

Australian Universities Accord

University of Technology Sydney submission



Contents

Introduction	1
1 An enduring Accord – the balance between autonomy and diversity	2
1.1 The creation (or re-establishment) of a Tertiary Education Commission	2
2 Creating opportunity for all Australians – a National Equity and Diversity Strategy	4
3 Growing a culture of lifelong learning	6
3.1 Postgraduate funding	6
4 A fit-for-purpose funding approach	8
4.1 Single block fund grant	8
4.2 Australian Technology Network’s simplified block funding system supported by activity-based funding to enable growth	8
4.3 Third stream activity funding	8
4.4 International student revenue levy	9
5 Connection between the vocational education and training & higher education systems	10
6 A First Nations focus – research and education excellence	11
7 The student experience – aligning the future of work and learning	13
8 Incentivising industry collaboration – a National Innovation Strategy	15
9 Enabling impactful research	17
Contact details	18
Appendix	19
U@Uni Academy program	19
Wanago Program (short for ‘Want to go’)	19
Institute of Applied Technology - Digital	19
NSW Education and Training Model	19
UTS Startups	19
SME@UTS	20
Indigenous Residential College	20
Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research	20
Student Partnership Agreement 2022-2024	20
Learner Experience Lab	20
UTS Tech Lab	20

Introduction

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) appreciates the opportunity to provide ideas and insights on the future of Australia's higher education system. There are aspects of Australia's higher education system that are world-class. It is sought after by students from all over the world and is comprised of leading academics across all fields of research and endeavour. There is much to be celebrated and protected.

The Accord Panel's Discussion Paper, however, effectively sets out the case for change in a range of areas. UTS agrees that many elements of the current system, particularly the way the system is funded, are no longer fit for purpose given the major role universities play in the economy, in our communities, and in the creation and translation of knowledge in Australia, now and into the future. The rationale for changes to the current system is also more urgent given Australia faces huge adaptive challenges related to climate change and sustainability, growing inequality (including within the education sector), a need for productivity growth and geopolitical uncertainty to name just a few. Since universities play a pivotal role in solving these issues, it is timely to consider bold ideas for reform.

A shift within Australia to viewing education as something that people take part in throughout their lives is also vital to addressing these challenges. This means policy, funding and regulatory settings must fundamentally change to help Australians, and Australia, take advantage of the many benefits that accrue from a pervasive culture of lifelong learning.

This submission focusses on areas where UTS believes there are major issues that could be addressed by policy and/or funding changes, rather than re-prosecuting why the system needs to change.

UTS is a member of the Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN), Universities Australia (UA) and the NSW Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NSWVCC). UTS has contributed to the ideas put forward by these groups and is broadly supportive of their recommendations and ideas.

This submission is structured around the key recommendations UTS is making to the Panel. These recommendations include ideas such as:

1. The creation of a Tertiary Education Commission to oversee a robust, long-term and stable framework for universities to operate within.
2. A National Equity and Diversity Strategy that considers legislated equity targets, the lifting of enrolment caps for defined equity cohorts and a review of student financial support.
3. The introduction of a levy on international student revenue, matched by government, to create a shared resource for funding agreed university priorities and managing the risk of major changes in student revenue.
4. The introduction of a single block fund grant to stabilise baseline funding for universities.
5. Explicit funding opportunities for infrastructure and programs, including those that support Indigenous education and attainment.
6. A National Innovation Strategy to strengthen university/industry collaboration for the benefit of research, the economy, and students.
7. The introduction of income contingent loans, or a lifetime learning allowance, to make it easier for people and organisations to invest in lifelong learning.
8. Investment in innovative models of VET/university collaboration.

In addition, a range of case studies highlighting programs or approaches that UTS considers instructive can be found in the appendix.

1 An enduring Accord – the balance between autonomy and diversity

The Accord should explicitly recognise the three key features that underpin Australian universities: education and research (both domestic and international) and the contribution universities make to their communities. Clarity and re-articulation of purpose will help the university sector make choices and communicate our individual missions and associated civic duty when it comes to addressing local, national and international priorities. A shared view – between governments, universities, students, industry, unions, and communities – will assist the sector to partner and deliver education, research and other initiatives to the benefit of all key stakeholders and society.

There has been much discussion about the merits or otherwise of a more diverse university sector. Notwithstanding the clear differences that exist in individual universities' missions and operating environments, UTS supports encouraging greater specialisation that may improve student choice, research outcomes and provide greater benefits to the communities that individual universities serve. This diversification is best achieved by incentivising particular elements of university missions, and that those missions are shaped by institutional agreements with government and other stakeholders. For example, UTS's commitment to social justice, excellence in Indigenous education and research, and the role of technology in society is at our core. Innovation, creativity and technology infuse everything we do. Our mission was developed in consultation with our community and guides our major investments and activities.

There is also a critical need for the sector to be supported in offering a diversity of educational experiences, including through support and frameworks for shorter forms of learning and by facilitating greater mobility between school, TAFE and university.

UTS supports the need for recognising and enabling greater diversification and recommends this be achieved by allowing diversity to flourish through the design of the system and funding drivers. Institutional autonomy, supported by sound governance frameworks that allow the deployment of resources towards each university's mission and purpose, should be protected.

In terms of the nature and shape of the Accord, the ATN has proposed (and UTS agrees) with an 'Accord of Accords' with each university detailing their expected contribution to national needs, providing the funding or agreeing the revenue sources to deliver that contribution, and outlining indicators of expected performance.

1.1 The creation (or re-establishment) of a Tertiary Education Commission

The challenges and opportunities facing the university sector are complex. There is a pressing need for a robust long-term and stable framework for universities to operate within. Given the 12-month timeframe for the Accord process, further work will be required to deliver appropriate strategies, policies and funding in relation to several priority areas. UTS **recommends** the Accord re-establish an independent body to oversee this work and provide advice and information to government on the implementation of wide-ranging, long-term and critical reforms to the higher education sector.

The independent body – a Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) – should be responsible for:

- Overseeing and monitoring the implementation of the Accord, including planned revisions of the Accord and how individual accords support each university's mission.
- Overseeing funding allocations to support national and institutional priorities in a transparent manner.
- Administering programs and grants related to the Accord in line with government policy.
- Maintaining and communicating an overall understanding of the national skills surplus/deficit, pipeline and available places across the tertiary education sector.
- Developing ideas, analysis, and research (like the Productivity Commission) for consideration by government and the sector.

- Improving integration between vocational education and training (VET) and higher education and aligning state and national approaches to support better alignment.
- Developing a new generation of tertiary education sector experts with the ability to advise government and the Minister on relevant legislation, policy and regulation.

The TEC should not be a regulatory agency and should not displace or subsume the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).

2 Creating opportunity for all Australians – a National Equity and Diversity Strategy

UTS believes that for Australia to be a prosperous, fair and egalitarian society it should have a university system in which all Australians can successfully participate. Structural inequalities mean that for this to be achieved, equity interventions must occur at every stage of the education continuum, from early childhood education, through primary and secondary schooling, into a 'lifetime of learning' ecosystem with principles of equity and access at its core.

A reinvigorated focus on improving access, participation and success for underrepresented cohorts in university study to better reflect the diversity of the Australian population should be a national priority. This includes the funding of places for such groups, the provision of institutional funding to support positive outcomes and access by individual students to relevant living and other support. Targets should be agreed with universities according to their mission and linked to a national target in a way that ensures all universities are playing a role in delivering what should be a national priority.

The current situation is not meeting aspirations. The Bradley Review's target of 20% of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level be people from low SES backgrounds has not been met. The participation rate of low SES students in higher education still sits at around 16% nationally as of 2021 (participation was at its highest in 2017 at 17%).

In addition to this, the higher education sector is showing signs of socio-economic segregation. An analysis by Emeritus Professor Alan Pettigrew found that 15 universities (out of 42) educate almost 60% of the total low SES student population. 11 universities educate almost 60% of Australia's rural and regional students. The equity-focussed universities also tend to be those with less international student income and lower research block grant funding. Those with the highest level of research block grant funding have the lowest equity student numbers.

Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) equity support funding never reached the promised 4% target of the Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) because of cuts and adjustments since 2012. HEPPP was around 1.8% of CGS (including enabling and regional loadings) as of 2021. The current total allocation sits at approximately \$145 million nationally which is inadequate to support parity of student success. A reform of the system should address structural and cultural conditions hindering equity groups to transition into university and then support universities to make sure those students succeed.

UTS **recommends** the development of a National Student Equity Strategy to build equity and access as core principles across the lifetime of learning. The development of the strategy would also allow for the consolidation of key equity findings from concurrent reviews such as the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into the Early Childhood Education and Care system and the appointment of the expert panel to inform a better and fairer education system (Schools Funding Review).

In relation to the Accord, the National Student Equity Strategy should cover the following:

- A raising of ambition in relation to the Bradley Review's equity participation targets, with a view to creating new nationwide equity targets that reflect population parity, as well as an appropriate level of HEPPP.
- A review of the 'Partnerships' component of HEPPP to support collaborative programs and shared responsibility for widening participation across universities, schools and communities. The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education provides a good model of practice for a future cross-sector approach.
- Legislated equity funding to provide medium to long-term commitment to institutions to enable the access, participation and success of students from targeted equity groups.
- The examination of lifting enrolment caps for defined equity cohorts such as students from a low SES background, in line with agreed targets.
- A review of student financial support: the current study support initiatives, including Abstudy, Austudy, Youth Allowance and the Tertiary Access Payment Scheme are complex, resulting in gaps of students being eligible for such support.

- A review of pathways into university to understand which have succeeded at increasing access and ensuring student success. Case studies of U@Uni and the Wanago Program are in the Appendix but further detail on these innovative programs can be provided to the Panel on a confidential basis.
- A review of enabling programs and where they have been used most effectively, particularly in relation to where they can support non-school leavers.
- Exploration of additional investment in national graduate employability programs for students from underrepresented backgrounds.
- A review of the financial study support available to students to enable better access to work integrated learning opportunities (including clinical placements). Placement opportunities are usually offered on an unpaid basis and such a support scheme (perhaps named WIL-HELP if provided on an income-contingent basis) could assist students by providing a stipend while on placement; a rental subsidy and/or free public transport for students travelling to work placements.

The proposals put forward by the ATN are strongly supported by UTS and include:

- The creation of a National Participation Fund to help fund students' living costs and to allow them to focus on study, improve retention and completion rates, and help accelerate students' careers.
- The distribution of equity funds to shift from a formula driven allocation of a limited quantum of funds to a block grant designed to enable a university to provide adequate and ongoing support as part of its third stream of activity. It is important however that strong accountability is built into the funding designated to support equity cohorts.
- That all First Nations Australians can access a demand driven student place under the CGS.
- That the 50% 'low completion rate' rule that denies students (often vulnerable students) a Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP) or HELP loan be removed.

3 Growing a culture of lifelong learning

Traditional models of university degrees will continue to provide the foundation for the acquisition of disciplinary and professional skills including skills associated with critical thinking, learning how to learn, and working in diverse teams. But we are already serving a cohort of learners who want (and need) to learn and work simultaneously and continue to learn over the course of their career. The higher education sector of the future must support these new modes of delivery, as well as students' ability to navigate university and vocational education seamlessly. Importantly, universities must partner with employers to ensure that their interests and needs are reflected in these new models of education.

First and foremost, this requires standards and an ongoing funding source for micro-credentials and short courses to allow the sector to respond quickly to the changing needs of the economy and society.

There is at present no 'currency' for lifelong learning and no constant, clear funding framework. It is incumbent on the lifetime learner to outlay a sometimes considerable amount to undertake important skilling which may be critical to changing careers, progressing within their current career to meet new demands, or to innovate as roles evolve. Major equity issues arise given these opportunities are only available to individuals or employees of businesses who can pay for them. In NSW, the State Government is tackling this through the Institutes of Applied Technology (IAT) and the New Education and Training Model (NETM) – both of which heavily subsidise the cost of microcredentials for learners.

UTS **recommends** that models such as the IAT and NETM should be evaluated and, if successful, replicated and supported by the Federal Government. Case studies for the IAT and NETM are in the appendix.

Other **recommendations** to support lifelong learning include:

- Introducing income contingent loans, or a lifetime learning allowance, to make it easier for people and organisations to invest in structured and reorganised lifelong learning beyond formal undergraduate and postgraduate education.
- Supporting a national skills passport that allows accredited organisations to understand the skills attainment of individuals enrolled in their learning.
- Providing a regulated public register for microcredentials that is transparent, transferrable and government approved. This should tie into international learning markets where possible. The stackability of microcredentials or short courses towards formal qualifications needs to be clear and obvious – people should feel assured they are in an approved educational pathway no matter the end goal.
- Adjusting the AQF model to provide greater recognition and flexibility around microcredentials, and yet still provide assurances of quality. This would involve regulation around volume of learning, credit value, and assessment requirements.
- Professionalising the career adviser market so that people are not just focussed on the ATAR but are supporting students to look at what they need to do in relation to career development.
- Introducing microcredentials to students in high school to examine alternative accreditation to access tertiary study. For example, completion of microcredentials in high school might lead to ATAR adjustment or direct recognition of prior learning (RPL) into university degrees.

For the higher education sector to be responsive to evolving skills needs there must be intelligence to inform short-, medium-, and long-term planning and decision-making. The recently established Jobs and Skills Australia is a positive development for the provision of such intelligence, and will complement the work underway to review Australia's migration system and the crossover with the higher education system (e.g. opening pathways to permanent residency for international students qualified to fill vacancies, and recruitment of global talent in research).

3.1 Postgraduate funding

Finally, Commonwealth funding for postgraduate coursework has not been allocated strategically for some time. Arrangements were made to support the "Melbourne Model" at the time of its inception, providing a structured approach to undergraduate/postgraduate articulation. However, even in areas such as

architecture where the 3+2 model of undergraduate/postgraduate education is the norm, not all postgraduate places are funded by CSP and some students are required to pay the full cost (with loans available through FEE-HELP). This ad-hoc arrangement, compounded by previously designated places, has led to the non-strategic allocation of CSP places by universities. Moreover, given full fee rates are typically much higher than for CSP/student contribution rates, universities have very little incentive to initiate change. From the student perspective, domestic postgraduate coursework is an unaffordable prospect even though FEE-HELP is available.

Given the recent changes to the allocation of CSP for postgraduate coursework students, most places have been included in the current cap and can be reallocated at the discretion of each university. UTS **recommends** that:

- universities be allowed to swap undergraduate and postgraduate CSP under the funding cap to provide some flexibility in the application of those places;
- more places be allocated within the cap to support postgraduate education; and
- the Commonwealth allows universities to vary postgraduate student contributions upwards to match the total funding of a full-fee place.

In this way, students will pay less (by the amount of the CSP) than the full fee rate but the Commonwealth will not pay more.

Implementation could be achieved through an amendment to the CGS rules which currently prevent Table A providers from using their discretion to apply CSP as per their internal priorities.

4 A fit-for-purpose funding approach

The Discussion Paper acknowledges the current system relies on multiple revenue streams, with Government funding (direct grants for teaching, research and engagement) and student fees making up the largest components. The legacy of the current operating model compels universities to apply their various funding sources across all areas of their mission, and of necessity requires decisions by universities on cross-subsidisation guided by their mission.

There is broad agreement that the current model is not sustainable and heavily reliant on the financial margin from international student tuition fees. These fees are a significant contributor to university outcomes including the enhancement of the student and campus experience, research support and infrastructure investments.

In this context, UTS recommends consideration of either:

- a single block fund grant to replace the current combination of government funding; or
- the ATN's proposal to shift university funding to a mixture of block funding for agreed priorities and volume funding that scales with activity and opportunity.

Other complementary recommendations to either model could include:

- Third stream activity funding (outlined below)
- An international student revenue levy towards national priorities (outlined below).

4.1 Single block fund grant

Given the current complexity of funding arrangements for universities, UTS **recommends** the Panel commission detailed modelling and design work on a single block fund grant to replace the current combination of government funding (student funding and research funding, including research block grants, and other forms of support for infrastructure and targeted priorities). This would stabilise baseline funding for the sector as a whole while allowing universities to diversify according to their contextual imperatives. The block grants would be allocated over a three- or five-year funding cycle with annual review.

4.2 Australian Technology Network's simplified block funding system supported by activity-based funding to enable growth

UTS also **recommends** further exploration of the ATN's proposal to shift university funding to a mixture of block funding for agreed priorities and volume funding that scales with activity and opportunity. ATN supports the major features of the current system of volume-based teaching funding. This includes the current split of government and student contributions for most domestic undergraduate programs (52% government through the CGS and 48% student through HECS-HELP). However, ATN notes that there are aspects of the funding arrangements for teaching that need to be improved and are worth replicating here:

- There is a case for less differentiation in the level of student contributions required for different disciplines (or agreement for a uniform student contribution across all disciplines).
- Many STEM disciplines have had their overall funding rates substantially reduced and this is jeopardising their quality and viability.
- There is a variety of critical disciplines/specialities which universities find uneconomic due to low demand but are nevertheless of substantial economic or social importance.

4.3 Third stream activity funding

Universities are primarily funding and supporting third stream activities (the interaction of universities with the rest of society) themselves, or with modest external funding. For example, UTS has established the highly regarded UTS Start-Ups program and the SME@UTS program and has invested significantly in the

commercial translation of research. UTS also funds major initiatives in the social justice space and is committing significant funding to build Australia's first Indigenous Residential College. Every university will fund projects and initiatives that are core to their mission, but these sorts of investments are at risk during challenging financial times.

If Australia wants to build a more complex economy that harnesses the capabilities of an entrepreneurial higher education sector, there needs to be a significant uplift in funding to support third-stream and translation activities. This activity also includes much of the work universities do to support their local communities and is particularly important in rural and regional areas. UTS **recommends** that third-stream activities be embedded as a legitimate and essential element of the higher education system and funded accordingly. This stream of funding would be negotiated and agreed as part of the block grant model described above.

Case studies for UTS Startups, SME@UTS and the Indigenous Residential College are in the appendix.

4.4 International student revenue levy

The Discussion Paper recognised 'international education as an integral, necessary, and positive part of Australian higher education and the Australian community.' UTS agrees and will not re-prosecute all the reasons international education is beneficial to Australia and Australians (there are many), except to highlight that the financial margin from international education is a significant contributor to university outcomes across teaching and learning, research and infrastructure.

To create an environment in which government and universities collectively direct some share of funding to national priorities, UTS **recommends** implementing an international student revenue levy. Universities would contribute a share of international education revenue, the Federal Government would match this funding, and joint government/university agreements determine how funds are spent.

Implementation could be based on the following elements:

- Levy – a levy is imposed on all Australian universities who earn revenue above an agreed threshold (or proportion of teaching income or teaching load) from international student tuition fees in-country (i.e. excludes transnational education) to create a shared resource.
- Fund matching – funds raised via the levy are matched by an equal Commonwealth contribution.
- Funds management – pooled fund (i.e. university and Commonwealth contributions) are centrally held by the Commonwealth (managed by the proposed Tertiary Education Commission) and applied after negotiation with universities on their individual missions. A proportion of the total raised could also be invested in a 'Sovereign Risk Fund' as a contingency to be utilised during a period of crisis (a pandemic for example) where there is a material, medium-term deterioration in international student revenue.
- Funds usage – funds support agreed strategic priorities for the Australian university sector (priorities agreed with those members that were levied), including infrastructure.

This approach could help achieve some of the outcomes desired by government such as funding for equity cohorts based on how many equity students an institution is supporting; research and other university infrastructure; or support for enhancing domestic and international student experience. The funding would form part of the block grant negotiations.

5 Connection between the vocational education and training & higher education systems

As careers evolve and workforces reshape at a rapid pace, record numbers of people are seeking to skill and reskill in response to emerging industry needs and the future of work. There are also persistent and emerging skills shortages in the labour market. The rapidity of change highlights the importance of flexibility in labour markets, in labour mobility and within our post-school education system. There is significant potential for more collaboration between the VET sector and the university sector in developing education offerings that respond to a growth in jobs that require a different mix of skills than has traditionally been provided by either sector, and the interest from students for more flexible higher education options. Stronger collaboration is also essential to growing the number of First Nations students in higher education.

UTS is working closely with the NSW Government and TAFE NSW on initiatives that provide better opportunities for students in NSW and prepare them for a future of lifelong learning in a range of fields.

The Discussion Paper recognises that a strengthened tertiary system and the improvement of pathways for students within that system is a key area of reform for the Accord. UTS agrees and recommends the proposed Tertiary Education Commission be tasked with longer term work to achieve a more integrated system.

In the short term, UTS **recommends** that the Federal Government should closely examine models that are currently being piloted with a view to evaluating and investing in those that are successful and scalable. We particularly call the Panel's attention to the Institutes of Applied Technology (IAT) in NSW which were recently recommended by the Productivity Commission as an exemplar of good university, VET and industry collaboration.

Attempting to implement the IATs has highlighted some of the barriers that exist for TAFE/university collaboration at both the State and Federal level. Changes to current funding settings need to better incentivise collaboration, co-design and innovation across industry and providers, and provide students a smoother transition across different loan and fee settings. While these changes are longer-term, the IAT pilot partners have identified three priority areas for Accord consideration:

A Commonwealth co-contribution: targeted funding through a grant scheme-style co-contribution for development and delivery of innovative course offerings / curriculum under the IATs, with a focus on micro-credentials, to meet industry needs. A co-contribution for the IATs will enable development and delivery of additional micro-credentials, covering VET content, higher education content, or content from both. This would support the viability of innovative offerings and be an effective way to test and pilot agile course offerings.

Dedicated CSPs: new CSPs could be made available to the IATs, and other similar models in other States, during the next CGS funding period. This will incentivise the participation of university providers and make HECS support available for IAT students.

Clarity and flexibility on regulatory requirements: Support is required from the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) and TEQSA to facilitate the testing of flexible regulatory requirements under the IATs. The IATs are seeking to make use of a stackable qualification model, where students can progressively work from micro-credentials up to attainment of full qualifications. As a continuation of this, the IATs also seek to enable progression from VET Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas to Bachelor awards. The IATs need certainty regarding the recognition of qualifications awarded under this model. With its focus on work-integrated learning, the IATs would also benefit from greater inclusion of industry professionals in classrooms and teaching. Clarification on, and flexibility in, teaching requirements in VET and higher education would support this.

UTS sees great potential for additional IATs in areas of the economy that would benefit from skills through a collaborative university/industry/TAFE approach such as the low carbon transition; the caring economy (nursing, childcare, aged care, disability care); and defence-related skills related in part to recently announced AUKUS plans.

6 A First Nations focus – research and education excellence

Major Australian Government studies and extensive research identifies that higher education is critical in preparing Indigenous people for leadership roles and improving their life opportunities and health, education and economic outcomes.

The impact of educational attainment is not limited to the fortunes of graduates – it has an intergenerational impact that improves the life circumstances of immediate, extended family members and their communities for years to come. In Australia, Indigenous participation in education remains well below population parity.

At UTS, Indigenous education and employment is a shared responsibility of the entire university, embedded in everything from our plans and policies to the curriculum in every faculty. Our Indigenous Graduate Attribute Program utilises an Indigenous-led curriculum framework to embed Indigenous curricula. A team of Indigenous curriculum specialists leads a collaborative process working with academics across the university to develop content relevant to graduates' 'professional capability to work with and for Indigenous people' to guide content, curriculum and assessment.

Our successful Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research has provided academic, social, cultural and emotional support to Indigenous students for more than thirty years. Jumbunna also works with Indigenous communities across Australia, using these partnerships to advocate for change and do research with strong social impact.

UTS has one of the largest cohorts of Indigenous academics of any Australian university, and nationally significant cohorts of Indigenous professional staff and postgraduate research students; a result that has been driven by targeted policies and investments. Our strategies import a governance structure whereby every Dean at UTS has a personal responsibility to progress Indigenous targets within their faculty.

Despite these successes, the barriers for student entry to UTS remain high and although UTS has high levels of Indigenous student success, participation remains relatively low. To address this, and to drive and celebrate a culture of Indigenous excellence, UTS will build Australia's first truly comprehensive Indigenous Residential College (IRC).

The IRC will provide personal, pastoral and cultural support services to all its students, to enable them to thrive and succeed, reducing the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous success and completion. With an extensive range of programming to encourage academic excellence, pride in Indigenous identity and culture, nurture leadership and service potential, and promote global citizenship, the IRC will grow the next generation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders and equip them to shape and lead in Australian society.

UTS is currently working with a range of stakeholders in the Federal Government to secure a financial contribution to what we are confident will be a nationally significant institution. We know from extensive research that the additional supports the IRC will wrap around its Indigenous students are critical to increasing the number of students who attain a tertiary qualification. At present, there is no clear funding mechanism for a proposal such as this one.

UTS **recommends** the Panel consider explicit funding rounds for infrastructure and programs that support Indigenous education and attainment. In removing the financial barriers to higher education, coupled with addressing the increasing uncertainty of insecure housing in a major global city such as Sydney, we will remove the major impediments to increasing participation of Indigenous students. The IRC is a measure that will address these issues and enable students to thrive in an environment steeped in their own culture, traditions and beliefs.

Beyond support for the IRC and similar projects, UTS **recommends** the following initiatives to raise Indigenous higher education attainment:

- Uncapped CSPs for First Nations students and reduced fees (or fee free) for designated courses.
- Earlier intervention with schools given we know Indigenous aspiration building requires a far deeper level of engagement not only with the individual student but with the family and community more broadly. This may include a more collaborative approach with VET that maps out a tailored pathway.
- Providing more flexible and affordable options for short courses and micro-credentials which are particularly attractive for to people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds given

they allow more mobility, flexibility and engagement with both education and employment. Utilise best practice remote learning to deliver all or parts of courses 'On Country' allowing First Nations students to remain close to their family, cultural responsibilities, and decrease costs of living in major centres.

- Review the way Abstudy is funded when it comes to full time and part time study equivalent. This has major implications on whether a student, particularly mature age student, will consider study versus employment.
- Increase pathways for Indigenous Early Career Researchers.
- Provide more Laureate opportunities to deepen Indigenous research, leadership and evidence on issues of relevance to First Nations people and the nation.

Case studies for the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research and the Indigenous Residential College are in the Appendix.

7 The student experience – aligning the future of work and learning

Tertiary education students today, at all levels of study, bring a strong consumer lens to their expectations of the education provider. Students are aware they are making a significant investment of time and money to study, as well as incurring opportunity costs around employment and living standards. Consequently, they expect more of their chosen university and the government standards that underpin their experience. Students increasingly expect their learning experience to be personalised, adapted to their own life goals and career aspirations, learning styles, and personal interests. The challenge for universities is to create these rich individual student experiences at scale.

A first-class student experience should be at the heart of the Accord process. Indeed, this aspect underpins many of the recommendations in this submission. A positive and rewarding student experience will afford benefits in international education, engagement with postgraduate and lifelong learners, retention of low SES or First Nations students, and the willingness of students to contribute financially to their education. As such, UTS recognises the need to measure and quantify the student experience.

Objectively measuring the student experience is difficult and the challenges are well known, but surveys do provide a useful baseline indicator of student engagement, satisfaction and educational quality (e.g. the Student Experience Survey run by the Commonwealth Department of Education). These measurement instruments still have value and should continue to be part of the evaluation mix. However, each scale should be reviewed, based on existing research from the sector, updated to account for current student expectations, variations in institutional offerings, those support services that enable success for Australia's most vulnerable students, student safety and wellbeing broadly, and the national lifelong learning agenda.

Many UTS students, particularly undergraduate students who are yet to embark on their chosen careers, tell us that the campus experience, including face-to-face teaching, is very important to them. UTS is committed to providing a high-quality campus learning experience with a wide range of options to cater to students' extracurricular interests, including sports and social groups, spaces to meet and study, and services to support wellbeing. Conversely, our postgraduates tell us they value online learning options, as these are vital to balancing their work, family, social and lifelong learning commitments. UTS acknowledges that COVID-19 has caused significant change in the way all students expect to engage with learning. We are evolving our practices to ensure we retain our high engagement and high-quality utilising the physical campus and digital environments in combination to provide the best possible student experience.

UTS seeks to align the future of learning and the future of work. UTS places students at the heart of the learning experience, combining technology with creative practice and innovation for which we are so well regarded into our curriculum, research-led teaching, industry experience and community relationships to develop graduates that are ready for the future of work. The importance of partnerships with industry at every stage of students' learning journey cannot be understated; it is critical for our students to learn but also for employers to play a part in shaping their future workforce. All of these elements should feed into a student experience, and into the Government's evaluation of one.

UTS **recommends** the Accord process:

- Ensures universities retain the institutional autonomy to cater to their specific cohort of students, given the depth of knowledge universities' have about their student population. UTS's Student Partnership Agreement is an example of how a university can reach agreement with the student body about how to strengthen engagement and clear, mutually agreed expectations. A case study of this agreement is in the appendix.
- Facilitates the showcasing and sharing of best practice in student experience and emerging approaches to quality teaching (a case study for LX.lab is in the appendix), perhaps through a shared repository or reward for innovative collaboration that moves the sector's knowledge and practice forward.
- Designs, develops and implements fit for purpose student experience evaluation tools that provide timely (lead) as well as longitudinal insights.
- Identifies and develops strategies to address those environmental factors that negatively impact the student experience, particularly for those students with backgrounds traditionally under-represented in tertiary education.

- Leverages international student experience outcomes to protect and increase Australia's share of the international student market onshore and in other countries.
- Establish a 'WIL-HELP' scheme to support students to participate in work integrated learning, such as clinical placements, especially where students face cost of living pressures and/or the foregoing of other work to meet professional obligations.

8 Incentivising industry collaboration – a National Innovation Strategy

The Discussion Paper asserts that while universities are good at collaborating with other research organisations, the links and collaboration between industry and universities could be stronger and more productive. From UTS's perspective, industry engagement permeates everything we do. We know this is a major point of difference when it comes to student choice – our students choose UTS because they know their chances of securing employment both during and after their degree will be high. Providing graduates with the foundations in critical thinking, creativity and system problem solving is vital to prepare them to succeed in a future of multiple careers. This must be combined with ensuring real experience of graduates in applying their skills directly in the workplace and an ability to identify and access ongoing reskilling.

UTS has significant partnerships with large listed Australian companies, Government departments and agencies, professional service firms, multinationals, cultural institutes and SMEs. UTS is a leader when it comes to SME engagement and we are currently delivering a Federally funded program, SME@UTS, to help SMEs adopt productivity-lifting technologies. A case study of SME@UTS is in the appendix.

Perhaps one of the most important approaches to connect industry, students and the university is through the use of physical infrastructure. To further support our engagement with industry, UTS has committed significant capital and operational investment into R&D and state-of-the-art equipment on its campus, in recognition that one of the identified deficiencies in Australian industry structure is the underpinning technology infrastructure. Examples of this include UTS's ProtoSpace, Data Arena, Tech Lab (a case study is in the appendix) and the Biologics Innovation Facility. The scale of these facilities is such that it is impossible for SMEs to fund alone or even in partnership, but when provided by the university/government, they allow companies of all sizes to engage in innovation, physical prototyping, high-end data analysis and virtual manufacturing.

While there are universities like UTS with a particularly strong reputation for working with industry, more can be done to improve the strength and depth of collaboration. A more systemic approach to improving the foundations on which good collaborations are built, and better incentivising industry engagement, is recommended.

It is also critical that we are clear about what we mean when we talk about 'industry'. In Australia approximately 90% of the economy is made up of SMEs. This presents significant challenges when it comes to collaboration – one of the reasons why UTS is running bespoke programs targeting SMEs. Industry also means for-profit entities of all sizes, as well as not-for-profit entities that provide important public services.

UTS **recommends** the development of a national innovation strategy with a specific aim to strengthen university/industry collaboration for the benefit of research, the economy, and students.

This strategy should consider:

- Incentives to encourage industry to engage with universities, such as new, tax-based incentives for industry to take students for work integrated learning experiences; and/or for the employment of higher level Masters and PhD level graduates.
- Incentives for SMEs to engage with universities given the barriers that exist (time, resources, capacity) such as funding for programs such as SME@UTS and introducing a Skills Tax Incentive Scheme for those SMEs that invest in upskilling and knowledge exchange.
- Making it easier for PhD-qualified international students who study in Australia to stay in Australia for employment post their studies.
- Embedding industry engagement in the development of university curriculum where relevant; allowing industry practitioners to teach and assess students; working with industry to develop short courses and microcredentials.
- The introduction of a premium rate to the RDTI for businesses collaborating with universities.
- Innovation or technology vouchers to encourage university-SME collaboration.
- Examining the NSW Small Business Innovation and Research programme with a view to scaling across the country.
- Reviewing the suite of ARC Linkage schemes, Industry Fellowships, and Industry Laureates to make sure they work in the context of an economy dominated by SMEs.

- Examining place-based activities as a mechanism to enable new knowledge-based industries to diversify the economy For UTS, positioned in the heart of Tech Central (one of NSW's innovation precincts) a greater focus on precincts to support Australia's innovation capability is warranted. It is becoming increasingly apparent around the world and in Australia that these innovation ecosystems, when appropriately supported, become dense hubs of economic activity where innovation, entrepreneurship, creativity and placemaking become greater than the sum of their parts.

9 Enabling impactful research

Australia's research system must change if it is to boost Australia's economic complexity and meet the grand challenges of climate change, energy and food security (to name a few). UTS agrees with other higher education stakeholders, such as the ATN, who call for activity and investment to be better focussed and coordinated to enable an impactful and collaborative research environment capable of addressing these grand challenges.

Globally accepted measures of research quality and impact show that research excellence exists in Australia at a wide variety of institutions outside of the traditionally established research universities.

In a sector-leading result, in its most recent national assessment the Australian Government assessed almost 80% of UTS research as having a 'high' impact on the community, well above the sector average of 43%.

International citations data in key research areas of national interest, such as artificial intelligence, water technology and biomedical science, demonstrates that UTS is a global leader in these fields.

So, when considering future research funding models, UTS **recommends** the Australian Government seeks to fund research quality and impact wherever it demonstrably exists and include measures of international research performance alongside comparative national positioning in consideration of research funding mechanisms.

Outlined below are a series of high-level **recommendations** to effect change in the research environment (building on those made in relation to industry collaboration and growing a culture of lifelong learning):

- The Government should set out a long-term vision for Australian research either framed as grand challenges or identifying priority areas such as a more refined and focussed Critical Technologies List and National Reconstruction Priorities with clarity around the definition of these categories.
- Frameworks should incentivise stronger collaborations by bringing researchers together from across the sector with other publicly funded research organisations, industry and government to solve and translate grand challenges in an Australian and international context.
- A national grand challenge focussed funding program with a dedicated translation and extension pathways built in should be established. This would be in addition to the current research-led, investigator-initiated research grants model (managed by ARC and NHMRC). This is also different from recent Trailblazer initiatives which while funded by government, are restricted to a limited number of universities and priority areas.

In addition, targeted strategic support should be provided:

- for universities to engage on the global stage, that is, to be formally part of appropriate global consortia and networks and engage with global industry in addition to our local remits.
- to improve research training, including improving pathways for researchers to gain experience and develop high-impact careers in government and industry.

As discussed earlier, the complexity and cross-subsidisation of university funding more broadly obscures a complete understanding of the full cost of university research (both direct and indirect) and how to support it appropriately. UTS **recommends** this be properly examined with a view to greater transparency about these costs and that a more complete picture of choices universities make in their investment of resources towards priorities, including research, be developed as an alternative to the current approach to determining costs on research and teaching in isolation.

Contact details

UTS appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. Please do not hesitate to contact Amy Persson, Head of Government Affairs and External Engagement (amy.persson@uts.edu.au) should you wish to discuss this submission further.

Appendix

U@Uni Academy program

The U@Uni Academy program was piloted in 2020 with 322 low socio-economic status (SES) Year 10 students from 20 NSW public schools in south-western Sydney. 52% of the students identified as first in family, 1.4% as First Nations and 20.5% as students from refugee backgrounds. The program is unique as students do not need an ATAR to gain access to UTS, instead they participate in a two-year program that develops their general capabilities within five categories: Communication and Collaboration; Attitudes and Values; Practical and Organizational Skills; Research and Critical Thinking; and Innovation and Creativity (the 'CAPRI' categories).

Students commencing UTS through the U@Uni Academy pathway are monitored and supported through the First Year Success initiative in which they are offered case managed academic and wellbeing support where needed. The program also raises awareness amongst students regarding the support services available on campus, and students are referred to appropriate services.

Link: <https://www.uts.edu.au/partners-and-community/initiatives/social-justice-uts/centre-social-justice-inclusion/uuni-academy>

Wanago Program (short for 'Want to go')

The Wanago Program delivers NSW STEM HSC subjects to high-school students in years 11 and 12, where those subjects are not available within their school. The Program was initially a UTS social justice initiative and seeks to assist students typically underrepresented in STEM industries, such as female students and students from low SES backgrounds.

Link: <https://www.uts.edu.au/about/faculty-engineering-and-information-technology/what-we-do/wanago-program>

Institute of Applied Technology - Digital

The Institute of Applied Technology - Digital is a technology focussed institute at TAFE NSW Meadowbank. Working in collaboration with TAFE NSW, Microsoft, Macquarie University, and UTS, the IAT-D is delivering market-leading training that rapidly responds to industry needs. Students have access to stackable microskills and micro-credentials, which are recognised by education partners.

Link: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/skills-nsw/skills-initiatives/institute-of-applied-technology.html>

NSW Education and Training Model

The NSW Education and Training Model is an industry-led, and place-based, approach to the development of micro-credentials prioritising emerging industries and skills required for people who live and work in the Western Parkland City (an economic zone around the Nancy-Bird Walton International Airport).

Link: <https://www.wpca.sydney/delivery/netm/>

UTS Startups

UTS Startups is deeply committed to supporting technology-enabled entrepreneurship and is proud of the fact that it is the largest community of startups in Australia. It currently supports 530 active startups, having added 252 new startups in 2022 meaning that it crossed its 1,000th that year. These startups collectively created 573 new paid jobs in 2022 alone.

Our high school program to inspire the pursuit of technology-enabled entrepreneurship is also the largest in Australia, reaching 44 schools last year, and running an event at the ICC for 6,000 students in June 2023.

Link: <https://www.uts.edu.au/current-students/opportunities/uts-startups>

SME@UTS

UTS is a leader when it comes to SME engagement and we are currently delivering a Federally-funded program, SME@UTS, to help SMEs adopt productivity-lifting technologies. Since its launch in 2021, 180 SMEs have been engaged through workshops, masterclasses, and meetings.

Link: <https://www.uts.edu.au/partners-and-community/initiatives/smeuts/smeuts>

Indigenous Residential College

UTS is embarking on a ground-breaking proposal to build Australia's first truly comprehensive Indigenous Residential College. The IRC aims to remove the barriers, both real and perceived, that prevent Indigenous participation in higher education and the broader economy. The purpose-built, world-class facility – which will offer a comprehensive range of services above and beyond accommodation – will be defined by its ethos of pride in Indigenous identity and culture, and its commitment to fostering academic excellence, leadership and service, and global citizenship.

Link: <https://www.uts.edu.au/partners-and-community/initiatives/indigenous-residential-college>

Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research

The Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research aims to produce the highest quality research on Indigenous legal and policy issues and to develop highly skilled Indigenous researchers.

Link: <https://www.uts.edu.au/research/jumbunna-institute-indigenous-education-and-research>

Student Partnership Agreement 2022-2024

UTS's first Student Partnership Agreement outlines a collective approach to student engagement with UTS, with the common goal of enriching the student experience and affirming the university's commitment to student participation, inclusion, sustainability, quality management and communication. These priorities connect to, and are informed by, teaching and learning practices, inclusive student programs, support for student union and responses to the National Student Safety Survey.

Link: <https://www.uts.edu.au/current-students/news/student-partnership-agreement-signed>

Learner Experience Lab

The Learner Experience Lab (LX.lab) is a diverse, flexible and multi-skilled team, offering a comprehensive package of learning and teaching support, with a specialisation in blended learning and technologies for learning for teaching staff at UTS. It works with the faculties to support and build capability across all UTS teaching staff to enhance the learner experience.

Link: <https://lx.uts.edu.au/>

UTS Tech Lab

UTS Tech Lab is a research facility in Botany, NSW that supports bespoke industry-led partnerships to drive innovation and growth (mainly engineering and IT, followed by business and design), particularly for startups, SMEs and large multinational organisations in collaboration with academic and technical teams as well as student talent.

It combines research expertise, industry co-location and collaboration, and world-class facilities to make Tech Lab a unique environment in which to create commercially responsive solutions to a wide range of R&D challenges.

Link: <https://techlab.uts.edu.au/>