

Australian Universities Accord

Submission on behalf of the

Goulburn Valley Tertiary Education Partnership

1. Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Accord Interim Report. This submission constitutes a response from the **Goulburn Valley Tertiary Education Partnership, co-convened by the University of Melbourne, GOTAFE and La Trobe University with regional education, industry, government, and community partners.**

The partnerships and initiatives currently underway in the Goulburn Valley respond to a need identified by those living and working in the region and have the potential to significantly boost engagement in education, employment, and training, delivering enhanced economic and social outcomes in the Goulburn Valley. In addition, these initiatives provide exemplars of the type of activities the Government could support across regional Australia. The Goulburn Valley offers impactful case-studies evidencing the potential for institutional collaboration, strong industry-education links, and a whole of community effort to build aspiration, increase education opportunities and deliver positive change in regional communities.

Recommendations:

1. The Goulburn Valley Tertiary Education Partnership is currently supported in-kind by the University of Melbourne, GOTAFE and La Trobe University. **We recommend that the Accord consider investment to strengthen and elevate established partnerships and collaborations in regional locations, such as the one in the Goulburn Valley** which aims to:
 - Significantly contribute to access and participation in education, employment, and training;
 - Leverage the [Shepparton Education Plan](#) and its focus on creating pathways for young people beyond school;
 - Strengthen Indigenous economic development by creating stronger links between industry and education, as outlined in the [Goulburn Murray Regional Prosperity Plan](#);
 - Guarantee the educational growth and financial sustainability of key flagship regional Indigenous education hubs like the [Munarra Centre for Regional Excellence](#);
 - Boost community-led research that tackles the issues that matter in the Goulburn Valley.
2. The Goulburn Valley Tertiary Education Partnership highlights the potential for new models of delivery and collaboration to increase tertiary education and research provision across regional Australia. **We recommend that the Accord consider:**
 - Incentivising and strengthening collaboration between higher education and VET sectors in regional Australia.
 - Funding community-led research to address the needs of local communities in the regions.
 - Investing in Indigenous-led research, capacity building, and enterprise in the regions supported by higher education expertise to create Indigenous knowledge, self-sufficiency, and prosperity.

- Dedicating resources to support and strengthen tertiary institutions engagement with culturally and socio-economically diverse communities, leading to greater access and participation in tertiary education and the workforce.

About the Goulburn Valley Tertiary Education Partnership

Shepparton, located in the Goulburn Valley in Victoria, is home to the University of Melbourne, GOTAFE and La Trobe University offering diverse education opportunities for the region. All three tertiary institutions are committed to leveraging their capabilities and capacity to contribute to education and workforce outcomes that improve the social, cultural, and economic prosperity of the region.

The University of Melbourne, GOTAFE and La Trobe University have formed a partnership to collaborate with multiple sectors to create education aspiration and pathways to study, build workforce skills and capabilities, and undertake collaborative research around challenges and opportunities for the region, including improving workforce attraction, retention, and development.

In line with advice from the Panel, including the request for succinctness and brevity, our submission provides feedback on key areas which we believe have the potential to significantly enhance higher education opportunities in regional Australia.

2. Regional alliances and place-based strategies

The Goulburn Valley Tertiary Partnership welcomes the Interim report's strong focus on addressing low participation rates among low SES, regional and Indigenous students, and the proposal to encourage and incentivise new models of delivery and collaboration to increase tertiary education and research provision in regional and under-serviced areas. We are also pleased to see the report has highlighted the important role higher education plays in addressing critical skills shortages in a range of professions, and to the importance of strong links with the school, VET systems and the wider community.

The Accord presents an exciting opportunity to address education disadvantage in regional, rural, and remote communities. We believe the existing and emerging partnerships in the Goulburn Valley demonstrate how collaboration and strategic alliances between tertiary institutions, industry, government, and community can bolster regional and rural education, training and research delivering broad benefits to the region.

It is our collective view that strengthening current and emerging partnerships and initiatives in the Goulburn Valley will deliver economic and social benefits to the region. **Moreover, the work underway in the Goulburn Valley offers models of partnership and collaboration that could be emulated across regional Australia, addressing many of the challenges outlined in the Interim report.** Our submission outlines some of these key partnerships and signature initiatives.

3. Goulburn Valley Tertiary Education Partnership

As noted in Interim report, *higher education providers play a crucial role in communities, particularly in parts of Australia beyond the inner suburbs, delivering local jobs, building economic and social connections, providing relevant applied research, and bringing many other tangible benefits.*

La Trobe, GOTAFE and the University of Melbourne have a long history of working collaboratively, and with community, on our shared commitment to increasing participation in tertiary education. The

La Trobe/GOTAFE partnership has delivered important articulation pathways between TAFE diploma and University degree level studies in Nursing and Social Work, and a 'no wrong door' approach which prioritises easy access to advice and information about both TAFE and/or university options. Jointly held events, such as Open Days, emphasise opportunities and connections across the three institutions.

The Goulburn Valley Tertiary Education Partnership demonstrates the pivotal role of the tertiary education sector in enhancing rural based learning and research opportunities and improving education and employment outcomes for young people in the region. The partnership and action plan have emerged from discussions with a broad range of regional stakeholders who have emphasised the importance of an integrated approach to tertiary education, workforce development and regional outcomes. At a high level the partnership aims to:

- Create aspiration for education and career ambition.
- Develop pathways to education and build workforce skills and capacity.
- Promote collaborative research that addresses challenges and opportunities for the region.

Initiatives are focussed on:

- Developing key partnerships with Greater Shepparton Secondary College to pilot taster education and employment pathways programs.
- Working with industry to map current and future skill needs in the region.
- Reducing barriers to tertiary education.
- Developing a program of skills and capacity building to address skills gaps and build the local workforce.
- Creating forums, events and information for families, young people, and employers to understand workforce opportunities, ambitions, and pathways.
- Investigating joint community-led research projects

The partnership is currently supported in-kind with staff and program costs covered by University of Melbourne, GOTAFE and La Trobe University. However, external funding is required to support and enable the delivery of this partnership. There is significant scope to further build on the many excellent initiatives already taking place in the Goulburn Valley.

Attachment 1 provides information about higher education partnership initiatives delivered in the region.

Conclusion

As outlined in this submission, strong community partnerships already exist in the Goulburn Valley. These partnerships have been built out of necessity. The urgent need to find solutions to local education, training and workforce development challenges has galvanised the community into action. There is now an opportunity for the Government to build on this solid base of existing alliances and initiatives to create a thriving regional community. However, this is not a short-term project, rather one that requires an ongoing commitment and sustained funding to meet the future education and training needs of the region.

Finally, the partnerships and activities currently underway in the Goulburn Valley illustrate the significant potential for the Accord to enhance higher education access, equity, and opportunity across regional Australia.

Attachment 1

Current higher education initiatives in the Goulburn Valley

Building Indigenous aspiration and education excellence

Addressing education inequities is key to 'closing the gap' and eradicating Indigenous disadvantage in regional, rural, and remote Australia. In the Goulburn Valley, 25.4 per cent of Indigenous youth are not engaged in work or study, significantly higher than the average Victorian regional non-Indigenous rate of 11.9 per cent. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have poorer outcomes across labour force engagement and income measures in comparison to general population rates in the Goulburn Valley and regional Victoria. With a 15.4 per cent unemployment rate, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are almost three times as likely to be unemployed compared with the region's average (5.7 per cent).¹

The following initiatives, along with previously cited examples, aim to provide pathways to meaningful education and employment outcomes.

The [Academy of Sport, Health and Education](#) (ASHE) is a partnership between the Rumbalara Football Netball Club and the University of Melbourne, in collaboration with La Trobe University and GOTAFE who provide pathways into higher education. ASHE was formed as a community and educational resource to provide Indigenous people with an educational setting and support for their transition to employment or further education. Since 2004, well over 1200 students have graduated with VCAL, VET and Diplomas in Nursing, Community Services and Social Work. GOTAFE provides VCAL and VET programs and La Trobe University has articulation arrangements for students to undertake relevant diplomas.

Building on the success of this partnership, ASHE will be co-located in the new Indigenous led [Munarra Centre for Regional Excellence](#) in 2024. The Munarra Centre for Regional Excellence will deliver a broad range of VET and higher education courses leading to improved health, education and employment outcomes for Indigenous people in the region. It is also an excellent example of the benefits of collaboration, with each institution bringing critical areas of expertise, resulting in a diversity of education and training options and pathways in the region.

There is significant potential to strengthen and grow partnerships, in line with the Government's ambitions to enhance place-base strategies and create new campus models. For example, an Indigenous research hub located in the Goulburn Valley has the potential to build and strengthen partnerships with local community and industry, leading to research that addresses local challenges and delivers economic and social benefits to Indigenous communities and broader society.

Providing exceptional teacher education

The [Greater Shepparton Teaching Academy of Professional Practice](#) is a collaboration between La Trobe University, The University of Melbourne and schools in the Greater Shepparton area which aims to provide final year students placement experiences that enhance their skills in inclusive education. The program, supported by the Victorian Department of Education and Training, is designed to boost teacher preparation for work in schools serving culturally diverse communities. This program is critical to both enhancing the quality of teachers in the region and addressing critical workforce shortages.

¹ https://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/2063901/Goulburn-REDS-2022-Supporting-Analysis.pdf

La Trobe University's School of Education has secured \$7.9 million from the Federal Government to expand its [innovative, employment based pathway, NEXUS](#), into primary schools. The program enables people to transition from other careers, while gaining practical experience in a school setting. NEXUS students take part in an 18-month accelerated or two-year Master of Teaching (Secondary) or Master of Teaching (Primary), whilst undertaking paid employment in schools (part-time in first year and full-time in second year). On top of their salary, NEXUS students also benefit from up to \$14,900 in financial support.

NEXUS and the Greater Shepparton Teaching Academy of Professional Practice will be critical to addressing extreme teacher shortages facing many schools in the Greater Shepparton region.

Developing a culturally diverse health workforce

The University of Melbourne, La Trobe University and GOTAFE are collaborating to increase the rural health workforce by providing professional health education and research training in a rural context. Key examples include:

- **The University of Melbourne and La Trobe University** are collaborating to deliver a unique [end-to-end rural medical program](#) enabling medical students to undertake their studies and training in regional Victoria. This seeks to respond to perennial doctor shortages in regional areas.
- [Going Rural Health](#) is a University of Melbourne Department of Rural Health (UDRH) initiative, funded by the Federal Government. The program provides multidisciplinary training to students enrolled in a nationally recognised nursing, allied health or other health science undergraduate or postgraduate degree at any Australian University. In the Goulburn Valley, *Going Rural Health* supports both La Trobe University and University of Melbourne students by providing a range of placement and training opportunities with the overarching goal of attracting and retaining health professionals and strengthening health services in the region.

Growing the agricultural, horticulture and food manufacturing sectors

- A key outcome from the Northern Victorian Agriculture Roundtable held in November 2022 was commitment and funding to develop **the Northern Victorian Agriculture and Food Manufacturing Education Strategy**. The overarching goal of the strategy is to deliver industry-specific training and education pathways across northern Victoria (Goulburn, Ovens Murray, and surrounding areas). This includes providing clearly articulated education pathways to improve education and employment outcomes, deliver a ready supply of high skilled employees, and ultimately improve social and economic outcomes in the region.
- Stemming from this work **GOTAFE has secured \$1.99m** in funding to support education aimed at ensuring students have the skills required for a career in agriculture. A detailed industry and community engagement program will shortly commence to inform both the development of the shared strategy and the suite of short courses focused on attracting new workers and further developing the skills of the existing workforce.

Attachment 2

Goulburn Valley Tertiary Education Partnership Advisory Group

The partnership is overseen by the Advisory Group comprising the following representatives:

Professor Jane Mills – La Trobe University
Professor Jim Watterston – University of Melbourne
Professor Joanna Barbousas – La Trobe University
Kristie O'Brien – GOTAFE
Associate Professor Michael Donovan – La Trobe University
Dr Cate Roy - University of Melbourne
Lindy Nieuwenhuizen – Committee for Greater Shepparton
Sharon Hensgen – Department of Education
Beck Dean - Kaiela Institute
Sam Atukorala – Ethnic Council Shepparton
Elizabeth Capp - La Trobe University
Padmini Sebastian - University of Melbourne
Hannah Turnbull - GOTAFE
Katie Taylor - LaTrobe University