



Jobs and Skills Australia discussion paper

University of Tasmania Submission

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UNIVERSITY of
TASMANIA 

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Acknowledgment of Country

The University of Tasmania pays its respects to elders past and present and to the many Aboriginal people that did not make elder status and to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community that continues to care for Country. We acknowledge the profound effect of climate change on this Country and seek to work alongside Tasmanian Aboriginal communities, with their deep wisdom and knowledge, to address climate change and its impacts.

The Palawa people belong to one of the world's oldest living cultures, continually resident on this Country for over 40,000 years. They have survived and adapted to significant climate changes over this time, such as sea-level rise and extreme rainfall variability, and as such embody thousands of generations of intimate place-based knowledge.

We acknowledge with deep respect that this knowledge represents a range of cultural practices, wisdom, traditions, and ways of knowing the world that provide accurate and useful climate change information, observations, and solutions.

The University of Tasmania likewise recognises a history of truth that acknowledges the impacts of invasion and colonisation upon Aboriginal people, resulting in forcible removal from their lands.

Our island is deeply unique, with cities and towns surrounded by spectacular landscapes of bushland, waterways, mountain ranges, and beaches.

The University of Tasmania stands for a future that profoundly respects and acknowledges Aboriginal perspectives, culture, language, and history, and a continued effort to fight for Aboriginal justice and rights paving the way for a strong future.

Executive Summary

The University of Tasmania strongly supports the proposed structure and functions outlined in the Jobs and Skills Australia Discussion Paper, in particular the proposed expanded functions, which will better enable the delivery of skills and training in our highest need areas, particularly regional areas.

Education is the vehicle through which knowledge and skills are strengthened. It helps to overcome poverty, injustice, and inequality, promoting human rights while benefiting our environment, health and economic outlook. With higher rates of education, employment rates increase, along with productivity and average incomes. Crime and substance abuse drop. Data shows we become healthier. We live longer. More knowledge leads to more sustainable environmental management. Further, through education, we can create safe spaces for learning, enlightenment, and development for all.

The National Skills Commission (2022) projects that over the five years to November 2026, 91.7% of new jobs will require post-school education, and more than three-fifths of the total projected employment growth will be in high skill level jobs. Key to delivering enhanced knowledge and skills is having the data and information available to identify the current and emerging areas of highest need.

At the University of Tasmania, we will use the outputs from Jobs and Skills Australia to:

- Identify the areas of emerging growth to develop and deliver micro-credentials as building blocks to higher education for disadvantaged cohorts, especially those in Tasmania's rural and remote communities
- Enhance sustainable economic growth and innovation in regions by determining the opportunities to form partnerships with Tasmanian Small to Medium Enterprises to lift their productivity and growth
- Leverage the Jobs and Skill Australia datasets to inform the most effective internship models that serve both students and employers
- Support further design and implementation of a community-led, place-based employment model through the \$15 million Regional Jobs Hub program, that increases access, employment, workforce preparedness and participation across Tasmania's regions.

By providing advice and reports that contain an economy-wide focus, and nuanced analysis of key regional demographic and business needs, the University of Tasmania will be able to deliver the Federal Government's, and indeed our own, mission to increase education and employment outcomes. We will deliver this through providing the necessary workforce in critical areas for Tasmania and enhance life-long learning and skill building through improved regional access and engagement.

We provide access and expertise for and from Tasmania

As the sole University based in Tasmania, we are responsible for educating much of the future workforce that Tasmanians will rely upon during their life, such as teachers, farmers, lawyers, paramedics, nurses, doctors and social workers, just to name a few. It is therefore imperative that the graduates we train meet the needs of our community and can adapt and evolve to suit changes in industry.

Despite the attractions of living in Tasmania and strong population growth in recent years, we face serious challenges in increasing employment and participation both now and into the future. Tasmania has a disproportionately high number of people facing disadvantage in all its forms, including those living in rural and remote areas, First Nations people, unique and complex health challenges and the lowest digital literacy in Australia. Tasmania has the highest proportion of people living in the most disadvantages areas (37%)¹. We have the highest rate of disability (26.8% compared with 17.7% nationally),² and we have some of the poorest health outcomes in the country. Tasmania also has the lowest proportion of people with a university degree at 16.2%, compared 22% nationally³, and 48% of adults are functionally illiterate⁴.

Central to what makes these challenges hard to address are low levels of educational attainment in Tasmania. Currently, Tasmania has the highest proportion of adults with only year 11 education outcomes or below. This poor educational attainment magnifies our economic challenges, with unemployment in Tasmania consistently higher than nationally at 3.7%, compared to the national 3.4% for July 2022, and we have the lowest level of workforce participation at 60.6% compared with the national average of 66.4%. Our geographic remoteness adds further complexity, with Tasmania being the least digitally inclusive state, recording an average score of 66 compared to the national average of 71.1.⁵

Delivering our mission to address these challenges has allowed our university to develop expert teaching and support practices to regional, remote and low SES cohorts, attracting more of these students than the average university, with higher number of:

- regional and remote domestic students (61% vs national average of 24%),
- low SES students (27% vs national average of 18%), and
- mature age students (~80% of our total student cohort), compared to 60% of other universities that teach predominately school-leavers

We have also tailored our offerings to meet the areas of high need in Tasmania, such as key occupations with skill shortages, and this is delivering strong employment outcomes. For example, our Graduate Outcome Survey results from 2017-2021 show:

- 100% employment outcomes for UTAS graduates in Rehabilitation Studies
- Over 96% employment outcomes for UTAS Pharmacy, Agriculture and Medical graduates
- Over 90% employment for teachers, process and resource engineers, nursing and allied health, behavioral science and architecture graduates

These outcomes are compared to the national undergraduate bachelor domestic employment rate of 87.9% (2017-2021). And we seek to do more of this.

¹ ABS 2016 Census, Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage

² [Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2018](#)

³ <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/6>

⁴ ABS (2018), 2016 Census QuickStats

⁵ <https://www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/dashboard/National.aspx>

Through Job and Skills Australia, we can leverage our experience in delivering micro-credentials to create new industry-focused higher education for disadvantaged cohorts

As recognised by the Job and Skills Australia (JSA) discussion paper, Universities and vocational training providers play a key role in helping to meet the current and future skills and labour needs, both through knowledge generation of workforce needs, and delivery of industry-focused education, training and skill development.

Since COVID, we have seen strong demand in short-term skills and education, with 12,500+ short course participants, 2,474 enrolments in undergraduate certificates and 7,758 enrolments in Grad Certs from 2020-2022. These offerings have quickly become a pathway into higher education for students with no prior educational attainment, and we continue to attract more than the national average (22.4% in UGC vs 13.2%, and 4.9% in UG Bachelors vs 3.2% nationally). Offering these micro-credentials is successfully breaking down barriers of higher education to upskill or retrain for our high proportion of regional and disadvantaged communities and enhancing life-long learning for all Tasmanians.

Further, we have more than 1,500 students enrolled this year across our suite of undergraduate certificates in agribusiness, ICT, community support, education support and sustainable living, demonstrating how we are leveraging government policy changes to inject the Tasmanian workforce with skilled professionals.

The University of Tasmania strongly supports the strengthened economy-wide focus of the JSA to help better understand current and future workforce needs and continue to develop education and upskilling to professionalise emerging industries and build a more sustainable workforce for Tasmania.



During the pandemic we experienced first-hand the benefit of short form education, to lift industry capability quickly and efficiently.

As COVID-19 first broke, our staff and students were called upon to assist the State's Health Department to respond and provide upskilling to Departmental staff in managing the disease.

In response, we worked with the Department and broader healthcare industry to develop a four-day, face-to-face micro-credential in outbreak management. This short course has since attracted interest from State Health Departments across the country.

We continue to deliver the microcredential as a service to our communities.

Enhance sustainable economic growth and innovation in regions through analysis and advice on how Small to Medium Enterprises can lift productivity and growth

Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are vitally important to Australia, contributing more than half our national GDP, employing 68% of Australia's population and making up 99.8% of all Australian businesses, including 97% of all businesses in Tasmania⁶. Many of these businesses are located in regional areas, for example 57% of SMEs in Tasmania are located outside of Hobart. It is essential therefore that the JSA analyse and develop a deeper evidence base to serve not just large metropolitan contexts, but also understand the opportunities for regional enterprises to grow and innovate.

To ensure sustainable economic growth is enabled in our regions, the JSA should provide analysis and advice on the design needs of regional SMEs to lift productivity in the sector. This may, for example, include addressing shared opportunities in industry value chains (e.g., addressing bottlenecks in distribution networks), developing new types of products (e.g., repurposing waste streams into new products) or new processes to address inefficiency in common production practices (e.g., redesigning food processing facilities to make use of new technologies). These would be explored with the explicit intention of providing advice to the Minister for Skills and Training on the opportunities that could be utilised by SMEs across the state to increase productivity, demand, and exports.

For Tasmania, which has the largest proportion of regionally located SMEs in Australia, this would mean prioritising industries such as agriculture, forestry and construction in partnerships with large organisations such as the University of Tasmania to co-design and deliver the technological advances that will enable scalable and sustainable growth.



Under the Federal Government's Regional Research Collaboration Program, the University of Tasmania has partnered with local businesses to solve regional and global challenges in energy, agriculture and health. The three-year project focuses on building industry expertise in three key areas:

- Using microwave assisted thermal sterilisation (MATS) technology to make shelf-stable foods that can be stored without refrigeration while maintaining quality, providing opportunities to boost regional capabilities and food exports for local industries
- Value-adding of plantation wood as a sustainable, renewable building material and reduction in the carbon intensity of the construction sector; and
- Converting wood-product residues to bioproducts which can be used as biodegradable, new generation sustainable plastic alternatives and gain capacity in advanced extraction and separation methods to create bio-based chemicals and fuels.

"Food and wood products are areas of strategic growth for Tasmania and regional Australia, contributing significantly to the annual Tasmanian economy," project lead Associate Professor O'Reilly Wapstra said. "A thriving and sustainable sector requires continued innovation to locally value-add and diversify products and markets. This innovation is underpinned by high-impact research and a workforce that is connected to advances in technology and trained graduates."

⁶https://www.business.tas.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/369382/Business_Statistics_Snapshot_June_2021.pdf

Leverage the Jobs and Skill Australia to inform the most effective internship models that serve both students and employers

To help meet the workforce needs now and into the future, it is imperative that graduates of vocational and higher education have not only the knowledge, but the skills and on-the-job experience that will enable them to both successfully enter the profession they have studied, and stay in their jobs.

Whilst the concept of internship or work experience placements is not new, higher education internship schemes⁷, and how they are funded⁸, are evolving. We know though, that these offerings are typically taken up by students from high SES backgrounds⁹, with the means of support to undertake unpaid work placements without interrupting their existing study, work, or other commitments. At the University of Tasmania, 80% of students are mature age, and more than 60% study part time, therefore their ability to engage in unpaid work is even more challenging. For students able to access financial assistance, these payments are often insufficient to manage the increasing cost of living, even if eligible for the full support payment¹⁰. JSA data could inform an internship model and sufficient financial support system that would allow all students to participate in workplace internship opportunities, irrespective of their study choices or social background.

We know too that critical to the success of work experience placements is the willingness from employers to engage with universities and vocational trainers to establish the placements and enable the students to learn and grow their skills and experience. Many employers, particular of SMEs, face challenges of multiple requests from differing organisations; a lack of clarity on the expectations, quality and knowledge of the student attending the placement; and limited experience in navigating the regulatory requirements of hosting the internships¹¹. In Tasmania, we have the additional challenge of working with employers who have never before experienced University, either through attendance or in partnership, and therefore ensuring that the relationship is easy and fruitful to them is imperative.

JSA will play a vital role in proving the labour market data that outlines what industry needs, including specifically not just current but emerging skillsets, the shelf life of skills and the end-point knowledge and training that employers want. This data will inform how best to structure internship models that are tailored to students, and support employers to offer these places without overburdening them with additional bureaucracy.



Internships are enabling students to apply their learning first-hand and provide much needed skills to employers in regional areas.

Taz Drone Solutions employer Andrew Davies has been participating in the Diploma Applied Technology pilot, supporting the upskilling of his staff member Brady in gaining a higher education degree, all while strengthening and growing his business.

'Getting 'access to talent' in a rural area, particularly in developing skills applicable to the rapid growth needed in the business, and the ability to solve problems is crucial' says Andrew.

'By combining our different backgrounds and knowledge together in a real workplace-based project has brought new insights and ideas which is leading to positive changes to how we design and manufacture our products'.

⁷ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-07/future-degree-apprenticeships.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/pay-apprenticeship-levy>

⁹ <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/WIL-in-universities-final-report-April-2019.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://raisetherate.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Starved-Of-Opportunity-Young-Peoples-Experience-Of-Youth-Allowance-And-Newstart-November-25th.pdf>

¹¹ <https://acen.edu.au/innovative-models/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ATN-Final-Report-Expanding-Work-Integrated-Learning-WIL-Possibilities-October-2018.pdf>

Support the design and implementation of community-led, place-based employment models that increase access, employment, workforce preparedness and participation across our regions

Beyond accessing relevant education opportunities, job seekers in regional Tasmania face additional barriers to securing and sustaining work which vary from community to community, and further contribute to low rates of workforce participation. The JSA can further strengthen its evidence-base of specific priority cohorts through leveraging the new and innovative approaches being developed to further build access and participation to employment.

The University is supporting the development, implementation and evaluation of community-led, place-based employment models, for example through the Tasmanian Government's \$15 million Regional Jobs Hub (RJH) program. The RJH is an innovative community-led model now operating at seven sites across Tasmania, with a view to coordinating training and employment services to better meet community needs. The RJH approach supports sub-regional networks that connect employers with potential workers, and which provide skills and other supports (such as digital inclusion) to enable and sustain access to employment through partnership with community sector agencies.

Preliminary evidence indicates the effectiveness of the RJH model, and the University will continue to work with the Tasmanian Government, industries and communities to evaluate and measure the impact and effectiveness of the program. We would welcome the opportunity to work with Jobs and Skills Australia to evaluate the opportunities to scale this program and deliver better employment outcomes across regional Australia.



The Tasmanian Government, in partnership with industry and the University, has invested more than \$15 million into the creation of the Regional Jobs Hub Network to coordinate efforts to increase employment, training and workforce participation in our regions.

This model has been proven to work, with the initial pilot delivering more than 2,000 job outcomes and a better joined up approach between service providers and funders.

The model has been shared as an exemplar approach to community led work through Stronger Places, Stronger People agenda.