



UNIVERSITY  
OF WOLLONGONG  
AUSTRALIA

## **Submission: Labor's Commitment to boost equity and participation in Australia's universities**

### **Introduction**

The University of Wollongong (UOW) recognises the importance of Australia having an accessible and equitable post-secondary education system, and strongly supports efforts to address uneven education opportunities which exist across the nation.

UOW welcomes Labor's plan to undertake a National Inquiry examining equity and participation in Australian universities and other higher education providers, and provides the following key points for consideration when framing the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry.

### **About the University of Wollongong**

UOW is a research-intensive university that has built a strong international reputation for world-class research and exceptional teaching quality, and is ranked amongst the top 2% of universities worldwide. In 2016, UOW had over 33,900 total student enrolments across its global campus network and more than 2,400 staff (Full Time Equivalent).

The University offers more than 400 undergraduate/postgraduate courses and research degrees across a wide range of disciplines through the five broad faculties of Business, Engineering and Information Sciences, Law, Humanities and the Arts, Science, Medicine and Health and, Social Sciences.

UOW is an international multi-campus university, with three Sydney campuses (at Loftus, Liverpool and Sydney CBD), Wollongong, Shoalhaven, Batemans Bay, Bega, and the Southern Highlands. The University also has campuses in Hong Kong and Dubai.

UOW has developed the Innovation Campus in Wollongong which is an education, research and related business precinct. This state of the art facility provides strong linkages between business and research, and complements the University's leading research and innovation institutes.

UOW currently administers a range of programs and other activities aimed at addressing increasing the aspirations, attainment and access to higher education, many of which are funded through Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP). These programs are of high value to participants and UOW emphasises the ongoing need for HEPPP funding to ensure the ongoing delivery of the various programs supported by this funding.

### **Key Points for Consideration in Formation of Inquiry Terms of Reference**

1. *Labor Government would invest an additional \$174M over ten years to help ensure more Australians get the opportunity of a university education.*
- UOW welcomes Labor's commitment to provide an additional \$174M over ten years and supports the importance of the need to adopt strategies collaboratively developed with a range of stakeholders across universities, TAFEs and, Not for Profit and Community Organisations.
- UOW has a strong record in successfully establishing collaboratively developed strategies that enhance educational outcomes for our communities, and would welcome an increase in funding to support the work undertaken to widen the participation of disadvantaged communities in higher education. UOW has been actively engaged in this work contributing to the national conversation and leading collaboration throughout NSW.

- It is critical that consideration be given to longevity of funding as opposed to annualized funding, as the latter hampers the depth of engagement and the development of skills and expertise within communities. This is particularly important for work conducted in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where the development of trust is integral to success.
- The use of a competitive process that facilitates a strong evidence based approach is recommended, with a focus on partners across differing contexts. UOW would advise that existing programs be used rather than adopting a new or competing approach.
- UOW has a strong commitment to increasing the participation of under-represented communities in higher education and a proud history of developing and implementing initiatives across our geographical footprint that has impacted upon communities across Australia.
- It will be important that universities continue to collaborate (as has been done through the HEPPP NPP projects) in ways that enhance impact and outcomes, minimise duplication and ensure that we learn from each other.
- UOW recommends that across the ten years effective monitoring be employed that informs identification of additional equity groups that require attention. For example, there is currently little evidence on access, participation and success of refugees settling in Australia.
- UOW also notes that evidence shows that a greater emphasis is required to address access, participation and success of people with disability.

2. *Labor's commitment to returning to the demand driven system if it wins the next federal election; and, Over the next ten years, it will see nearly \$10 billion in additional funding flowing to Australian universities. In return, we expect universities to play their part in furthering the national interest by delivering quality education, world-class research and supporting increased access and equity.*

- UOW welcomes the commitment by the Labor Party to return to the demand driven system as this will facilitate continued progress on outcomes for equity groups we currently work with.
- UOW has a strong commitment to quality education and research as is evidenced by the outcomes we have achieved in relation to student experience, student outcomes and our extensive research portfolio.
- Within the parameters of additional funding arising from an increased numbers of students, the approach to HEPPP funding allocation will be important in order to:
  - Establish a coherent approach to evaluation of HEPPP funding use. Improving the HEPPP Framework by investing in key elements that were identified in the *Acil Allen Consulting 2017, Evaluation of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program, Melbourne* would be of great benefit to the sector, including:
    - The introduction of evaluation frameworks and greater accountability of universities to illustrate impact; and,
    - Addressing longevity of funding that we enhance business continuity and program outcomes. A shift to a three year funding cycle, for example, would significantly increase the impact of the current HEPPP activities and would allow universities to commit to staffing and programs with a view on longer term outcomes.
- Whilst supportive of Labor's proposal to return to the demand driven system, it is noted that the focus of this Submission relates equity and higher education participation. Should Labor be elected to Government in the next election, UOW emphasises the need for Labor to seek further advice and consultation about key issues with universities prior to a return to the demand driven system.

3. *More interventions can be made to assist those communities where a pathway to university still remains out of reach.*

- UOW recommends that the funding mechanism is designed to facilitate cross-sectoral partnerships between schools, VET providers and universities in ways that transcend barriers between the sectors. This includes using mechanisms such as the National Priority Pool to encourage consortium bids cross-sector to enable students who wouldn't typically pursue university with a clear enabling pathway to do so. Further, funding should be structured so that universities within the same geographical area must work in partnership with each other to limit the duplication and gaps that additional funding could exacerbate.
- Whilst welcoming the additional investment flagged by Labor, UOW notes it has concerns how low socio-economic equity students are determined. The current approach, which uses the postcode of a student's high school, is not a true reflection and will present future discrepancies with social and affordable housing policies shifting to a 'salt and peppered' approach to new developments of housing stock.
- The notion of mentoring is a critical element that is strongly supported, especially for Indigenous students, as evidence shows a high proportion of these students fall into more than one equity group, such as First in Family, disability or low SES.
- Investing into and effectively working alongside Aboriginal communities, with funding that supports mentoring, aspiration harnessing and breaking down the barriers and perceptions associated with accessing the higher education space can be successfully built, however ensuring that funding is available to sustain and deepen these relationships will provide pathways to higher education collectively.

#### **Further Information**

The University would welcome further opportunities to elaborate upon, or further clarify, the matters raised within this submission. To do so, please do not hesitate to contact the UOW Director, Government Relations (Mr Canio Fierravanti) on 42215931/0411 244491 or via caniof@uow.edu.au.