



Andrew Barr MLA

Chief Minister

Treasurer

Minister for Climate Action

Minister for Economic Development

Minister for Tourism

Member for Kurrajong

Professor Mary O’Kane AC

Chair

Australian Universities Accord Panel

australianuniversitiesaccord@education.gov.au

Dear Professor O’Kane

I am writing to provide a response to the Discussion Paper released by the Australian Universities Accord Panel on 22 February 2023.

Canberra exists at the forefront of Australia’s transition into a knowledge economy and is the most highly qualified capital city in Australia. Two-thirds of adult Canberrans hold at least one post-secondary qualification and half hold a bachelor degree or higher. Our tertiary education sector employs or supports 20,000 jobs – among the largest of any single sector outside of government – and international education are the Territory’s highest valued export. Furthermore, a high proportion of Canberra’s private sector jobs are related to professional, scientific, and technical services.

Canberra’s tertiary education sector has grown significantly over the years to accommodate the demand for a highly skilled, highly trained workforce. Local universities including the Australian National University (ANU), University of Canberra (UC) and University of New South Wales (UNSW) have developed relationships with businesses and entrepreneurs to launch global start-ups in several sectors of our economy. UNSW, with support from the ACT Government, is establishing a new campus in our city centre that will expand Canberra’s postgraduate options and facilities to support collaboration with industry and research commercialisation. The ACT Government is also developing a new campus for the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) to meet the demand for vocational education.

ACT Legislative Assembly London Circuit, GPO Box 1020, Canberra ACT 2601

 +61 2 6205 0011

 barr@act.gov.au

 [@ABarrMLA](https://twitter.com/ABarrMLA)

 [AndrewBarrMLA](https://www.facebook.com/AndrewBarrMLA)

 [andrewbarrmla](https://www.instagram.com/andrewbarrmla)

Canberra's development as a knowledge economy demonstrates the importance of access to education and training to attain the skills and qualifications needed for emerging roles and skills. Tertiary education providers play a critical role in delivering quality education and supporting students on their lifelong learning journey.

Canberra's experience as a welcoming and inclusive community and our ability to attract and retain highly qualified international researchers in critical scientific fields promotes Australia's research outcomes globally and translates to improved investment opportunities for local start-ups and entrepreneurs.

Equity in access and attainment to tertiary education

In 2021, 43 per cent of people in Canberra had a Bachelor or higher degree qualification, representing an increase of almost 40,000 people since 2016. This is reflective of the ACT's knowledge-based economy. While 33 per cent of workers in the ACT are employed in public administration and safety, a further 32 per cent are employed in service-based industries including professional, scientific and technical services, healthcare and social assistance and education and training.

The pandemic revealed that higher education students – and particularly international students – are vulnerable to gaps in mental health access and community supports. At-risk students are much less likely to complete their courses of study.

Improving access to post-secondary qualifications and attainment of a qualification that supports an employment outcome is important for all cohorts, resulting greater opportunities to participate in society and the ACT's economy. Wrap around supports that are coordinated with income services and welfare supports will be important in encouraging access, retention and completion for those in underrepresented groups.

Links between higher education, vocational education and training and local industry

Lifelong learning is a varied and individual journey including formal post-secondary and workplace environments. Cooperation and partnership across governments, higher education, vocational education and industries will be important in developing a learning ecosystem which recognises that people can and will choose to upskill or reskill throughout their lives and careers.

Australia's higher and vocational education systems have distinct roles and characters; and both sectors have a role to play to meet the workforce needs in the ACT's knowledge economy. There is however significant complexities arising from separate governance and regulatory systems between higher education and vocational education and training.

There is an opportunity to create greater accountability by universities and collaboration between higher education and vocational education and training through shared governance across governments.

Securing Australia's research capabilities

Australia's research-intensive universities and institutions drive innovation which provides unique, domestically sourced solutions to skills needs and future economic demands. Their work is essential

for driving Australia's productivity and competitiveness in the global knowledge economy and for securing Australia's place as a regional centre for innovation.

University research, in partnership governments and Australia's national scientific bodies, will be important in assisting jurisdictions meet their respective targets and ambitions in areas such as cyber security and renewable energy.

Cultural diversity

International students support Australia's growth as a globally connected and competitive economy in the relationships and networks they build with their institutions, peers, employers and the with the broader Australian community. These relationships build bridges with friends and family in their nations of origin, and thereby support Australia's reputation as a welcoming and inclusive nation and partner.

International Education continues to be Canberra's largest export. In 2021 Canberra was accredited as an Established Welcoming City, demonstrating the ACT's commitment to a diverse and inclusive city.

I would encourage the Panel to consider ongoing supports that increase the global competitiveness of Australia's universities and national strategies to assist both domestic and international students access the supports needed to sustain participation in their studies and local communities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comments to assist in the development of your report. Please contact Ms Kate Starick at kate.starick@act.gov.au if you have any further questions. I look forward to reviewing the Panel's recommendations when they become available.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Barr MLA
Chief Minister

26 June 2023

cc:
Chris Steel MLA, Minister for Skills, ACT Government