There are three (soon to be five) regional university centres that have facilities and staff to support on-line learning from universities throughout Australia:

- Great Southern Universities Centre (Albany)
- Geraldton Universities Centre
- Pilbara Universities Centre (Karratha and Port Hedland)
- Lumen Wheatbelt Regional University Centre – commencing 2022-23 (Narrogin, Merredin, Wongan Hills and York)
- Kimberley Universities Centre – commencing 2022-23 (Broome).

The higher education sector plays an important role in the Western Australian economy, with a report by ACIL Allen in 2021 estimating that in 2019, the State's international students contributed \$2.1 billion to Gross State Product "and supported almost 12,000 direct and indirect FTE jobs across Western Australia".²

There were 143,015 student enrolments in Western Australian universities in 2021, with a combined full year student load of 98,654 EFTSL (Equivalent Full-time Student Load).³

As a proportion of its population, Western Australia has the second lowest rate of domestic enrolments in higher education (3.79%), and one of the lowest shares of international students at 7.6%, well below the State's share of the country's total population (10.7%).⁴

Increasing international student numbers is a priority for the Western Australian Government. The Western Australian Government provided \$41.2 million to the international education sector in the 2022-23 State Budget.⁵ The funding package was aimed at building a pipeline of future onshore international education students, re-engagement of the international education agent network and providing financial support for sector recovery. Western Australian universities also receive funding from student fees (including international students), investments, philanthropy, commercialisation and other income streams.

² ACIL Allen (2021). *Economic Contribution of International Education in Western Australia*. [online] Available at: <https://www.studyperth.com.au/media/zclhfxtl/economic-contribution-of-international-education-in-wa-2021-web.pdf>.

³ Australian Government Department of Education (2022) *Selected Higher Education Statistics- 2021 Student data* Available at: <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/student-data/selected-higher-education-statistics-2021-student-data> (Accessed: 25 April 2023).

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022). *National, state and territory population, December 2019 | Australian Bureau of Statistics*. [online] www.abs.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/latest-release>

⁵ Western Australian Government (2022). *Media Statements - Major package to drive growth of international education sector*. [online] www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2022/05/Major-package-to-drive-growth-of-international-education-sector.aspx> [Accessed 25 April 2023].

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

A strong, high quality university sector is fundamental to the state's economic development, innovation and diversification priorities and its current and future skilled workforce needs.

Higher education also has a critical role in underpinning the delivery of essential services. This is highlighted by the fact that teachers (19%), nurses/midwives (11%), medical practitioners (4%) and other health professionals (3%) all require tertiary qualifications and account for about 37% of the State's public sector workforce, the largest employer in Western Australia.⁶

These occupations have experienced substantial growth in recent years (teachers by 8% from 2017-18 to 2021-22, nurses/midwives by 17%, medical practitioners by 20% and other health professionals by 11%). Demand for these professions, which are already under workforce supply pressure in Western Australia and nationally, especially in regional and remote areas, is expected to continue to grow in coming years.

The Western Australian Government's economic development framework, *Diversify WA*, outlines how government, industry and the community can work together to grow and diversify the economy to build resilience and sustainable economic growth.⁷ It identifies eight externally focussed sectors for strategic development: energy; tourism, events and creative industries; international education; defence industries; mining and mining equipment, technology and services (METS); space industries; health and medical life sciences; and primary industries.

The State STEM skills strategy, *Future Jobs, Future Skills: driving STEM skills in Western Australia* was released in 2019 with the vision to create a competitive and innovative workforce with the skills to drive Western Australia's technological future and create new job opportunities.⁸ Its goals are to:

- ensure students have STEM skills for the jobs of the future
- reskill the current workforce with the STEM skills required to embrace a technological future
- break down barriers and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate in a STEM future.

Growth in Western Australia's eight priority strategic development sectors rely heavily on the availability of a STEM-skilled workforce. In addition, key enabling capabilities for these sectors are current and emerging technology, advanced manufacturing, innovation and entrepreneurship, and scientific endeavour, which are themselves reliant upon a STEM-skilled workforce.

As per the State STEM skills strategy, the Western Australian Government continues to encourage a strong and flexible university sector that builds these enabling capabilities and Western Australia's STEM capacity and capability more broadly.

Higher education will also have a critical role in enabling the achievement of many of Australia's national objectives, including achieving net-zero by 2050.

⁶ www.wa.gov.au (2023). *State of the WA Government Sector Workforce*. [online] Available at: <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/document-collections/state-of-the-wa-government-sector-workforce> [Accessed 25 April 2023].

⁷ www.wa.gov.au. (2023). *Diversify WA economic development framework*. [online] Available at: <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-the-premier-and-cabinet/diversify-wa-economic-development-framework> [Accessed 25 April 2023]

⁸ www.wa.gov.au. (2021). *Future jobs, future skills*. [online] Available at: <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/future-jobs-future-skills>

Over recent years, Australia's clean energy workforce has experienced considerable growth, increasing by 27% between 2017-18 and 2018-19⁹. However, the clean energy industry is experiencing serious skills shortages that put at risk Australia's achievement of its climate ambitions.

Current skills shortages are expected to be exacerbated by the acceleration of decarbonisation efforts up to, and beyond, 2030. The higher education sector is fundamental to addressing these skills shortages.

Western Australia's universities play a vital role in preparing a future workforce that can respond to a rapidly changing technological future. Lifelong learning and reskilling throughout one's working life enables individuals to respond to emerging opportunities and changing technologies and societal needs.

Universities are increasingly offering flexible courses that enable reskilling, such as short courses and micro-credentials, often partnering in an integrated way with Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges to deliver these programs in an agile and industry connected way.

Universities are also working closely with industry to improve alignment between graduate skills and industry needs. In addition to developing specific STEM discipline skills needed by industry, this is providing greater opportunities for students to develop core competencies. University courses, like secondary school subjects, are increasingly emphasising higher order skills as they are being taught. Initiatives such as internships, work integrated learning, field work and industry mentoring programs enable students to understand the portability of their skills and the array of career opportunities available.

The Western Australian Government encourages a higher education sector that:

- develops courses that are flexible and enable reskilling, lifelong learning and continuing professional development
- fosters collaboration and partnerships with industry for course development and work integrated learning
- offers industry and teaching internships for credit, work integrated learning and industry mentoring programs
- embeds core competencies across professions into courses
- works with other education providers such as TAFE colleges to offer holistic education pathways for students
- provides opportunities for research students to engage with industry
- develops appropriate graduate career readiness credentials in universities in consultation with industry.

The Western Australian Government would welcome such innovations being further encouraged and supported through the Accord.

How should an Accord be structured and focused to meet the challenges facing Australia's higher education system?

The Western Australian Government would welcome the Accord being structured in a way that focuses on the core themes of the discussion paper. It is also important that the Accord reflects the need for flexibility, to accommodate and adapt to different jurisdictional and regional contexts and changing circumstances over time.

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020). *Employment in Renewable Energy Activities, Australia, 2018-19* | Australian Bureau of Statistics. [online] www.abs.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/employment-renewable-energy-activities-australia/latest-release>.

The Western Australian Government looks forward to engaging further as the Australian Universities Accord progresses, given the significant role jurisdictions have in funding and overseeing school education and VET, and the need for effective linkages between school education, VET and higher education.

How can the diverse missions of Australian higher education providers be supported, taking into account their different operating contexts and communities they serve (for example regional universities)?

Capability to study higher education programs remotely could be strengthened, to support greater university participation and completion by individuals in regional and remote areas and build local workforce capacity. It is noted, for example, that almost one third of Western Australia's workforce has a bachelor degree or higher, but the rate is considerably lower in regional Western Australia where almost a quarter of the State's jobs reside.¹⁰

Looking from now to 2030 and 2040, what major national challenges and opportunities should Australian higher education be focused on meeting?

The long-term structural shift in employment towards service industries is expected to continue.¹¹ Four service industries – health care and social assistance; accommodation and food services; professional, scientific and technical services; and education and training – are forecast to generate over 60% of Australia's total projected employment growth.

For example, Western Australia will require a large, diverse and skilled workforce to meet the escalating demand for health care services, driven by factors such as an ageing population, increasing prevalence of chronic conditions, and greater acknowledgement of the need for services for mental health and disability. Similarly, Western Australia's critical need for teachers (and psychologists) is underpinned by a local supply that is in decline against a backdrop of ongoing population growth. The *National Teacher Workforce Action Plan* released nationally by Education Ministers in December 2022 details 27 actions to address the national issue of teacher workforce shortages, which the Commonwealth, States and Territories are all working collaboratively to implement.¹²

As referenced above, minimising and responding to climate change and the loss of value and resources due to material and energy inefficiencies are likely to be additional challenges for Australia's economy and society in the coming years, that present as key focus area opportunities for the higher education sector.

How do the current structures of institutions, regulation and funding in higher education help or hinder Australia's ability to meet these challenges?

Any significant reforms to the governance structures of the higher education sector, for example, creating separate research institutions and teaching universities in each State with different funding streams, should be done in consultation with State and Territory governments due to statutory governance arrangements, and the importance of addressing local context and skills needs.

The governance of the Australian higher education sector is split between the Commonwealth and State Governments.

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Education and Work, Australia, May 2022* | Australian Bureau of Statistics. [online] Available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/education-and-work-australia/latest-release#qualifications-held>.

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² Australian Government Department of Education (2023). *National Teacher Workforce Action Plan - Department of Education, Australian Government*. [online] Department of Education. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.au/teaching-and-school-leadership/resources/national-teacher-workforce-action-plan>

The current higher education funding model has the following issues:

- Universities have little control over the envelope of funding received from the Commonwealth, especially for Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP) for domestic students. There has been criticism of the Commonwealth considering the university sector as one homogenous system with cost adjustments only for the location of the university and not for size and scale. However, universities have autonomy to determine the mix of courses offered, the amount charged to students (up to a maximum), and the mix of CSP and full fee places offered.
- Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) funding for universities is capped to an amount stipulated in their agreements and the CGS guidelines. This creates little incentive for universities to provide extra places to domestic students, but large incentives to increase international enrolments, using them to cross subsidise other activities.

Finally, State Governments have been working to lift the school education outcomes of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and those in regional areas. There is an opportunity for Commonwealth and State Governments to collaborate to remove any governance, regulatory and funding barriers from the university sector to retain and support these students.

The Australian Government provides block funding to universities to retain and attract students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and regional areas through the Indigenous, Regional and Low Socio-Economic Attainment Fund. There has been long term funding for support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through Indigenous student assistance grants. These capped amounts are contained within a university's Agreement.

States and Territories currently determine for their TAFEs the type of courses offered, the cost of courses and the student contribution rate. This allows for variation across jurisdictions based on place, industry needs, and student demand and need. The Western Australian Government would welcome the Accord identifying ways similar local and regional needs and flexibility could be better serviced by the higher education sector.

What reforms are needed to promote a quality learning environment and to ensure graduates are entering the labour market with the skills and knowledge they need?

Graduate employability is a key consideration in a student's choice of academic institution. Many universities and colleges in the United States are entering into partnerships with major labour market data research companies and on-campus recruitment companies to help prepare their students for the workforce demands of the modern labour market. Some Australian universities are also turning to labour market research and recruitment companies to put their students ahead in the labour market race.

Encouraging Australian universities to work with leading labour market researchers in Australia, globally and government entities, such as Jobs and Skills Australia, or relevant State Government training and workforce development agencies, could help drive better outcomes for students. This would help shape curriculum and university offerings to link with current and emerging skill trends in the Australian labour market.

The emergence of new industry sectors comes with the potential for new job roles that will require education and training pathways to meet industry needs in a sustainable way, both through the growth phase and in a steady state mature industry environment.

How should Australia ensure enough students are studying courses that align with the changing needs of the economy and society?

Early identification of trends in industry needs and the education and training pathways to meet these needs is essential. To achieve this, consideration needs to be given to better data sharing between universities, industry, Commonwealth and State governments to assist with planning and communication of timely consumer information to inform student choice.

There are a broad range of factors that influence students' decisions to enrol in further education and training, and key drivers include:

- access to quality career information and/or counselling
- the quality of career development curriculum, exposure to the world of work and career development competencies attained during schooling
- the influence of family and peers, particularly regarding perceptions of VET and higher education
- Commonwealth and State Government policy settings
- funding mechanisms.

Strategies to influence behaviour could encompass the range of drivers outlined above, rather than single mechanisms such as funding.

The introduction of the Job Ready Graduates (JRG) funding model attempted to align student choice with Commonwealth priorities for skills. However, it has created perverse incentives for universities to allocate resources away from the identified priorities in order to optimise their funding outcomes. A new funding model is required that will reward universities for aligning delivery profiles with clearly identified public objectives and industry needs. This needs to be complemented with initiatives that better inform student choice and encourage them to study or train into relevant areas.

Consideration should be given to closer alignment of Commonwealth Supported Places allocations to projected local labour market need, particularly with regard to essential services experiencing supply shortages such as teachers and allied health professionals.

Given university courses often span a number of years, program design that provides flexibility for students to adjust their course of study in response to industry and occupational demand trends may also improve alignment.

An example of a robust industry-specific student satisfaction and graduate outcomes survey process is Western Australia's First Year Graduates Survey and Principal Perceptions of First Year Graduates Survey. These surveys are undertaken annually by the State's initial teacher education providers and school education sectors, and provide invaluable, high-quality data for the State's universities and school education sector on the satisfaction, preparedness, transition and on-the-job support of graduate teachers into their new teaching careers.

Stronger linkage between higher education and labour market outcomes could be achieved through reporting. Encouraging greater use of Quality Indicators for Teaching and Learning (QILT) Student Experience and Graduate Outcomes surveys (or other robust industry-specific surveys where applicable) could boost reporting of outcomes, identify emerging fields of study and enhance jurisdictional analysis of university outcomes. Linkage to enrolment data, particularly if courses are linked to the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations and Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification, would enable analysis of relationships between courses of study and employment outcomes.

How should placement arrangements and work-integrated learning (WIL) in higher education change in the decades ahead?

University courses could embed WIL in a greater variety of ways.

- Technological advances provide opportunities for more specialised and tailored WIL experiences, such as using virtual reality and other immersive technologies to simulate complex work situations and environments.
- A greater emphasis on providing WIL opportunities that are diverse with regard to industry, geography and types of work.
- More flexibility in academic timetables and calendars to support students to undertake 'block' placements in regional areas, with
- Greater blending and integration of WIL and traditional classroom learning.

The Accord should also consider opportunities to support women's economic participation, for example through more flexible WIL arrangements for people with caring responsibilities, and those already working.

The connection between the Vocational Education and Training (VET) and higher education systems

It is important that the university and VET sectors work closely to ensure a sustainable pipeline of skills to meet the strategic priorities and emerging State needs.

The focus on skills and industry development to achieve occupational outcomes and delivering the skills required for new and emerging industries provides an opportunity for the VET and university sector to work in collaboration, rather than in competition.

A closer partnership between the sectors will support lifelong learning for Australians, from high school, changes in career, and upskilling.

There is an emerging need, and opportunity, to develop new courses through collaboration between universities, TAFEs, and industry that lead directly to a job. This will require joint delivery and innovative regulatory and funding responses to enable both sectors to be more agile and responsive to community and industry needs. This will be increasingly important in emerging industry sectors, such as clean energy.

How should better alignment and connection across Australia's tertiary education system be achieved?

To ensure Australia has the right mix of skilled students going into the job market, workforce planning should holistically examine the likely supply pipelines of various types of students (and the outcomes they are achieving), regardless of whether skilled workers are VET or university graduates.

The uptake of micro-credentials, skill sets, and short courses is increasing, as a means to upskilling and reskilling the workforce.

A consistent definition, nomenclature, value and purpose of micro-credentials and short courses offered across both VET and higher education would better facilitate articulation between the sectors. Creating clearer pathways and recognition of prior learning between VET and higher education is important in providing ease of access and navigation between the two sectors for students.

Western Australia's Defence Industry Reskilling and Upskilling Grants program is an example of the development of micro-credentials that are fully aligned to industry workforce and skills requirements.

This initiative is part of the Western Australian Government's \$11 million defence industry workforce development package, and places the defence industry in the driver's seat to develop the micro credentials and skill sets in partnership with universities and registered training organisations (RTOs).

The Universities Accord could promote development of dual-sector qualifications, utilising the specific features of both sectors to provide a new suite of qualifications with the appropriate balance between knowledge and practical aspects drawn from both VET and higher education sectors, delivering in partnership to provide a single point of entry for students. Industry has a significant role to play to bring both sectors together to work in partnership on a reform of this nature.

There is evidence that this is starting to happen, but the Universities Accord provides an opportunity to incentivise and resource greater collaboration.

Greater collaboration, standardisation and clarification around entry requirements and pathways will help to increase the alignment between VET and higher education.

Each State and Territory has its own economic structure and business cycle, and State-level governments are best placed to respond in a timely way to local training needs. Any national governance approach must acknowledge the role jurisdictions have regarding VET.

Due to the local knowledge embedded in State-level governments, better alignment and connection across Australia's tertiary education system will require, among other things, effective collaboration that recognises the autonomy of States and the value of tailored responses to local needs and opportunities.

What role should reform of the AQF play in creating this alignment?

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) supports the development and maintenance of pathways which provide access to qualifications and assist people to move easily and readily between different education and training sectors and between those sectors and the labour market.

The evolving nature of training and the labour market has resulted in a changing learning paradigm, and there is a need for the AQF to be reflective of this evolution. Industry, such as the resource industry, wants to employ workers first and train them on the job, which means that the AQF may not be reflective of dynamic ways of learning and training. Universities are having to become more skill-based due to changing nature of work and lifelong learning.

Making recognition of prior learning more accessible and transparent could also help to create closer alignment between the different education and training sectors, providing learners with a more flexible and personalised pathway to achieving their qualifications. Currently, complexities exist around credit-giving mechanisms, consistency and acceptance across different universities and/or VET sector and quality assurance.

Reform of the AQF could facilitate closer alignment between the sectors by identifying equivalence in content and learning outcomes between matched university or VET courses or units of study.

How can pathways between VET and higher education be improved, and how can students be helped to navigate these pathways?

Current articulation arrangements are instigated by individual institutions, which may result in fragmented and inconsistent outcomes that are confusing and difficult for domestic students to understand and navigate as viable pathways. The articulation opportunities for students are limited by whether their chosen provider has articulation arrangements in place. The pathways between VET and higher education could be improved by considering a systemic, standardised and well-regulated articulation process.

If standardised articulation arrangements were to be considered, providing greater access to information for consumers of standardised pathways through the creation of a national portal for articulation could assist student navigation between VET and higher education.

The development and use of micro-credentials has been expanding in the VET sector. Consideration of how these could articulate into university courses and what threshold criteria and principles might be applied in setting standardised articulation arrangements, is required.

An example of standardised articulation currently in place is the recognition of the Diploma of Enrolled Nursing.

- In Western Australia, RTOs delivering the Diploma are required to meet the requirements for registration with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council, as appointed by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency in consultation with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia.
- There is an Enrolled Nursing Cooperative with RTOs and supported by the Community Skills WA Training Council that manages the process of delivery and assessment of this qualification.
- Articulation into Bachelor of Nursing degrees at Curtin, Murdoch and Edith Cowan universities is recognised for all students enrolled in an approved VET program, given students and the RTO have met the requirements of the national bodies.

An alternative approach to standardised articulation arrangement is where there are multi-provider collaborations to agree articulation arrangements, rather than individual partnerships between providers.

In Western Australia, a program to facilitate and catalogue articulation arrangements between VET and universities in defence industry-related qualifications was initiated as part of the Western Australian Government's 2021-22 \$11 million Defence workforce development package.¹³

- The program includes analysis and documentation of existing defence industry jobs relevant programs' articulation arrangements between all Western Australia's TAFE colleges and universities whereby students who successfully complete a VET qualification receive academic credit and reduced duration towards a university degree.
- The program will identify gaps, opportunities and creation of new articulation arrangements relevant to the defence industry priority occupations in the land, air, maritime, space, information and cyber defence capability domains.
- The establishment and maintenance of a Defence Industry White Collar (professional) and Grey Collar (para-professional) VET to University Articulation Online Catalogue will be developed, which will be used by Jobs and Skills Centres and career advisors to promote VET to higher education pathways relevant to the Western Australian defence industry.
- This initiative assists with some of the burden for pathways due to the frequent updates of VET qualifications' impact on universities pursuing articulation arrangements.

¹³ Government of Western Australia. (2022). Media Statements - *McGowan Government investing in skilled workforce for the future*. [online] Available at: <https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2022/05/McGowan-Government-investing-in-skilled-workforce-for-the-future.aspx> [Accessed 25 April 2023].

How can current examples of successful linkages between VET and higher education be integrated across the tertiary education system?

The examples of successful linkages between VET and higher education noted in the discussion paper describe some degree of localisation or specialisation. Consideration should be given to whether a proactive whole-of-system approach to linkages will be as effective at ensuring VET and higher education institutions have the freedom to make the connections that will serve their community or area of specialisation.

TAFE colleges are the backbone of the publicly funded VET system in Western Australia and, as public institutions, provide a strategic mechanism for the State to drive reform, underpin quality and deepen industry engagement. This extends to strategic linkages with universities and has been instrumental for workforce development strategies to promote defence industries in Western Australia. Further integration could be promoted through the Accord and complemented by the National Skills Agreement through funding and grants to develop skills solution partnerships and centres of excellence for existing and emerging industries, such as clean energy, and the care economy.

Increasing accessibility of pathways between VET, higher education and industry is a key component to ensuring successful learning and employment outcomes for students. An example is the Defence Industry Internship and Graduate Scholarship Program, which facilitates placements between employers, universities and RTOs, and provides support to all parties. Elements of the program include an 8 to 12 week 'taster' work integrated learning scholarship placement, a 12 to 26 week scholarship program and a one-year graduate program.

Similarly, the partnership between North Metropolitan TAFE (NMT) and Edith Cowan University (ECU) in cyber security pathways allows students to complete a Certificate IV in Cyber Security and an Advanced Diploma of Cyber Security at NMT and receive 18 months of recognition of prior learning with ECU, where they are able to gain a Bachelor of Science. This allows them to complete three qualifications in three and a half years rather than five years.

What role do tertiary entrance and admissions systems play in matching learners to pathways and supporting a sustained increase in participation and tertiary success?

Tertiary entrance and admissions policies play a significant role in matching learners to pathways and can support a sustained increase in participation and tertiary success. It is important that alternative pathways are not framed as easier options for entry into university, and that students are academically prepared for higher education.

The Western Australian Government would welcome the Accord considering ways to further support people from under-represented groups to participate and graduate from university.

Delivering new knowledge, innovation and capability

The Western Australian Government is a significant supporter of higher education research and innovation, contributing research funding to Western Australian universities across portfolio areas such as Environment, Agriculture, Defence, Regional Development, Health, Transport, and Mining.¹⁴

¹⁴ Australian Government Department of Education (2022). *Research Income Time Series - Department of Education, Australian Government*. [online] Department of Education. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.au/research-block-grants/resources/research-income-time-series>.

How should Australia leverage its research capacity overall and use it more effectively to develop new capabilities and solve wicked problems?

The nation's research capacity is currently dispersed between industry, academia and within government, so a lever for using this capacity more effectively is to fund, support and value greater collaboration between universities, industry and government agencies.

Other barriers such as research governance approvals and intellectual property (IP) ownership should be addressed to enable research to be well-governed, IP to be shared and its benefits to be experienced by the broader community. New models of partnering researchers and universities with start-ups and larger businesses should be explored to maximise the potential of Australia's idea and IP generation.

Innovation hubs can also be seeded with support from local community and business partners, with local universities as foundational partners and contributors. This is especially the case in the context of new emerging technologies.

How can Australia stimulate greater industry investment in research and more effective collaboration?

Public sector investment in research is essential for some types of research to progress, especially if the public benefits are large and cannot be captured by the private sector.

Public sector investment can also reduce the risk of research for the private sector, encouraging more research and development than would otherwise occur. The Australian Government's Cooperative Research Program is a good example as it funds industry-led collaborations between industry, researchers and end users.

Cooperative Research Centre Project (CRC-P) grants are an example of combined public sector and industry investment enabling the delivery of timely, translational impact. Importantly, these industry-led collaborations with researchers and end users enable informed and targeted solutions to industry problems and the commercialisation of cutting edge ideas.

Providing incentives to create and foster innovation hubs co-located near industry has the potential to support more effective research collaborations between industry and higher education providers. Supporting and providing incentives to making international connections with overseas universities, researchers and industries can also play a role in building greater research collaboration and capability.

Access and opportunity

The Western Australian Government is committed to supporting greater university participation and completion rates by under-represented groups.

What is needed to increase the number of people from under-represented groups applying to and prepared for higher education, both from school and from other pathways?

Western Australia's School Curriculum and Standards Authority continues to provide choices in pathways for students for entry into further education, training or employment.

It is recommended that universities consider the prerequisites they require from students entering into university courses, to ensure they are best prepared to succeed in their chosen area of study.

While there should be alternative pathways, there still needs to be rigour.

The State has concerns about the evident decline in ATAR course enrolments, as well as the recent history of issuing of early university offers to secondary school students (including unconditional), and the impact these may have on future university performance of students compared with the preparation for university studies through ATAR.

There has been public concern that an increase in the prevalence of early or unconditional offers, or both, may decrease the motivation of Year 11 and 12 students, to engage in more complex and challenging courses and content, and so be less well-prepared for a broader range of post-school options.

We want to ensure we have a system that allows people from underrepresented groups to enter university, however we need to ensure that they are well-placed to succeed in their studies.

Increasing retention and achievement of students to Year 12 and providing every student with a pathway to a successful future, are key priority focus areas for Western Australia's Department of Education. Explicit within the Department's strategies is a strong focus on priority equity cohorts such as Aboriginal students, regional and remote students, and students with socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Through strengthened support for teaching and learning excellence in every public school classroom, partnering with families, communities and agencies to support the educational engagement of every student, and using evidence to drive decision-making at all levels of the public school system, there is a clear drive to ensure all students experience continued success at school and are well prepared for further education, training or work post-school.

In addition, the Western Australian Government is investing \$32.9 million over four years to 2024-25 to provide enhanced specialist career development, advice and resources in secondary schools, including Career Learning Tool Kits for students in Years 8 and 9, career resources to support parents and Career Practitioners in 70 secondary public schools across Western Australia, including 24 schools in regional areas. The Career Practitioners are qualified teachers who embed career learning within the school curriculum and play an integral role in providing information and liaising with students, staff, parents, training providers, employers and industry.

Each career practitioner will undertake a Graduate Certificate in Career Development, also funded through the commitment.

What changes to funding and regulatory settings would enable providers to better support students from under-represented groups in higher education?

Creating incentives for universities to recruit and retain under-represented students and requiring universities to report on diversity and inclusion are two considerations.

Consideration could also be given to incentivising universities to partner with community organisations to provide additional support for under-represented students, such as mentoring, tutoring or other support services, or partnering with local businesses to provide internships or job opportunities for under-represented students.

The development of new pathways into university courses from the VET sector could shorten the step-up to higher education for under-represented students. An example could be through providing pathways from VET-sector allied health assistant training to allied health university courses.

The participation of Western Australia's four public universities in the Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) pilot and the setting of gender diversity targets by many leading organisations, is an example of current practice in the higher education sector and industry, aimed to addressing under-representation, in this case the participation of female students in STEM.

Governance, accountability and community

The Western Australian Government welcomes initiatives that facilitate higher education courses being delivered to regional students, where they reside. Where appropriate, such courses should be tailored to the local context and industry skill needs of the area.

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

Many metropolitan based universities require their students to participate face-to-face which means many regional students face greater disincentives to study because of cost and distance to campuses. Caring responsibilities can make it more difficult for students to relocate for their studies.

Partnerships with regional TAFE colleges, such as the partnership between the University of Southern Queensland and TAFE Queensland, and Charles Sturt University and TAFE NSW could be further encouraged. Charles Sturt University draws around a third of its student intake through VET pathways.

Unique approaches could also be promoted, such as those seen in the Mid-West region of Western Australia with the creation of the Geraldton Institute, a not-for-profit organisation trading as the Geraldton Universities Centre (GUC). A similar approach for the Pilbara saw the creation of the Pilbara Universities Centre (PUC) in 2019.

The GUC has service level agreements (SLAs) including with Central Queensland University, Charles Sturt University and Curtin University. Under each of these SLAs, students are enrolled by the university of their choice, undertake the university's accredited course/s locally, and upon successful completion of all requirements are awarded the university's qualification. Course delivery is typically a combination of on-line instruction and local face-to-face tutorial support.

The GUC and PUC do not receive direct funding from the Commonwealth as a higher education provider; instead, Commonwealth funding is provided to the university partner where the student is enrolled. Funding flows to the GUC and PUC from their university partner based on their individual SLAs. This has caused challenges for both centres as many Perth-based universities would prefer the students to attend their campuses face-to-face.

As noted earlier, capability to study higher education programs remotely could be strengthened, to support greater university participation and completion by individuals in regional and remote areas and build local workforce capacity.

Quality and sustainability

The independent review of Western Australia's public university sector, announced by the State Government on 23 February 2023, will provide recommendations on ways to better support the high performance and financial sustainability of the State's four public universities.

How should research quality be prioritised and supported most effectively over the next decade?

An examination of international best practice would be welcomed. Several countries are working to actively improve and prioritise research quality including the United Kingdom (The UK Reproducibility Network), France (Second National Plan for Open Science 2021-2024) and the League of European Research Universities.^{15,16,17}

Multi-disciplinary research, quality metrics and research incentives are all important for generating high quality research.

Sectors already demonstrating high quality research could be better supported to expand. For example, Australia has an international reputation for conducting high quality clinical trial research. Reducing barriers to, and increasing capacity of, clinical trials in Australia will further enhance the nation's position globally.

Investment in ongoing research and development training should also be considered, especially in evolving digital aspects of research, for research administration staff and for clinical based researchers, providing opportunities to leverage trainees early in their careers.

International education

The Western Australian Government recognises the significant benefits international students bring to our country - socially, culturally and economically. International education is identified in *Diversify WA* as one of eight priority sectors in which there are significant growth and diversification opportunities.

Western Australia is home to more than 125 high quality education providers including schools, colleges, pathway providers, English language institutions and universities. In 2022, there were 44,999 international student enrolments at Western Australian education providers.

On 16 April 2023, the State Government announced \$13.1 million in additional funding for Western Australia's international education sector from 2023-24, taking the State Government's total spend on international education to \$75.4 million over four years.¹⁸ The additional funding includes \$6 million to promote the State as a study destination for international students, \$5.5 million for grants to support international students commencing studies in the State, and funding extends the existing International Student Accommodation Subsidy and ELICOS Bursary which provide one-off \$1,500 payments to eligible international students, assisting with accommodation, cost of living and course fees.

Balancing international education priorities and national security and foreign interference risks, remains an ongoing challenge for the university sector.

¹⁵ www.ukrn.org. (n.d.). *UK Reproducibility Network*. [online] Available at: <https://www.ukrn.org/> [Accessed 25 April 2023].

¹⁶ LERU. (n.d.). *23 leading universities pushing the frontiers of innovative research*. [online] Available at: <https://www.leru.org/>.

¹⁷ scienceouverte.univ-rennes.fr. (n.d.). National plans for Open Science | Science ouverte. [online] Available at:

[https://scienceouverte.univ-rennes.fr/en/national-plans-open-science#:~:text=2nd%20National%20plan%20for%20Open%20Science%20\(2021%2D2024\)](https://scienceouverte.univ-rennes.fr/en/national-plans-open-science#:~:text=2nd%20National%20plan%20for%20Open%20Science%20(2021%2D2024)) [Accessed 25 April 2023].

¹⁸ Government of Western Australia. (2023). *Major boost for international education to diversify WA's economy*. [online] Available at: <https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2023/04/Major-boost-for-international-education-to-diversify-WAs-economy.aspx> [Accessed 25 April 2023].

How should the current recovery in international education be managed to increase the resilience and sustainability of Australia's higher education system, including through diversification of student enrolments from source countries?

Increasing the Australian Government's offshore promotion of Australia as a study destination of choice will provide greater opportunity for the States and Territories, as well as education providers, to leverage off the 'Australia' brand when marketing offshore. Raising awareness of Australia's international education offerings in-market allows providers the opportunity to expand into new source countries.

This will lead to diversification of source markets, strengthening the resilience of the sector and preventing over-reliance on a few countries as a provider's or State's main source of international students. As a result, education providers will be less susceptible to economic or geopolitical changes which may prevent students from key markets travelling onshore to study.

Western Australia finds value in the current Austrade-led Study Australia Partnership (SAP) as a way of collectively promoting Australia offshore. The SAP harnesses collective efforts to promote Australia as a destination and partner of choice for international education, supports a cohesive brand presence globally, and supports improved services, access and experiences for current students, who in turn become our future brand ambassadors.

Recovery of the international education sector will rely on scaling the capacity of education providers (both for onshore and offshore delivery of courses) in proportion to the growing number of returning international students. Supporting education providers to expand their transnational education programs and EdTech capabilities is important for resilient and sustainable growth in the higher education sector, as well as the diversification of student enrolments from source countries.

Throughout 2021 the Western Australian Government funded the delivery of a number of programs to support international education providers in the State to expand their transnational education offerings and education technology (EdTech) capabilities. This included the Online Capability Fund, which provided financial assistance for institutions to support their operations and to expand their online activities. The fund offered grants of up to \$40,000 to 14 successful applicants to deliver projects relating to purchase of ICT equipment to enable online course delivery, redesign of courses and curricula to suit online or blended delivery formats, and staff development to build capability in the delivery of online education.

EdTech has also been identified as a focus area and tool to grow the international education sector by competitor markets. The United Kingdom's Department for Education, in partnership with Nesta, ran a £1.4 million grant program¹⁹ for EdTech companies aimed at stimulating industry innovation, supporting the development of products, and building the evidence base to ensure technology meets the needs of teachers, lecturers, pupils and students.

It is also important to recognise international students entering Australia's higher education system rely on a range of pathway providers, such as through the school system, English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) providers and VET providers.

Supporting the broader ecosystem of education providers is vital to ensuring the sustainable growth of Australia's higher education system. For example, ELICOS providers are less resistant to external forces such as market interruptions as they rely on a constant flow of students through the pipeline.

¹⁹ nesta. (n.d.). *Reflections on the EdTech Innovation Partnership*. [online] Available at: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/project-updates/reflections-edtech-innovation-partnership/> [Accessed 25 April 2023].

They also experience higher teacher turnover rates and challenges with the attraction of qualified teachers in a globally competitive environment. With these factors, there is an increased need to support ELICOS providers to attract and retain teachers in order to avoid potential impacts on the vocational, and higher education student supply pipeline.

Taking steps to improve student visa processing challenges will also ensure Australia remains a competitive and attractive study destination and will minimise the number of students looking to alternative countries for their studies. Revisiting the Genuine Temporary Entrant criterion for student visas may present an opportunity to streamline the visa process and deliver graduate outcomes in line with the Australian Government's skilled migration priorities.

How can the benefits of international education be shared broadly across the system, including in regional areas, and what level of reporting should there be?

By increasing the offshore promotion of the international education sector as a whole, Australia will be in a stronger position to compete with Canada and the United Kingdom, drawing a larger volume of students across the ecosystem of education providers.

Growth of the sector and diversification of international education markets has the potential to increase economic benefits and the associated number of local jobs, particularly in regional areas. In the current context, international students can help address labour shortages, given they are eligible to work per the conditions of their student visa.

In addition to the direct benefits to the international education sector, hosting international students also creates a flow-on effect to the tourism industry. Thousands of friends and relatives travel to Western Australia to visit international students. It is estimated each international student attracts 1.5 visiting friends and relatives from overseas to visit the State. On average, these international education visitors spend more than seven times per trip compared to international holiday visitors.

Hosting international students also builds international networks, which can assist Australia with future business opportunities and foreign diplomacy. It also provides a future talent pool to expand research capabilities, and provides cultural experiences to domestic students.

Encouraging placements across the country and giving international students the opportunity to see both personal, career and business opportunities in different locations (highlighting their own comparative advantages) may attract future talent and investment into a range of locations and sectors.

Promoting the advantages of regional areas, such as accommodation affordability and community support, when compared to metropolitan destinations will be a key way of incentivising more international students to study regionally, and the flow-on economic and cultural benefits will be directly realised by the communities where the students study.

The State Government's Regional International TAFE Student Strategy commenced semester 1, 2023 offering \$5,000 bursaries to international students to encourage them to study priority courses in regional Western Australia. The students are also being provided with assistance to secure accommodation and employment.

In-depth reporting and data on international students studying regionally (e.g. by semester) would allow for better mapping of the flow on benefits that greater numbers of international students bring to regional areas (e.g. filling skills shortages, increased local tourism spend). This data would also provide the federal, State, and local governments with the necessary information to adequately support international students studying in the regions.

Investment and affordability

Which aspects of the JRG package should be altered, and which should be retained?

Funding for universities ought to incentivise alignment of course delivery profiles to clearly identified public objectives and industry needs, complemented with initiatives that inform student choice and encourage them to study such courses.

For example, universities would be better incentivised to increase enrolments in initial teacher education courses if CSPs for such critical skill shortage courses did not count towards universities' overall maximum basic grant amount.

Consultation with jurisdictions would be welcomed regarding local industry needs and context, and strengthening participation and outcomes for students from underrepresented groups.