



Response to University Accord Interim Report

[S]cience and technology are of crucial importance for the future health of their nations. We should have no objection to good scientific and technical education, and I shall not suggest that nations should stop trying to improve in this regard. My concern is that other abilities, equally crucial, are at risk of getting lost in the competitive flurry, abilities crucial to the health of any democracy internally, and to the creation of a decent world culture capable of constructively addressing the world's most pressing problems. These abilities are associated with the humanities and the arts.

-Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, 2016

Executive Summary

As education has shifted from being perceived as an intrinsic value benefitting the public good to an economically indexed commodity and a private good, Humanities, Arts, and Social Science (HASS) education has suffered worldwide in its perceived relevance and in attracting and retaining both public and private sources of capital investment. These trends have eroded the capacity of our education systems to deliver students and society the true benefits of the kind of big picture systems-thinking HASS programs do best.

Downturns in investment in comprehensive higher education and research have also deprived STEM-based solutions from crucial human-centred and society-based perspectives just when the world needs innovative solutions to best address urgent global problems in empathetic, caring ways that take into account social impact: climate change and environmental degradation, food security and agricultural sustainability, resource scarcity and sustainable development, technological disruption and ethics, mass migration and displacement, threats to public health, growing inequality, and political instability and conflict.

These global issues disproportionately affect the world's regions. Australia's regions are home to the highest proportion of the nation's socially and economically disadvantaged population. They are also places where crime rates are skyrocketing, where the mental health crisis and suicide rates are highest, where resources are extracted without compensatory redistribution of wealth among local populations, and where educational attainment levels have plateaued at levels significantly lower than metropolitan Australia.

Contrary to unfounded stereotypes that HASS education is an indulgence or distraction, these are all issues at the very centre of the place-based mission of regional HASS programs, which empower regional Australians to better understand, articulate, and change their life circumstances, to become powerful advocates for their communities, and to take up public-facing work in the areas of local governance, crime prevention and rehabilitation, education, union leadership, social services provision, youth and social justice, environmental stewardship, First Nations' partnerships and leadership, and local policy development.

Humanities in the Regions welcomed both the Australian Universities Accord Discussion Paper (February 2023) to which we contributed a response (April 2023) and the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report (July 2023) for their focus on redressing educational disadvantage in Australia's regions. We welcome long overdue attention to the urgency of improving access, attainment, equity, and quality of life for regional Australians who overwhelmingly represent this country's most diverse and disadvantaged educationally underrepresented citizens.

Whereas the Interim Report, however, proposes some welcome solutions such as Regional University Centres to redress the "tyranny of distance" facing Australians in the regions, we understand regionality as more than a mere fact of geography. Instead, we consider regionality as an index of compounded disadvantage.

Australia as a nation—like many nations—is sliced by a series of binary oppositions: east versus west, south versus north, urban versus regional, coastal versus inland... [Australia's regions] are all underserved by public transportation, face challenges in holding their population, health, and education services, but also—structurally and culturally. -Tara Brabazon, *Unique Urbanity* 2014

These divisions unequally affect regional Australian communities and citizens, but also affect the capacity of regionally based higher education institutions to deliver educational impact and equity in the programs best positioned to do this most: the humanities, arts, and social sciences (HASS). These programs need to be strengthened, equipped, and better acknowledged for the important place-based role they play in the educational ecosystem and in shaping this nation's future.

Humanities, arts, and social science programs at Australia's regional universities are facing an existential threat. This is of significant concern because these programs provide important enabling pathways for the most disadvantaged Australians. These programs also enable regional Australians to find regional solutions to some of the world's most pressing global and local problems. Partnering with STEM programs and working alongside metropolitan institutions as well as the VET sector, regional HASS programs possess key transformational capacity that is yet unrealised. We are stronger together. But we need a fair go.

We call on the Accord to work with regional HASS academics, regional stakeholders, and social scientists to overcome the flat two-dimensional understanding of regionality that compromises their current approach. We hope the Accord's Final Report will suggest the panel is better prepared to grapple with the state of resource-inequity facing HASS higher education in the regions and propose solutions which curb the increasing inequality already disadvantaged Australians face.

Australia should be proud that it has produced some of the highest ranked universities worldwide. Indeed, many regional academics have benefitted from education at these institutions. But we call out a system of higher education that allows a handful of wealthy cosmopolitan universities to dominate the educational landscape (see Appendix A) at the expense of spreading resources to, joining forces with, and valuing the local knowledge of regional institutions. We call for a system reset that reverses the status-quo of university funding in Australia, which itself disadvantages already-disadvantaged Australians by funnelling resources to highly profitable STEM and health programs in regional universities that favour students from advantaged backgrounds (see Appendix B).

We commend policy intentions that put regional disadvantage and educational inequity at their heart. We praise the Universities Accord Interim Report for paying attention to the needs of regional Australia and to redressing issues of educational disadvantage that disproportionately affect regional Australians. We also applaud the Interim Report for recommending the reversal of—and Education Minister Jason Clare for immediately ceasing—the 50% Pass Rule introduced by the JRG, given its poor equity impacts. We salute the Interim Report for shining a light on the poor working culture within Australia's higher education institutions.

Yet we call for a final report that more clearly demonstrates an understanding of current system inequities and seeks to reverse them. We continue to call attention to the way the current higher education system in Australia multiplies disadvantage by an inequitable distribution of resources across the sector. Because of these factors, we are concerned by the following perceived shortcomings in the Interim Report:

1. That little to no attention has been paid to the dramatically low public investment in higher education in Australia (see Appendix 3) to ensure HE in Australia is well positioned to serve the public good, both in metropolitan and in regional Australia.
2. That the student voice was not strong enough in the Interim Report and that regional Australian universities and regional Australian voices were represented generically instead of specifically within the interim report.
3. That not enough is being proposed to address structural disadvantage that besets the entire Australian higher education system by understanding the unique challenges faced by regional universities and regional HASS programs in particular to continue to deliver and enhance their place-based missions.
4. That education, a key tool of 'soft diplomacy,' is not being expressed or leveraged in the Interim Report in ways that acknowledge growing political divides between rural/regional and metro Australia.
5. That the Accord does not appear to acknowledge the unique and crucial role regional HASS education plays in shoring up Australia's democracies, fostering regional resilience, working with First Nations communities, and embracing First Nations' knowledges, developing human and social capital in regional, rural, and remote Australia, or contributing to the economic and social wellbeing of their communities and the nation.
6. That the Accord does not appear to suggest ways that STEM-based solutions should be incentivised to work with HASS-based human- and society-centred models and understandings and research approaches.
7. That the Accord does not yet seem to address the ways in which students from regional Australia who move to metropolitan Australia compound the brain-drain that has beset regional Australia since 1927, the first census in which metropolitan Australia outperformed rural and regional Australia economically and in terms of population and services.
8. That nothing is yet suggested in the Interim Report by way of strengthening regional university research capacity and infrastructure, such as a Regional ARC.
9. That not enough is being done to ease the financial burden of disadvantaged regional Australians to enter higher education or remain in it without financial duress. A differential tuition fee plan does not seem to be on the table, as we previously proposed, where higher Commonwealth Contributions for regional Australians could discount regional university tuition fees in ways that would attract students to regional Australian universities and grow their EFTSL and capacity. Nor is it acknowledged that HASS fields provide important enabling pathways for first-in-family, Indigenous, disabled, female, mature, and low-SES university students who name financial stress in QILT indicators for key reason they leave or consider leaving higher education.
10. That not enough has been done to recognise that the Job-Ready Graduate legislation continues to compound this disadvantage in ways that are passing on \$45,000 student debts to the most diverse and disadvantaged cohort of students and future students in regional Australia—those who study or are most likely to study the humanities, creative arts, and social sciences.
11. That the interim Report has not proposed a Regional Higher Education Think-Tank or resourced a body to represent and shore up higher education quality and provision in regional and rural Australia, for example by reinstating the Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT).
12. That issues such as wellbeing and student support are not extrinsic to HASS programs but are their bread and butter and that more needs to be done to recognise and empower the expertise of HASS academics to work with adjacent services in wellbeing, careers, and student support in regional HE.
13. That universities and HASS programs that serve Australia's regional north need to benefit from the kind of economies of scale which benefit a handful of metropolitan universities in Australia's south.

Proposed Solutions

We call for the following measures:

1. A Final Report that has clearly spoken to regional students, regional future students, regional academics, and other stakeholders on the front line of Australia's education system based in and serving Australia's regions. We hope for a Final Report that has clearly listened to their voices and needs, not just for better STEM education or better ways students can access educational facilities, but which more clearly understands the compounded disadvantage of the nationally funded and nationally regulated higher education system for rural and regional students and universities who need to be front and centre.
2. An immediate reversal of the Jobs-Ready Graduate program's inequitable differential tuition fees which disproportionately affect already-disadvantaged (existing and future) students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. Disadvantaged students are highly represented in the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences and \$45,000 tuition fees not only send the wrong message about the value of the humanities but also burden students from low-SES backgrounds with more debt, or worse—prevent them from studying in universities at all.
3. The funding of higher education research targeted at enhancing higher education equity in Australia, and especially targeted at improving regional higher education attainment, access, and student retention in ways that restore regional higher education institutions to serve their comprehensive higher education missions in their communities.
4. A radical reimagining of tuition fees, such as differentially discounted tuition fees for regional universities, instead of for different disciplines. Heavily discounted tuition in all programs at regional universities will create a gold-rush effect of student migration to the regions, instead of out of the regions. At the very least, a real strategy to stop the regional brain-drain needs to be addressed in the Final Report of the Accord.
5. An r-ARC (Regional ARC) to improve the level of research funding and research capacity at regional universities in Australia.
6. That the Accord begins to think more actively about not just how to structure and incentivise the VET sector and the university sector to work together but also how to incentivise the well-resourced STEM disciplines of the current higher education system to embrace their HASS colleagues. STEM-based solutions might be better incentivised to work with HASS-based human- and society-centred models and research approaches to address the wicked problems that face us now and in the future. Ways to protect the comprehensive nature of higher education in Australia need to be better designed into resource distribution models across the sector and within higher education institutions themselves.
7. The reinstatement of the OLT or similar to provide grants and incentives for academics to enhance their teaching and learning practice, especially for diverse students and in regional Australia.
8. That the interim Report has not proposed a Regional Higher Education Think-Tank or resourced a body to represent, shore up, and protect higher education quality and provision in regional and rural Australia.
9. Reinstatement of Australia's public investment in higher education to bring Australia in line with other OECD nations.
10. A broader inquiry into the culture of workplace dysfunction at universities and in regional universities in particular.
11. The resourcing and recognition of the unique voice and role of the newly formed Northern Australian Universities Alliance to work with the place-based mission of regional HASS programs to better serve the unique development needs of Australia's north.

Across the sector, Humanities in the Regions is alone in providing a powerful and unique role in enriching and enhancing regional higher education in these fields. We call on funding for regionally centred and regionally focused higher education policy and research to align with three priority areas:

1. To better measure, articulate, and shore up the **value** of humanities, creative arts, and social science education in regional Australia for local and national communities, industries, stakeholders, and future students since these areas enrol the greatest proportion of Australia's disadvantaged student cohort and provide critical pathways to social and economic improvement.
2. To better understand the unique educational needs and concerns of diverse and disadvantaged regional Australians and **improve and enhance the capacity of regional HASS education** to meet these needs and concerns; and
3. To work with the Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences, Humanities in the Regions, and Industry bodies to meaningfully link regional HASS students and HASS programs with local industry and **the world of work**.

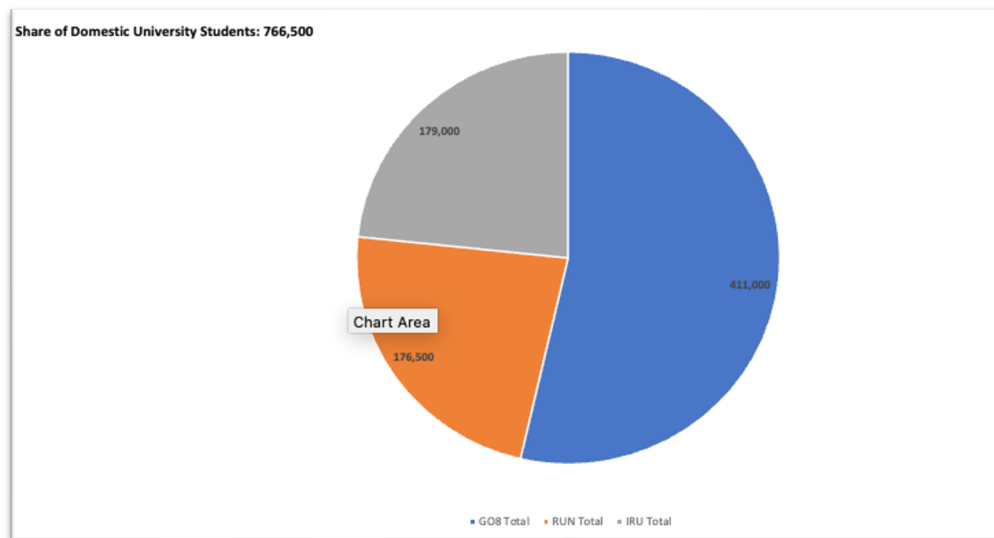
National education policy, as UK education researchers Sarah Hayes et al. noted in "Raising Regional Academic Voices (Alongside Data)" (2021) often paradoxically and unwittingly compounds the drivers of educational disadvantage for regional communities and citizens by reifying national discourses that fail to adequately account for and listen to the distinctness of regional voices. In its present state, the Accord is at risk of failing to adequately raise and listen to the distinctness of Australia's regional voices.

Without proximity to centres of power and lacking the leverage of well-funded think-tanks, regional stakeholders and local voices are at significant risk of being drowned out this once-in-a-lifetime discussion of Australia's higher education, even within the internal conversations of nationally based peak bodies that seek to represent them. As a result, national policy frameworks, as Hayes et al. note, risk furthering 'territorially agnostic discourse about universities, downplay institutional history and purpose, risk concealing innovative practices, and fail to tackle entrenched inequalities.'

We are grateful that the Accord panel took time to visit UNE and offer a roundtable to students and academics. However, regional HASS voices are still not being adequately consulted or heard.

The Crisis Facing Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences in Regional Australia

Metropolitan Australia dominates policy conversations. With 65% of the overall population based in Australia's 5 major cities, demand-driven higher education funnels the greatest resources into its eight most prestigious universities, in ways that continue to privilege to Go8.

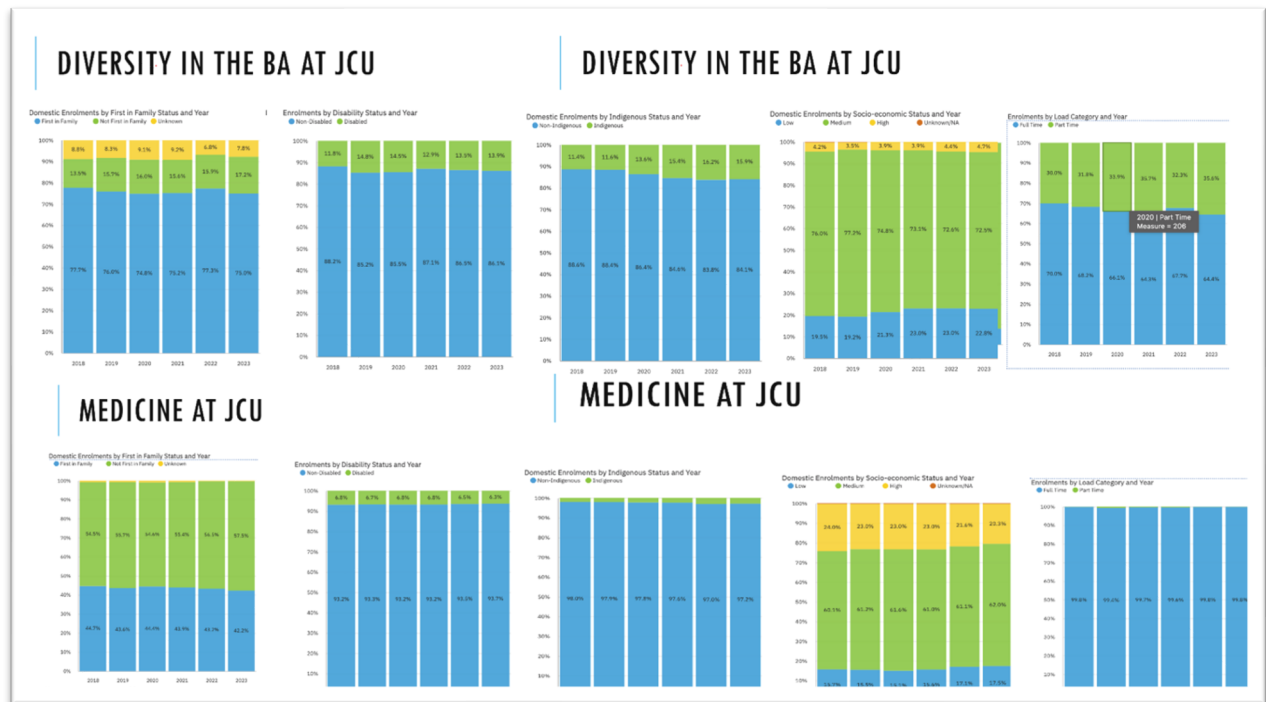


Appendix 1: Domestic Student Enrolment Numbers, Go8 vs RUN and IRU

Long beset by inequalities of resource distribution across the higher education (HE) sector in Australia where a handful of well-resourced metropolitan universities are able to offer more programs with sleeker systems accompanied by better scholarships schemes and sexier recruitment campaigns, Australia's regional universities have been plagued by "race to the bottom" economic vicious circles. Meanwhile, Australia's metropolitan universities have been enjoying the benefits of rich-get-richer economic returns.

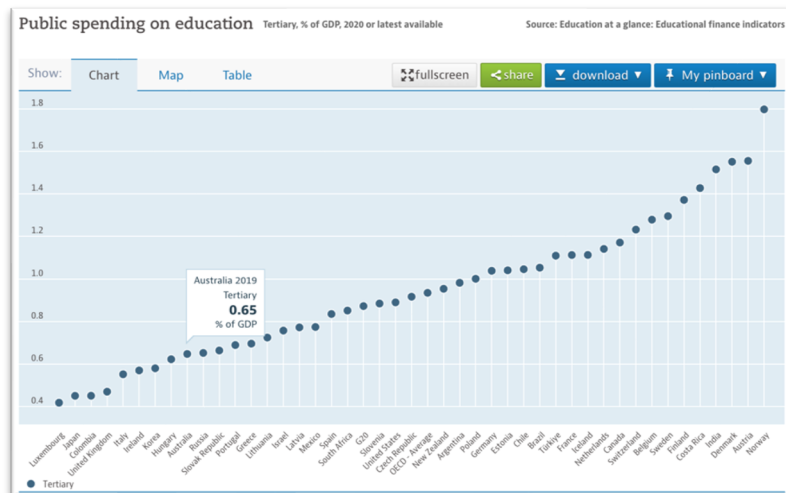
As the government has divested educational investment from Australian HE (see Appendix 3) and shifted universities into profit-driven models, programs that clearly offer students and therefore universities large economic dividends on their tuition—such as medicine and health sciences, law, engineering, IT, and business, including of course international student education, have become significant drivers of university revenue. The problem is these profit-driven areas do not enrol anywhere near the same proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds as HASS programs do.

As a case in point, we provide a comparison and contrast between the Bachelor of Medicine and the Bachelor of Arts at James Cook University (JCU) in Far North Queensland. In the Bachelor of Arts, 75% of enrolled students are first in family to university, and many are the first in their family to graduate from high school. In contrast, only 42% of Bachelor of Medicine students at the same university are first in their family to university. In the Bachelor of Arts at JCU, 13.9% of students register with a disability, in contrast to 6.3% of students in the Bachelor of Medicine degree and 6.7% nation-wide. In the Bachelor of Medicine at JCU, 20.3% of students are from high SES backgrounds, as opposed to only 4.7% in the Bachelor of Arts who come from high SES backgrounds. And 15.9% of JCU's Bachelor of Arts students come from an Indigenous background, in contrast to 2.7% in the Bachelor of Medicine at the same university. These statistics paint a stark picture of contrast between wealthy areas of the university driven by high student demand which overwhelmingly privilege already privileged students, and less well-resourced areas of the university which serve the public good and which attract disadvantaged students, who continually bear the highest burden of student debt and other markers of disadvantage including but not limited to program, subject, and resource cuts—even as HASS programs are the cheapest to deliver.



Appendix 2: Diversity and Equity in the Regional Bachelor of Arts Program

According to the Grattan Institute, in 2018, the Commonwealth Government spent less in real terms of tuition subsidies than it did the year before, creating a drop in direct education investment to students for the first time since 2003. Of the OECD countries, Australia contributes one of the lowest proportions of total GDP in public spending toward higher education, significantly lower than the G20 average, shamefully behind Russia and only slightly in advance of Hungary: taking its place in the last 10 of the top 50 countries for public spending on higher education.



Appendix 3: OECD Public Funding for Higher Education (2020) - Australia is in the last quartile of spending

Source: OECD Spending, <https://data.oecd.org/eduresource/public-spending-on-education.htm#indicator-chart>

In this profit-driven system, shifts in perceived relevance (Kuttainen 2022) of humanities, arts, and social sciences mean HASS education now receives the smallest proportion of student contribution and government contribution at Australian universities, leading to imbalances in comprehensive education provision and educational capacity, which are compounded at regional universities like James Cook where 43.1% of the overall student population is enrolled in health and less than 2% of the student population is enrolled in creative arts, for example.

Table 1: Share of enrolment by university and broad field of education, 2021²¹

Institution	Agriculture Environmental and Related Studies	Architecture and Building	Creative Arts	Education	Engineering and Related Technologies	Health	Information Technology	Management and Commerce	Natural and Physical Sciences	Society and Culture
Australian Catholic University	0.03%	0.00%	1.95%	23.74%	0.26%	39.85%	0.67%	4.39%	7.01%	22.09%
Bond University	0.22%	3.49%	2.93%	0.94%	0.19%	45.40%	1.56%	12.12%	5.72%	27.44%
Charles Darwin University	0.51%	0.69%	6.96%	13.77%	2.34%	34.64%	3.52%	2.84%	12.71%	22.02%
Charles Sturt University	4.79%	0.05%	2.82%	15.04%	0.48%	21.51%	3.23%	5.63%	10.40%	36.04%
CQUniversity	0.99%	1.16%	5.26%	12.13%	5.47%	33.77%	2.79%	9.16%	14.80%	14.47%
Curtin University	0.67%	4.92%	10.21%	12.16%	7.11%	20.76%	3.50%	12.72%	13.24%	14.70%
Deakin University	1.41%	2.10%	5.77%	8.49%	2.22%	17.34%	5.02%	12.53%	12.41%	32.70%
Edith Cowan University	0.50%	0.02%	8.72%	30.09%	2.44%	23.10%	5.80%	6.92%	7.15%	15.25%
Federation University Australia	1.16%	0.00%	4.47%	18.51%	2.65%	32.17%	3.72%	7.36%	11.59%	18.36%
Flinders University	0.31%	0.00%	6.56%	8.62%	3.81%	32.38%	2.36%	4.85%	15.27%	25.85%
Griffith University	0.87%	1.20%	10.73%	8.02%	3.62%	15.50%	2.68%	14.09%	13.58%	29.70%
James Cook University	0.79%	0.33%	1.90%	6.94%	3.33%	43.71%	3.71%	6.30%	17.19%	15.81%
La Trobe University	2.94%	0.12%	2.50%	8.97%	1.19%	35.29%	3.49%	8.88%	13.67%	22.93%
Macquarie University	0.99%	0.16%	5.06%	6.72%	2.06%	4.88%	6.31%	20.27%	12.86%	40.69%
Monash University	0.73%	1.33%	4.55%	6.06%	6.26%	16.11%	4.45%	10.98%	20.24%	29.29%
Murdoch University	2.44%	0.12%	4.58%	10.27%	1.80%	15.66%	4.40%	4.75%	19.09%	36.89%
Queensland University of Technology	0.51%	4.55%	9.91%	8.12%	7.44%	14.00%	7.43%	15.30%	10.60%	22.15%
RMIT University	1.00%	6.83%	14.22%	2.37%	13.43%	6.83%	8.38%	18.27%	10.86%	17.79%
Southern Cross University	2.21%	0.07%	7.50%	13.68%	1.40%	21.74%	1.35%	11.58%	17.78%	22.70%
Swinburne University of Technology	0.00%	1.14%	16.70%	17.95%	10.13%	3.91%	7.81%	14.84%	7.16%	20.36%
The Australian National University	2.85%	0.00%	4.09%	0.05%	3.99%	5.13%	5.00%	5.69%	17.86%	55.35%
The University of Adelaide	2.75%	1.31%	6.45%	2.26%	8.81%	19.93%	4.24%	8.96%	17.74%	27.53%
The University of Melbourne	3.27%	3.42%	10.36%	6.16%	3.92%	14.94%	3.15%	10.33%	17.18%	27.26%
The University of New England	3.54%	0.81%	3.79%	17.82%	0.24%	8.04%	1.96%	7.22%	15.86%	40.71%
The University of Newcastle	1.52%	5.23%	5.50%	12.30%	6.46%	22.71%	1.71%	6.65%	16.37%	21.54%
The University of Notre Dame Australia	0.35%	0.17%	3.30%	21.27%	0.00%	33.86%	0.00%	5.91%	6.99%	28.14%
The University of Queensland	3.70%	1.32%	4.10%	3.17%	9.61%	20.52%	2.86%	8.55%	20.28%	25.89%
The University of Sydney	1.13%	2.30%	6.95%	4.69%	7.33%	23.60%	3.47%	8.76%	14.97%	26.81%

21 Initial analysis provided by Professor Alan Pettigrew

Source: 'Challenges and Opportunities for the Higher Education System,' Australian Universities Accord Discussion Paper: February 2023, p.14. Highlights our own.

Appendix 4: Drops in Public Investment in Higher Education drive public-facing HASS programs into extinction.

Demand-driven higher education models in Australia that rely on shamefully low levels of public higher education investment are creating a situation in which regional universities are becoming unviable in everything except high-return programs like medicine. University leaderships are happy to continue to cut low-return programs like humanities, arts, and social science to maximise their own profits and minimise their own cost-bearing. The Commonwealth of Australia must bear some of these costs in order to return regional universities to the heyday they once were in the 1970s and 80s, when IRU and RUN institutions opened their arms to regional Australians. Without that investment, they become uncompetitive with metropolitan institutions.

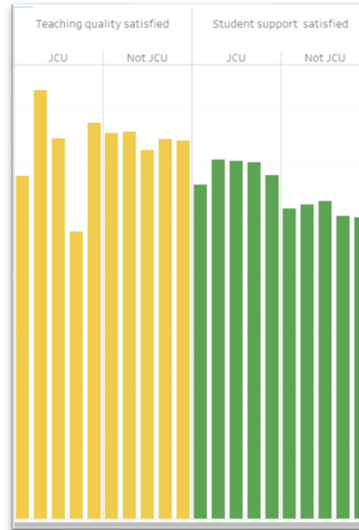
Students who cannot travel to metropolitan universities lose out. So do regional universities and regional communities more broadly. This vicious cycle significantly contributes to an environment of routine restructures and redundancies at regional universities in Australia and is a major reason why regional higher education providers are poor employers. Instead, with sustained public investment, regional universities can be returned to being the centres of regional community culture and wellbeing which they once were.

We believe that the nation is ill-served by the retreat of HASS programs into a handful of well-resourced metropolitan institutions and STEM programs, as well as by private for-profit demand-driven models. Alongside our colleagues across the humanities in Australia and worldwide, we call on the government to recognise the social and cultural dividends paid to society as a whole by better investing in truly comprehensive educations, in which creative arts, humanities, and social sciences have important roles to play. We are stronger together.

The pandemic was not just a public health crisis. It was also a public education crisis. During and after the pandemic, it became clear that humanities, arts, and social sciences (HASS) programs at regional universities across Australia had shifted into full-blown emergency: in just a handful of examples among many more, students at Charles Sturt University faced the loss of 116 degrees; students at the University of Western Australia were blindsided by the slashing of programs that built regional capacity to redress topics like racism, social and economic disadvantage, and climate change; Federation University reacted to the news of the closure of its Bachelor of Arts; and James Cook University closed its languages and creative arts courses.

The problem is not a student satisfaction issue. QILT analytics (Appendix 5) clearly reveal that regional HASS higher education providers are better designed and equipped than generic metropolitan programs to provide the kind of educational support needed for their students.

QILT Analytics: Year 2018-2022
Society and Culture (Humanities and Social Sciences)



Source: QILT SES Student Experience Survey Responses,
Society and Culture, James Cook University

Appendix 5: Student Satisfaction Levels in Regional HASS Programs

These statistics also show that regional higher education providers were disproportionately affected by the sudden economic and systemic shock to business as usual wrought by the pandemic, a predicament American academic Celia Orphan, who heads a think-tank on regional higher education, predicted when she noted in 2020 that regional universities, like the regions they serve, are particularly vulnerable to recession and must be better protected from fluctuations in the economy.

Australia's regions are best equipped to offer a tailored, community-serving higher education program for regional students in which they will be most likely to see their lives and their stories reflected in the education they receive. That is because Australia's regional institutions overwhelmingly enrol the highest proportion of first-in-family, First Nations, low-SES, and disabled students and they know how to cater for their wellbeing, not by pathologizing their problems, but by helping them see their lives within larger structures of structural disadvantage and changing these systems from within. Australia's regional institutions are best equipped to position these students to truly serve the lives and communities of regional Australia. That is because what regional universities teach and research is different from their metropolitan counterparts, and what big universities research and teach is not necessarily what regional people relate to.

HASS educators in regional Australia are best equipped to address the multipliers of regional social, educational, health, and economic disadvantage in regional Australia. Yet HASS higher education must be better resourced to address issues that matter to the lives of our regional students and regional communities by ensuring that educational inequity is better understood as a societal and structural problem—not just a problem facing individuals.

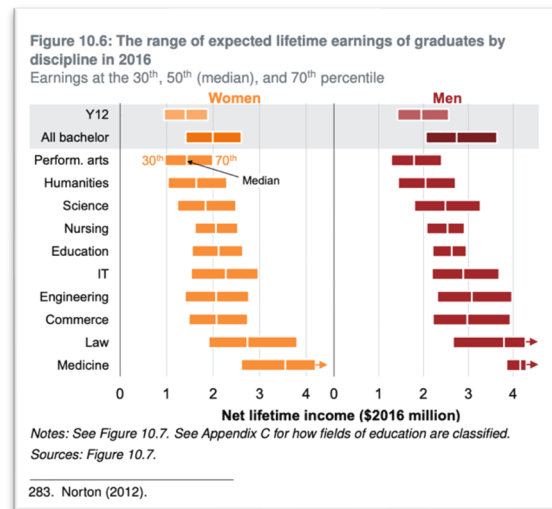
The humanities, arts, and social sciences have long offered complementary human and social-centred perspectives that enhance the scientific and profit-seeking perspectives of other disciplines. We call on the Accord to recognise the important roles played by HASS higher education as an engine of regional culture, in the development of regional social and cultural capital, and in promoting healthy democracies, and to fund regional HASS education accordingly.

Not requiring the expensive equipment or high-tech labs of some other disciplines, HASS is the lowest-cost field in terms of higher education delivery. Yet the current JRG differential tuition fee scheme makes it one of the most expensive fields of study for current and future students.

Instead of passing on cost-savings to students who enrol in low-delivery-cost fields, like HASS, the current JRG allows universities to profit from passing on costs to students. This is inequitable.

What's more, it sends the wrong message to the public about the value of HASS fields of study and divests a crucial aspect of Australia's higher education ecology from being best equipped to prepare the next generation to address the wicked global problems that face Australia's regions and the world.

Despite the claims made by the JRG about the low returns on investment for higher education, fields of humanities, arts, and society HASS graduates contribute significantly to the economic wellbeing of the nation, and HASS graduates in regional Australia play critical roles in the economic and cultural wellbeing of their communities.



Source: Grattan Report, 2018

Appendix 6: Expected Lifetime Earnings for HASS Graduates

As a consortium of Australian teaching-focused HASS researchers based in regional universities, we recognise the powerfully intertwined nature of our research and teaching activities informed by and serving our unique place-based missions. We recognise and respect that regional Australian communities are best equipped to solve their own problems and best positioned to contribute to more equitable solutions to complex global issues that are compounded in the regions.

We commend the Interim Report of the Australian Universities Accord panel for recognising and shoring up the powerful role that higher education plays in social mobility, economic prosperity, cultural development, soft diplomacy and strategic security, creativity, and innovation.

But we call for a better deal.

Regional institutions, regional humanities, regional citizens, and regional communities deserve better. Especially in a report that foregrounds regional educational inequity.

Regional Australians deserve a voice, a place at the table, and the kind of tools and resources that can help them shape an education that gives them a hope and a future: an education for regional Australia.