

Queensland Government response to the Universities Accord Discussion Paper

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Introduction: the role of higher education in Australia's future

The Queensland Government recognises that universities play a vital role in social and economic participation, labour force participation and growth. We commend efforts directed at building a stronger higher education system that provides for broad and representative student participation, fosters lifelong learning, develops a strong research and evidence base, drives innovation, and produces graduates that meet current and emerging needs of Australian and international labour markets.

The Queensland Government is committed to ensuring Queenslanders have the knowledge, skills and confidence to participate successfully in the economy and broader community. We understand the vital role higher education plays in driving social and economic participation and that investing in education leads to increased labour force participation and improves productivity and growth.

As Queensland is decentralised and has one of the largest First Nations populations in the country, we support a national system of higher education in which higher education access accounts for geographical differences, regional needs and demographic diversity.

Notwithstanding the relatively limited role of the state with respect to universities in legislation, the Queensland Government is proactively strengthening partnerships and collaboration between the State Government and higher education providers to ensure alignment with government objectives for the community and commitments made to the people of Queensland. This requires a joint effort between government and higher education providers to proactively work together to understand how these objectives and commitments of the state can translate into workable solutions that can be readily mobilised across the state. Queensland is committed to supporting jobs, investing in skills, educating for the future and growing our regions, which will require an educated population with a broad range of knowledge and skills across the humanities and sciences.

The Queensland Government has provided submissions to a range of previous reviews, which provide context for framing a Universities Accord (see **Attachment 1**).

From an education perspective, the Queensland Government recently released a new education strategy, *Equity and Excellence: realising the potential of every student*. This strategy is informed by research and targeted consultation, and sets a new direction for schools and Queensland's state schooling system with the aim of lifting educational outcomes, particularly in the key subject areas of English and Maths. The aim is to enable every young Queenslander to achieve great things no matter their background, circumstances, or postcode. *Equity and Excellence* is about reducing barriers for all learners, including our First Nations students and their communities.

A strong schooling system requires clear pathways to tertiary education (delivered at a university or via vocational education and training) and employment. The ease of movement between higher education, vocational education and training, and work is critical to facilitate career changes and lifelong learning preferences. To maximise transitions and ongoing opportunities, it is important that federal and state governments work with the higher education sector in meaningful and genuine partnership to ensure national priorities are met and deliver what is needed.

The Queensland Government agrees there is an important opportunity for universities to work more closely and in a more systematic way with state governments through its Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage programs. In the same way that the Queensland Department of Education seeks education research to include consistent involvement of First Nations academics, the use of ARC grants to facilitate engagement of Indigenous community organisations as partners with universities on ARC grants would also be particularly valuable.

Challenges and opportunities for Australia

Queensland’s demographic profile reveals a range of challenges that are unique to the state. Queensland is Australia’s second largest, and most decentralised mainland state. In 2021, just over half (50.7%) of residents lived outside the Greater Brisbane Capital City Statistical Area, resulting in a geographically dispersed student population. While the five largest populations were located in South East Queensland, the regional areas of Cairns and Wide Bay ranked in the top 10 by population size with 253,748 and 307,745 residents respectively.¹ Queensland’s First Nations peoples were more decentralised than the overall population, with 11.3% living in Cairns and a further 11.3% living in Queensland – Outback.¹ In 2021, just over seven million Australian residents reported that they were born overseas, including 1,170,330 living in Queensland, accounting for 24.1% of Queensland’s total population.²

Queensland has nine universities established under Queensland legislation including eight public universities and one private university, with over 330,000 Queenslanders currently studying in the higher education and training sector.³

While these universities have a physical presence in a defined area/s, each takes in students from around the state, and most have substantial numbers of international students and operate from multiple sites within Queensland and overseas.

Seven of the public universities are also Queensland statutory bodies. As such, they are autonomous in their operations but subject to legislative oversight and reporting arrangements applicable to all Queensland statutory bodies.

UNIVERSITY	REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION
Australian Catholic University: Queensland Campus (ACU)	Metropolitan campus of multi-state university
Bond University (Bond)	Metropolitan University
Central Queensland University (CQU)*^	Regional University
Griffith University (Griffith)*	Metropolitan University
James Cook University (JCU)*	Regional University
Queensland University of Technology (QUT)*	Metropolitan University
The University of Queensland (UQ)*	Metropolitan Headquartered University
University of Southern Queensland (USQ)*	Regional University
University of the Sunshine Coast (USC)*	Regional University

*Queensland Statutory Body. ^ Dual Sector University

Notably, CQU is a dual sector university, set up under specific legislative arrangements and regulated by both the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency and Australian Skills Quality Authority. Queensland also has a significant number of articulated pathways and other linkages between education sectors. These include co-locations, system-wide articulation agreements between TAFE and most universities, and programs whereby school students undertake introductory university studies.

² Queensland Government < <https://www.qld.gov.au/about/how-government-works/objectives-for-the-community>>

Challenges and opportunities for the higher education system

An Accord with a truly visionary plan for Australia's universities and higher education sector would offer a national higher education strategic statement covering strategic goals, national priorities, targets and benchmarks. This is central to a shared purpose and would underpin ensuing reform.

This could build on the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, which sets out a vision for a world class education system. In schooling and early childhood education, the Mparntwe Declaration has the agreement of all federal, state and territory governments and frames the agreed educational goals and commitments for the next ten years in Australia. A goal of the Mparntwe Education Declaration is that "all young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community." To this end, it identifies desirable pro-social skills such as change management and creation, adaptability to new ways of thinking, and the ability to engage in respectful debate. It also aims to enrich the lives of all our whole nation by ensuring the rich culture, learnings and history of First Nations peoples is passed down to future generations through the education system.

Although reference is made to embedding pathways for learning throughout life and supporting effective transitions, the Mparntwe Declaration does not encompass tertiary education, apart from reference to fostering high quality teachers and educators. There is no similarly overarching policy that sets out the expectations and future goals for higher education in Australia agreed to by all jurisdictions, providers, students and other stakeholders. While it is recognised that universities need the flexibility to respond to the needs of the community and student demands, there is room for high level expectations to set the frame for a more coordinated, cooperative approach.

Central to development of the Mparntwe Declaration was its wide consultation, giving an opportunity for all interested Australians to help guide the education vision for school students.

There is also an opportunity for universities to consider their economic and social missions/standards, whether enshrined in legislation or contained within a Universities Accord. These would take account of the broader interests of communities and states and territories and involve academic ideas and insights being shared with reciprocal benefit, ensuring external perspectives and priorities are brought into academia. This approach would benefit from Commonwealth leadership in order to build the same standards and expectations across the higher education sector.

When considering reform of higher education at the national level, it will be important that any initiatives or outcomes:

1. acknowledge the unique characteristics and need of each jurisdiction, and allow for jurisdictional and sectoral flexibility in implementation of reforms;
2. support state-based skills initiatives within overarching national priorities²;
3. be based on clear, well-reasoned evidence and thoroughly scrutinised for unintended consequences;
4. align with, and build on, the goals and objectives of other major policy initiatives and activities of states and territories;
5. adopt a proactive and longitudinal focus, as some reforms may take several years to be fully realised;
6. balance reforms targeted at the different roles of universities, with a focus on both teaching/skills development and research and facilitate a coordinated, better integrated system for identifying and responding to skills requirements across the tertiary sector;

² Queensland Government < <https://www.qld.gov.au/about/how-government-works/objectives-for-the-community> >

7. work in partnership with Australia's school education system to provide for more timely, visible, accessible and robust data and information about the sector on which governments and institutions can base policy and strategic planning;
8. recognise that the higher education sector is a key driver of innovation and skills development for economic and productivity growth in Australia; and
9. acknowledge the important role that universities have in developing a skilled and adaptable workforce to meet current and future needs.

Quality teaching delivering quality learning

Ensuring relevance of university curricula to skills, trends, and current and future industry needs is critical. Universities must adapt to ensure delivery meets the needs of jobseekers within the communities they will be employed. This includes providing flexible modes of delivering teaching and learning, to enable more learner choice and better suit the working conditions of a range of employment sectors.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted the education sector. Investment in delivery of online infrastructure and resources provided for continuity of learning. Sustainable, flexible and contemporary learning environments are still required to meet the diverse learning needs and preferences of students, maximise participation for students in regional and remote areas, and optimise quality educational outcomes and experiences. However, universities should consider the differentiated learning needs of students, balance the mode of education delivery (with an appropriate mix of face to face and online learning) and ensure that there are effective supports, monitoring and assessment of student wellbeing.

Education Ministers recently endorsed a National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (NTWAP), which seeks to address the national issue of teacher workforce shortages. The Accord panel should be aware of associated work and consider alignment and dependencies where relevant.

A key aspect of the NTWAP is strengthening Initial Teacher Education (ITE). One area of concern in ITE is that students currently miss out on placements within schools at the beginning and end of the school year. The preparation and finalisation of the school year provide valuable insights for ITE students, but due to inflexible university schedules they are not able to have this experience.

In early childhood education, there is a need for higher education institutions to work more closely with the early childhood sector (e.g., employers, unions and government) to ensure relevance and adequacy of courses to meet the needs of employees and employers, with a focus on improving quality service provision. This could include greater emphasis on incorporating work placements as a core part of the curriculum / course so that employees obtain skills and experience at work, while they study. Within the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector, this could occur through skill enhancement or micro-credentials as opposed to the more traditional pathways of a Diploma or Early Childhood Teacher (ECT) degree.

Where universities have expectations and provisions for community engagement embedded into employment conditions and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), there is greater opportunity for collaboration. This is particularly the case with engagement between university education departments and schools in promoting STEM pathways and building teacher capability to teach STEM in schools. Examples of collaboration include co-developing teaching and learning resources that translate academic research, and via direct engagement with schools through STEM outreach activities.

There is also opportunity for involvement of professional organisations and accreditation organisations to contribute to curriculum development and defining minimum standards. For example, Griffith University's five-year partnership with Gilmour Space Technologies is driving important innovations in Queensland's burgeoning space sector, with staff and student interchanges in place between the University and Gilmour.

Courses offered by the University which were adapted specifically to suit the skills sought by Gilmour Space Technologies.

The popularity of Google Career Certificates to fast-track qualifications in digital technologies (data analytics, UX Design, digital marketing, project marketing) with excellent job prospects highlights how education delivery must meet particular industries' expectations and needs, especially in rapidly changing industries like information communication technologies.

Meeting Australia's knowledge and skills needs

Education, training and skills development are foundations of an innovation system. This is reflected in the Queensland Government's *Advance Queensland Innovation for a Future Economy Roadmap 2022-2032* (the AQ Roadmap), which includes an objective to improve STEM uptake and innovation and entrepreneurial mindsets and skills in education and the workforce. Creation and application of knowledge for commercial, environmental and social gain underpins the nation's quality of life and comparative advantage. A long-term approach is required (from pre-Prep to higher education and lifelong learning) to ensure Australia's systems equip students with the skills and knowledge to meet future global challenges.

The *Good people. Good Jobs. Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022-2032* (QWS), released in August 2022, positions Queensland's workforce to engage with economic opportunities resulting from global shifts and to address skills and workforce shortages impacting the Queensland economy.³ Through the QWS, the Queensland Government committed to increasing the size, skills, and adaptability of the State's workforce, with \$70 million invested in new initiatives.⁴ This investment builds on the Queensland Government's significant annual investment in skills and training for Queenslanders.

The QWS highlights that Queensland's economy is strong and growing, and is dependent on a highly skilled, agile and mobile workforce, with portable and transferable skills. Jobs Queensland project an extra 280,000 jobs would be generated in Queensland between 2021-22 and 2024-25.⁵ Employment in all industries and across all of Queensland's regions is projected to grow. Increasing the number of people with post-school credentials and the proportion of people in the workforce with higher-level skills will be critical to drive economic growth, and lift productivity and service provision.

The QWS identifies a number of key areas of workforce demand for Queensland in the coming years, including:⁶

- growing need for degree-qualified and experienced health, social and education workforce;
- strong demand for entry-level and VET-qualified workforce in health care and social assistance;
- increased demand for VET- and degree-qualified engineering, technical and digital workforce;
- ongoing demand for entry-level workers in our consumer-facing service sectors; and
- demand for a VET-qualified workforce in skilled trades, traditional industry and utilities.

These identified trends in workforce growth provide a blueprint for the higher education sector to invest in relevant courses and degrees that support future knowledge and skills needs.

³ Good people. Good jobs. Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022 -2032 < <https://desbt.qld.gov.au/employment/support-employers/workforce-strategy>>.

⁴ Good people. Good jobs. Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022 -2032. p.5. < <https://desbt.qld.gov.au/employment/support-employers/workforce-strategy>>.

⁵ Good people. Good jobs. Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022 -2032. p.6. < <https://desbt.qld.gov.au/employment/support-employers/workforce-strategy>>.

⁶ Good people. Good jobs. Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022 -2032. p.8. < <https://desbt.qld.gov.au/employment/support-employers/workforce-strategy>>.

Collaboration with industry

The Queensland Government agrees there is a need for stronger, clearer relationships between higher education, VET and industry, and welcomes the focus of the Universities Accord on relevant engagement opportunities. This focus aligns with issues raised and analysis undertaken to inform the Queensland Workforce Summit (Summit), as well as input received from industry and other stakeholders at the Summit in March 2022. Through this and related activities, stakeholders have emphasised the importance of higher education policy settings and funding models that encourage and enable university-industry partnerships and work-integrated learning.

The Summit highlights the importance of government and industry taking a more coordinated and strategic approach to engaging with Queensland universities on current and future workforce needs, given the critical role they play in developing higher-level skills and capabilities across many regions and sectors. Supporting analysis for Summit projects showed that there is an increased demand for higher level skills in Queensland and that a large proportion of future jobs will be in occupations and roles that require a post-school qualification. The importance of workforce skilling approaches that span across and enable pathways between the VET and higher education sectors was highlighted at the Summit, given the growth in workforce and skills demand related to occupations that sit at the intersection of the VET and higher education sectors.

As a result, an action outlined within the QWS is for the Queensland Government to partner with the university sector to increase collaboration and engagement between Government, universities and industry. To this end, Queensland is regularly engaging with Queensland university Vice Chancellors. The university sector is also represented on the Roundtable informing implementation of the QWS, chaired by the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development.

Queensland specifically recognises that tailored partnerships between universities and industry are critical, particularly in driving innovation and growing emerging industries. Some examples of existing partnerships are provided below.

Example 1: Hydrogen Industry

The [*Queensland Hydrogen Industry Workforce Development Roadmap 2022–2032*](#) sets out key workforce development, skills and training actions to support the industry's development and growth. It includes actions to work with the higher education sector to ensure university course offerings reflect the specialist skills needs of the hydrogen industry and connect the industry with universities to offer industry placements to accelerate skills development and work-readiness. Similar themes are anticipated to emerge for clean energy workforce needs through Queensland's current work on developing a *Future Energy Workforce Roadmap*, which will identify opportunities to build and develop workforce capacity and capability.

The *Partner Up Queensland Regional Science and Innovation Network* is a state-wide approach to increasing science and innovation engagement in regional Queensland. Queensland has created three regional hubs with central Queensland and far north Queensland being led by CQU and JCU respectively. Each regional hub was provided with funding of \$70,000 over 12 months to employ a regional coordinator and to support events, activities and projects that encourage Queenslanders' participation and awareness of science and innovation within their region. School-based science and engineering partnerships, such as the Horizon Hydrogen Grand Prix program, is creating lifelong learning opportunities which prepare the workforce of tomorrow with the skills they need to thrive in emerging industries such as renewable hydrogen.

Example 2: Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP)

RATEP is a community-based primary and early childhood education program which provides a direct pathway for First Nations people to become registered teachers, qualified teacher aides or early childhood educators. It is a well-established joint initiative between TAFE Queensland, JCU and the Department of Education, in liaison with First Nations communities to deliver outcomes for First Nations people and communities.

During their studies, RATEP students complete a set amount of vocational placement hours so they can start practising their new skills in a work environment, ensuring they are job-ready when they graduate. Students study through a mix of online delivery and residential blocks while receiving ongoing support from TAFE teachers and teacher coordinators. Students can receive 12 months credit transfer towards the Bachelor of Education (Primary) at JCU.

Example 3: Gateway to Industry Schools Program (GISP)

The GISP builds school-industry partnerships, to enable students to acquire the knowledge, skills and attributes of an industry. Students participating in the program are exposed to a range of learning experience to assist them in their career choices and pathways to employment. It aims to increase students and schools' career knowledge about the range of pathways between VET and higher education, by strengthening connections between schools, industry sectors and universities.

Each project is led by industry organisations which develop and implement tailored school engagement activities in line with their industry's key skills and workforce priorities. Industry organisations choose how the industry specific projects operate and the type and level of engagement with participating schools.

Example 4: Regional School Industry Partnership (RSIP)

The Queensland Government's *Good people. Good jobs: Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022–2032 (QWS)*, sets out a whole-of-government 10-year plan for a strong, skilled and diverse workforce ready to seize today's jobs and adapt to future opportunities. The Department of Education will contribute to this state-wide approach through the RSIP, commencing in mid-2023, which aims to strengthen effective school-industry partnerships and support school to work transitions. This will have mutual benefits for students and industry stakeholders, including higher education.

Connection between the vocational education and training and higher education systems

Strengthened tertiary system

The discussion paper notes the need for a non-hierarchical and flexibly applied qualifications framework that encourages recognition of credit and prior learning, as identified by the Review of the AQF.

Australian, state and territory governments are working together to develop a new model for VET training products, including qualifications and skill sets, to ensure they are relevant to labour market needs. The final model for this work is still subject to ongoing public consultation and consideration by the Skills and Workforce Ministerial Council. It would be appropriate for the Panel to consider this work in the context of better alignment and connection across Australia's higher education system. A central goal of this work on VET training products is to maximise transferability across industries, including improved RPL so that workers are able to upskill and reskill and move easily between job roles in related occupations without needing to complete a full qualification.

Pathways for students

Contemporary research highlights the importance of students engaging in career education from a young age and across all curriculum areas. Presently, to support pathways planning, students in Queensland state schools are required to develop a Senior Education and Training (SET) Plan in consultation with their

parents/carers. Usually developed in Year 10, this maps out a plan of action for students to achieve their education goals and supports them to remain on track for success in senior secondary, post-school education and work.⁷

Early career education is supported by the Department of Education's *Pathways to a successful future* strategy and *Pathways* hub which draws together evidenced-based research, strategies and artefacts that support career awareness and education throughout the phases of learning and into post-school higher education, training and/or work. As part of the QWS, the *Career education in Years 7 to 10 initiative* aims to strengthen teachers' career knowledge and deliver high-quality career education to support transitions to senior schooling and higher education. The Regional School Industry Partnership project aims to strengthen effective school-industry partnerships, which has mutual benefits for students and industry stakeholders, including higher education.

Within this context, there is an opportunity for universities to more proactively partner with education stakeholders on career education at the earliest appropriate opportunity, including where specific higher education pathways reflect student interest that is linked to future employment outcomes.

While the Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) is the standard pathway used to determine entry for most university courses in Queensland, most TAFE VET courses, and some university tertiary preparation courses do not require an ATAR for entry. It is well-recognised that there are multiple tertiary entrance pathways for students and school leavers. However, while some universities will accept VET qualifications such as AQF Certificates III and IV, Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas to gain admission to a course, others do not. Consideration should be given to the most effective strategies for ensuring potential higher education students are aware of alternative pathways for entry beyond more centralised application processes through Tertiary Admissions Centres.

Having integrated and streamlined pathways into and through VET and higher education is more likely to produce a robust labour market that can be quickly trained in response to rapidly changing industry needs for skills. At a time characterised by acute professional skills shortages, there is a need to develop more flexible pathways that facilitate greater mobility across an integrated education system that has clear entry and exit points linked to employment opportunities.

To successfully develop a skilled and adaptable workforce for the future, Queensland is building on the strength of its existing school and post-school education and training, through its VET system and universities. Queensland is focussing on lifelong learning and closer collaboration between industry and the education and training sectors, while supporting contemporary training offerings such as micro-credentials to complement traditional training and courses.

Growing a culture of lifelong learning and limiting barriers to post-school education requires an enhanced ability for students to move between VET and universities, e.g. through students being able to select subjects/units at other institutions to contribute to their degree. A move away from multi-year comprehensive degrees towards micro-credentials which do not require inflexible time blocks and financial commitments will promote innovation and flexibility, leading to more diversity in participation.

A system that delivers new knowledge, innovation and capability

Collaborating to a purpose – solving big challenges

Innovation within the education and training system itself is critical to ensure that it delivers the outputs needed for an innovative society. Universities are key drivers of innovation that arises from research and skills development through strong collaboration with industry contributing to increased productivity and

⁷ Pathways to successful future [Internal Link] < <https://intranet.qed.qld.gov.au/EducationDelivery/Stateschooling/senior-schooling/Documents/pathways-to-a-successful-future-strategy.pdf> >.

economic growth. The Queensland Government recognises this important objective, and as such the AQ Roadmap includes a priority outcome to translate our world-class research and collaborations into commercialisation opportunities.

It is important for university sector research and development to be aligned with state/territory level industry development policies and priorities. Presently, research aligned with big challenges often emerges at the initiative of individual academics and institutions. This results in a wide diversity of approaches, but the overall effort is fragmented and uncoordinated, resulting in slow and uneven progress. A new approach is required on the demand side to establish agreed goals and target multidisciplinary and entrepreneurial effort towards achieving these. Approaches such as moon-shot projects (e.g. UK Grand Challenges) could be adopted. The Commonwealth Department of Education (DESE) University Research Commercialisation consultation paper also suggests the following to improve collaboration and commercialisation outcomes: (1) mission-driven research; (2) stage-gated design; (3) incentives for participation; (4) industry-university collaboration; (5) governance.⁸

The 2022 World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) Global Innovation Index ranks Australia as the 25th most innovative country overall.⁹ Australia's input is strong, but ranks 37th when it comes to knowledge and technology outputs. Australia performs well in knowledge creation but poor in translating this knowledge into new products or other innovation.¹⁰ Further, the current education, research and innovation settings within the system are often targeted more toward pure research than mobilisation and commercialisation, and they do not always foster a culture of industry engagement and collaboration. To encourage and accelerate university commercialisation outcomes the existing approach will need to shift, while also maintaining investment in research excellence and basic research.

The CSIRO *Value of science and technology* report also highlighted the need to realise greater value from innovation investment.¹¹ It noted the strength of Australia's research capability, but lamented a less successful ability to translate research into valuable economic outputs. A lack of collaboration between research and industry was considered a major factor. Embedding commercialisation targets for universities would assist in delivering greater benefits from university to society, the economy, and the environment.

Notably, such issues extend beyond the scientific disciplines into the humanities. The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) was established by Education Ministers to position Australia's educators at the forefront of education research to improve learning outcomes for all children and young people. AERO was established to address a need identified by the education sector for rapid translation and mobilisation of evidence for practitioners in schools and early learning settings that had not materialised through effective partnering to meet future research demands.

This highlights the necessity of a funding model that rewards university researchers collaborating with industry partners to translate research findings into practical benefits. This would improve the likelihood of a researcher undertaking meaningful and desired research. In this vein, the Queensland Government works with the university sector to provide financial incentives to support and increase research capacity and investment linked to a number of priority research areas (e.g. through the Education Horizon grant

⁸ University Research Commercialisation Consultation paper < <https://www.education.gov.au/university-research-commercialisation-package/resources/university-research-commercialisation-consultation-paper>>.

⁹ Global Innovation Index 2022, P. 17 < <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/pubdocs/en/wipo-pub-2000-2022-en-main-report-global-innovation-index-2022-15th-edition.pdf>>.

¹⁰ University Research Commercialisation Consultation paper < <https://www.education.gov.au/university-research-commercialisation-package/resources/university-research-commercialisation-consultation-paper>>..

¹¹ Value of science and technology <<https://www.csiro.au/en/work-with-us/services/consultancy-strategic-advice-services/csiro-futures/innovation-business-growth/value-of-science-tech>>.

scheme and Advance Queensland Industry Fellowships program, which provides funding to researchers partnering with industry to complete original research that will have a positive impact on Queensland).

It is also important to ensure that universities are not inadvertently impeding development of research-based start-up businesses through their policies on financial equity retention, academic career incentives and desire for short-term financial return at the expense of wider economic benefits that the university may only benefit from indirectly over the longer term. This is particularly problematic for so-called ‘deep tech’ disciplines such as quantum and advanced materials, where the academic inventors need to remain involved with the start-up because of the complexity of the Intellectual Property.

Creating opportunities for all Australians

Addressing barriers to access

The Queensland Government aims to improve social outcomes and create greater social inclusion for all Queenslanders. Education is one of the most important mechanisms to improve outcomes for individuals experiencing disadvantage or who live with a disability. Education can be truly transformative by preparing and encouraging generations of students and young people to be:

- actively engaged and connected to their local communities and able to participate at state, national and global levels;
- lifelong learners who are technologically engaged, knowledge creators, problem solvers, innovators and effective communicators sharing ideas with others and responding positively to change;
- people who are resilient, able to create opportunities and confident in pursuing their passions; and
- economically and socially productive as skilled workers, entrepreneurs and leaders of tomorrow.

The greater the participation, the more likely individuals are to move away from intergenerational disadvantage and poverty and improve their socio-economic and socio-educational standing. It is also critical that education systems themselves do not entrench inequality through disproportionately strengthening advantages of one group over another.

With this in mind, eight Queensland universities are engaged in a Widening Tertiary Participation Consortium. These universities have a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Education to improve the tertiary participation of First Nations peoples, residents from rural and remote locations and people from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds. Consortium partners provide members of these priority groups with the tertiary information and preparation needed to make effective decisions about career and education pathways. Related school activities focus on raising aspiration and achievement in middle and senior level students (Years 6–12) through partnerships brokered with individual schools and local TAFE institutes where appropriate.

The Australian Government will need to ensure there are sufficient Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP) through demand driven funding or other mechanisms to account for population growth at the state level and address under-representation in higher education of low SES, regional and First Nations populations.

System-wide approaches to increasing access and equity

Universities should aim to increase numbers of First Nations educators, lecturers, tutors and support staff, who have a crucial role in supporting First Nations students. Their presence has been found to increase attendance of First Nations children and families at education and care services.

Research from an early childhood perspective has found the following potential barriers to First Nations individuals studying teaching at university:¹²

- a lack of First Nations staff in tertiary institutions;
- the level of cultural competence amongst staff in tertiary institutions;
- any assumption that all First Nations students are the same, including any deficit assumptions about First Nations capability;
- possible stigma regarding tertiary study in home communities;
- a lack of understanding of First Nations cultural commitments and obligations to family and community; and
- any culturally unsafe professional placement sites.

A range of programs have supported skills development and qualification attainment for First Nations teachers and educators, from regional and state-wide programs to community and service-level programs and partnerships. Common characteristics identified as important to their success include:¹³

- a strengths-based approach;
- a combination of on-country, online and on-campus tuition;
- local mentors and/or study groups;
- face-to-face visits from lecturers/trainers;
- financial support for study costs, including food, accommodation and transport; and
- close involvement of academic staff specialising in First Nations education.

To increase university participation of First Nations students, the Department of Education has two long-standing initiatives (Solid Pathways STEM and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aspirations Program), which are founded on affording students additional opportunities to engage with universities and their respective staff to expose students to a range of career pathways and course offerings.

There is significant potential for higher education institutions to develop micro-credentials which can empower and support First Nations teachers to become teachers of First Nations languages.

These approaches require well targeted and coordinated partnerships between universities, schools and communities that focus on the needs of First Nations peoples. They also require universities to receive adequate funding that reflects any higher costs associated with supporting First Nations students to succeed in their studies and pursue higher education.

Given Queensland's highly dispersed population, ongoing funding for regional universities is particularly important. These universities play a significant role in closing the gap between First Nations and non-Indigenous Australians, as well as empowering First Nations communities through innovation, discovery, and commercialisation.

¹² Shaping our Future: A ten-year strategy to ensure a sustainable, high quality children's education and care workforce 2022-2031, p24 < <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-10/ShapingOurFutureChildrensEducationandCareNationalWorkforceStrategy-September2021.pdf>>.

¹³ Ibid.

Governance, accountability and community

Regulation and governance

Under current arrangements, state/territory governments possess minimal levers with which to influence the operations of universities and the higher education sector more broadly. Although many universities are established as statutory bodies under state legislation specific to each entity in Queensland (which also provides for their governance arrangements), the Australian Government is responsible for funding, regulation and policy setting in relation to higher education.

Where applicable, Queensland university legislation prescribes university functions and powers, the composition and operation of governing bodies and how property, finance and land are to be managed. The seven Queensland public universities that are statutory bodies are autonomous in their operations, but subject to legislative oversight and reporting arrangements applicable to all Queensland statutory bodies. This includes legislation and a suite of government policies and procedures on financial management and reporting requirements, borrowing, procurement, auditing, records management, information security, human rights, occupational health and safety, consumer protection, employment conditions, complaints management, corruption and integrity matters, land management and planning.

In addition to Queensland Government requirements, universities are subject to the Australian Government's regulatory and compliance regime as required under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*, *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Act 2011*, *Education Service for Overseas Students Act 2000* and *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*.

University Act amendments

The Queensland Government has sought to modernise its university Acts to respond to the 2008 Bradley Review and reflect the contemporary operating environment. Universities hold land under various tenures, including freehold and state land held in trust under the *Land Act 1994*. In 2011, the university Acts and *Land Act 1994* were amended to reduce red tape and extend leasing terms to make them more commercially viable to enable universities to attract capital investment from external entities.

In recognition of the transfer of regulatory responsibility to TEQSA in January 2012, and in response to issues raised by universities, Queensland's university Acts were amended in 2016 and 2017 to remove outdated provisions, reduce regulatory burden and modernise universities' legislative framework. This included:

- removal of statutes to reduce administrative burden for both universities and the state on what were primarily operational matters;
- changes to size and structure of the governing body at the request of one university (with similar amendments made subsequently (in 2016) for another university);
- exemption of universities from Government Remuneration Procedures for members of the governing body imposed on other statutory bodies, and recognising that universities are funded by the Australian Government, some but not all universities have subsequently elected to remunerate members of their governing body; and
- provision for sub-delegation of powers delegated to the Vice-Chancellor by a governing body, to support decision-making at the appropriate level.

University Governing Bodies

The governing bodies of Queensland's seven public universities range in size from 15 to 22 members. Under legislation, they include varying numbers of members across the categories of: official members;

Governor in Council (GIC) appointed members; elected staff, students and alumni; and additional members appointed by the Council.

The number of GIC members on the governing bodies of the public universities varies from three to eight. GIC appointments are administered by the Department of Education and considered “significant appointments” which are subject to government processes. Universities are invited by the Minister for Education to recommend suitably qualified persons for consideration as nominees for appointment as a GIC member. Through this process, they are to take into consideration the Queensland Government’s commitment to encouraging diversity on all government boards with a view to including people from diverse groups including women, First Nations peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with disability. Suitable nominees are also identified through the Queensland Register of Nominees.

Once appointed, the university Acts require that all members, including GIC appointees, “*must act in the way that appears to it most likely to promote the university’s interests*”¹⁴. The Minister does not have the legislative power to call on GIC members to make representations or put forward positions.

Borrowing and investment

Although universities are funded and regulated by the Australian Government, the state government monitors and reports on their financial position. The property and finance provisions of the legislation for relevant universities specify that the borrowing and investment powers of universities are established by the *Statutory Bodies Financial Arrangements Act 1982* (SBFA Act), *Statutory Bodies Financial Arrangements Regulation 2019* and *Financial Accountability Act 2009*.

Under the *Statutory Bodies Financial Arrangements Act 1982*, financial arrangements such as guarantees, derivative transactions, leasing, appointment of a Fund Manager, formation of companies, and shares investment/divestment, require universities to seek the Treasurer’s approval prior to proceeding with the arrangement.

As statutory bodies, public universities have access to the services of the Queensland Treasury Corporation (QTC), the state’s main financing authority. This includes access to QTC’s borrowing products, investment and leasing facilities that are only available to public sector organisations. Where universities borrow from the QTC, their borrowings are automatically guaranteed by the state and they benefit from lower interest rates compared to retail banks.

The role of international education

Higher education plays a significant role in contributing to Australia’s global standing and with considerable ongoing global economic and geopolitical shifts, international education and training (IET) has never been so important in providing a cultural backdrop and enrichment to our communities.

International education has become a significant contributor to the state and national economy, contributing \$2.95 billion to the Queensland economy in 2021. However, a balance of international and domestic students, who study and learn together is equally, if not more, important in raising the Australian international profile, enriching local communities, attracting talent to contribute to the economy, facilitating international diplomacy and creating global business networks.

The Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games offers a unique opportunity to leverage international education and training opportunities as well as research investment and talent attraction to accelerate the development of associated future industries, such as Queensland’s burgeoning hydrogen industry.

¹⁴ *University of Queensland Act 1998*, Section 10

Australia's IET sector needs a diversified market portfolio in terms of source of markets, broad field of study, and student distribution between regions and capital cities. For example, in Queensland over half of international student enrolments came from the top five markets, including China (20%), India (13%), Brazil (8%), Colombia (7%) and Nepal (5%). In 2022, around 29% of international students enrolled in Management and Commerce, followed by Society and Culture (26%), then Health (8%).

A diversified market portfolio could lead to a better distribution of enrolments geographically, encouraging students to study in the regions. In Queensland, approximately 30% of international students study outside the capital city in a regional area. For example, Townsville, a hub for marine and climate knowledge specialising in biodiversity, a major centre for resources, agriculture and manufacturing, and an emerging centre for renewable energy, presents an opportunity for students to study marine science and other new technologies in a regional university. Queensland has five universities ranked in the global top 150 – Times Higher Education's Young University Ranking 2022. Our regional universities offer diverse subjects that are highly ranked globally, which can attract students who want to learn specialised knowledge and be employed in the region.

Nationally, challenges in visa processing, access to affordable student accommodation and the rising cost of living continue to impact the IET sector and returning students. Simplified visa processes and smoothed migration pathways would attract more students to Australia and increase the retention rate post-study (which currently sits at 16%). Requiring students to confirm a Genuine Temporary Entry as part of visa processes while encouraging their contribution to the skills shortages can be problematic for students and providers. Australia needs to be able to recruit students to an all-in-one pathway to a chosen career – first studying and then working in Australia without multiple, confusing visa requirements.

Further, increasing community recognition of the value of international students to both domestic students and our communities will increase the level of inclusion of students in the places in which they choose to study, live and work. It is integral to Queensland's ongoing growth and international success, to develop clear pathways that foster specialist jobs within specific industries that support regional, rural and remote communities.

Ongoing collaboration across all levels of government is key to positioning Australia as a global leader in international education and training. Continuing engagement through the Commonwealth, States and Territories International Education and Training forum, Study Australia Partnership and Education Visa Consultative Committee supports national alignment on sector promotion and support. A stronger partnership between government and universities could bolster the onshore and offshore pipeline between Queensland schools and universities.

Investment and affordability

Related to equity of access and opportunity for higher education study for all Australians is the opportunity to improve parity between the VET Student Loan (VSL) program and higher education loan schemes which could support equity of access and pathways for students.

The Queensland Government submission to the *Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training* advocated for reforms for greater parity between VET and higher education loan schemes,¹⁵ as this is critical to reducing financial barriers for students and ensuring equitable access to affordable training for students, particularly those in need of financial support who would otherwise not necessarily be able to undertake training.

¹⁵ Queensland Government submission to the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training, P.16 < <https://uploadstorage.blob.core.windows.net/submission-uploads/fil110a8a9f567b862f8072a.pdf>>.

The federal *Evaluation of the VET Student Loans Program* delivered in December 2019 and the *Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work* report released in June 2020 had similar findings regarding the key difference between VET and higher education loan programs relating to the prospect of upfront costs for VSL students and the higher share of VSL students incurring a loan fee (resulting in corresponding affordability issues for those students who are already price sensitive and/or financially disadvantaged). These differences can create barriers to students wishing to access and participate in VET qualification pathways and have the potential to unnecessarily drive students away from the VET sector.

Conclusion

As the next chapter in higher education reform commences, the central pillars of the Mparntwe Education Declaration and the Queensland Government's education goals reflect two fundamental priorities for higher education – equity and excellence.

To achieve this ambition, the Queensland Government is ready and prepared to be a partner in a reset relationship where university approaches provide practical, flexible solutions for sector and industry challenges.

ATTACHMENT 1: Previous Queensland Government Submissions

Name of Submission	Link to submission
Quality Initial Teacher Education Review	https://www.education.gov.au/quality-initial-teacher-education-review/consultations/quality-initial-teacher-education-review-submissions/submission/12990
Productivity Commission Review of the National School Reform Agreement	https://www.pc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/349095/su_bdr123-school-agreement.pdf
Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training	https://uploadstorage.blob.core.windows.net/submission-uploads/fil110a8a9f567b862f8072a.pdf
Queensland Government Submission – House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs Inquiry into educational opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students	https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Former_Committees/Indigenous_Affairs/EducationalOpportunities/Submissions