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Engagement
The Next Twenty Years are Crucial!

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Editorial

Engagement: The Next Twenty Years are Crucial!

Professor Jim Nyland – Editor

Reflecting on the range, the reach and the depth of contributions to this Issue of Transform themed *Engagement: the next twenty years are crucial!* it is striking just how far we have come in defining and shaping the concept of engagement.

Established in 2003 by Western Sydney University's then Vice Chancellor, Professor Jan Reid, and with unanimous support from the Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee, Engagement Australia (EA) was formed and quickly became recognised as the peak body for engaged universities in Australia.

The nation needed to invest in the public realm and services, in order to build a more resilient economy and society, and higher education was to be at the heart of this challenge. As we look to the next twenty-year horizon HE leaders continue to wrestle with the conundrum: 'Can the promises made in the past about the need for a more equal and socially just society through a more engaged education process be redeemed in the future?' This crucial question persists as we look to reset, renew and rejuvenate our cherished sector through the Accord process.

The much-anticipated policy settings that are set to emerge from the current Review will also pose another crucial question, namely: '*Will our education system be good enough to create universities that are agents of change for their future communities?*'

Vice-Chancellor and Presidents Professor Barney Glover (WSU) and Professor Zlatko Skrbis (ACU) consider the opportunities presented by the Accord in advancing the notion of 'social good' in their respective university communities. The idea of 'community' for many is intertwined with 'place' and Natalie Day in her authoritative international piece, *Civic Connections: How UK Universities are Pivoting to more Place-Based approaches and the Implications for Australia*, argues that places and communities are vital to the future of learning. She invites us to re-imagine the community of learners and reflect its significance within a renewed curriculum.

There is always a question of pedagogy where learning is concerned and yet we continue to ignore the positive impact of diverse cultures, students' own concerns

with language and identity and the power of affective learning. The role of places and spaces is of great emotional significance and shows the potential that a treasured environment may have on personal and social understanding. The opportunity to include this rich but often ignored resource for a more critical understanding and a new approach to the curriculum must feature in our future place-based strategies to learning. We need to extract the experience of people in specific communities at certain times in the history of their communities, and through social interaction in the classroom and beyond it, create new learning involving objective knowledge and thought and feeling. What these geographical locations tell us is that passion for the place is a marvelous resource and that we need to harness this so it becomes in turn a passion for learning. The implication is clear – we need to re-define the subject matter of what we learn and teach and the ways in which people in communities can become central to learning.

There is a third crucial question which goes to the heart of what universities are good for: *'Will our education system be up to the task of producing really*

"The role of places and spaces is of great emotional significance and shows the potential that a treasured environment may have on personal and social understanding. The opportunity to include this rich but often ignored resource for a more critical understanding and a new approach to the curriculum must feature in our future place-based strategies to learning. "

useful knowledge of the wicked issues of the day?' The really useful knowledge of one generation can serve as a guide to later generations but it must be re-constructed always in the light of current challenges. The failure to recognise and address the wicked issues of the day is more serious than just the sin

of omission. Climate change, world poverty and degradation, war and social dislocation on an unimaginable scale and environmental destruction are the great evils of the time. They are the existential issues which will make or break our way of life and they impact the whole globe and all who live on it. Our handling of these things will determine the future of our planet and species. Every individual has a stake in this matter and it transcends the burning issues of the day such as inequality, race, ethnicity, faith and injustice. Whilst we cannot and should not invite people to consider deep suffering and deprivation as a learning opportunity, these serious issues should be at the very heart of our learning and be the basis of a critical literacy relevant to all learners.

What is needed is something that resembles a critical community-based learning culture which investigates and supports the communities in which educators actually live and work. What is implied here is in fact learning beyond the classroom where the problems and challenges facing communities become the source and inspiration for learning.

"For young people in particular this is important since they are the future and they have the most to gain or lose."

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Jen Azordegan's case study in this Issue highlights the importance of critical community based learning whilst Selina Tually and Clare Rowley focus on a partnership approach to addressing homelessness. Sowbhagya Michael, Grace Fava, and Jen Spannenberg show how an innovative model for Community-Engaged Medical Education can transform learning.

As Engagement Australia reflects on the twenty years since our establishment and looks towards the future, we offer a new Position Stand on what we consider to be key to advancing impactful community-engaged partnerships in the Australian higher education sector. My thanks to Dr. Matthew Pink, Professor Jessica Vanderlelie, Dr. Peter Binks, Professor Alphia Possamai-Inesedy and The Hon. Professor Verity Firth for joining me in crafting this important Position Stand for EA which charts an exciting future ahead for this important area of university business that we all cherish. It foreshadows the need for more participation and a negotiated curriculum which focusses on the key issues of the time plus a decelerated learning and teaching (a pedagogy for dialogue) which would provide us with better tools to fashion our future. It highlights the need to help learners to develop a critical commentary on public life and reality, because the systems of mass communication we have currently leave many of them immobilised, unable to understand the causes of their confusion and alienation and unable to act on them. For young people in particular this is important since they are the future and they have the most to gain or lose.

Professor Jim Nyland
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Article

Engagement Australia Position Stand on Community–Engaged Universities: Enhancing Civic Impact through Engaged Partnerships

Dr. Matthew Pink, Professor Jessica Vanderlelie, Dr. Peter Binks, Professor Alphia Possamai-Inesedy, The Hon. Professor Verity Firth and Professor Jim Nyland.

There is little doubt that Australia is currently undergoing substantial social and economic change, an 'in-between time' (Saul, 2018) of considerable disruption. New ways and means of working, issues of environmental, economic, and social sustainability along with rapidly advancing technological change exact evolving and dynamic challenges and opportunities for our Nation. These challenges and opportunities extend to the higher education sector, a sector whose teaching, research, and outreach can serve as a key 'engine room' of societal progress (Dewar, 2022).

The need for sector-wide reform has been recognised by the Australian government with the development of a Universities Accord, as well as formal reviews into the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) and Research Engagement and Impact (REI) Assessments. It has become clear that a re-focusing and re-calibration of the structure, purpose, and priorities of the sector are needed, to best meet Australia's present and future challenges. The Universities Accord is courageously re-imagining universities for the future over the next 30 years and recognises the need to elicit civic impact beyond the production of graduates and research (Australian Government, 2023;

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Nyland, 2023). Engagement Australia applauds the explorations of the Accord given our mission to,

> *"Champion the unique role universities have within society to address contemporary domestic and global challenges through teaching, learning, research and partnerships with community, industry, and government"* *– Engagement Australia Website*

As Engagement Australia (EA) reflects on the 20 years since our establishment and looks towards the future, we offer this position stand on what we consider is key to advancing impactful community-engaged partnerships in the Australian higher education sector.

This position stand is informed by the cumulative knowledge and experiences that have been shared within EA events and publications over its 20-year journey. Additionally, it is grounded in the deep learnings and theoretical underpinnings of the Australian Carnegie Community Engagement Classification system (Firth & Gusheh, 2022). Long the benchmark standard of community-engaged US institutions, the 'Australian' version of the Classification now supports the development of community engagement in the sector, with the first official round of classifications occurring in 2023.

We see our role in the sector as informing and leading best practice in engagement and the role of this position statement is to galvanise our commitment to best practice leadership for the sector. We anticipate further position stands will be cyclical and at times topical, however, in the interim, this initial position stand will serve the foundation of our ongoing support of the sector.

Defining University– Community Engagement in an Australian Context

The Australian university sector has a rich history of engagement with community, industry, the not-for-profit sector, and government that extends over many decades. Our 40+ Universities work in every State and Territory, often across borders (domestic and international) and touch upon most if not all communities and industries. The connection of universities to the communities they serve varies by context, though extends well beyond the provision of education.

The 'definition' and 'purpose' of university engagement in Australia has evolved considerably over the last 30 years. In the 1990s, the primary engagement role of Australian universities related to the commercialisation of academic intellectual property, the use of university skills and assets to solve industry problems, and the central role

of universities in providing a talent stream to key Australian sectors: the doctors and lawyers, engineers, public servants, humanities graduates, and creative artists required for growth and development of our society and economy. Community engagement was barely articulated as a role for universities and was poorly defined.

community figures; undertook research projects drawing upon the skills of its Members; prepared submissions to Government enquiries; and ran the BHERT Engagement Awards for 22 years. For most of its life BHERT was one of the pre-eminent voices in the development of university engagement best practise in Australia.

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"Our purpose is to champion the unique role universities have within society to address contemporary domestic and global challenges through teaching, learning, research and partnerships with community, industry, and government"

Engagement Australia Website

Like a number of other countries (e.g., UK, Canada, South Africa), the formalisation of Australian University engagement began with industry and in our context the establishment of Business-Higher Education 'roundtables' (BHERT) in the early 1990s. Established as a private sector association in 1990, through its 30-year history, (1990-2019) BHERT conducted roundtables with Government Ministers, industry CEOs, Vice-Chancellors, and leading

in the 2000s engagement capabilities in both Australian universities and in industry were maturing and a broader definition of engagement that extended beyond industry partnership was gaining momentum. The concept of a 'civic University' gained currency: a university that is an integral part of a specific community (town, city, or region). The term 'community engagement' with a meaning that was broader than industry engagement began to be more readily

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discussed and in 2003 the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance (AUCEA) was established by Western Sydney University's then Vice Chancellor, Professor Jan Reid, and with unanimous support from the Association of Vice Chancellor's Committee (AVCC), AUCEA was formed and quickly became recognised as the peak body for engaged universities in Australia. In 2011, a name change to Engagement Australia (EA) represented a willingness to consider a broader conceptualisation of engagement (beyond traditional notions of community that did not include government and industry). Engagement Australia continued to grow as a university-supported peak body providing a much-needed mechanism through which to showcase and develop a breadth of engagement practice and civic engagement. In recognition of this evolving maturity and the considerable mission overlap between BHERT and EA, the Board of BHERT agreed to close BHERT, and to pass its advocacy role – and its long-running Awards mechanism – to Engagement Australia.

As a model, Engagement Australia was better suited to support the breadth of university engagement in Australia, with an annual conference, a journal (Transform), commitment to professional development and a developing relationship with the international Carnegie network. The

growth of Engagement Australia over the last 5 years has vindicated its role as the leading voice on engagement in Australia.

Reflecting on the range, the reach and the depth of EA's capability building with universities to improve their institution's engaged research and teaching practice over the last twenty years, it is striking just how far we have come in defining and shaping a concept of engagement. Yet, in the early years it is fair to say it was a struggle for the university sector to arrive at a commonly accepted definition of 'engagement' - or for that matter 'community' - given the differences in mission.

As we navigated the challenge of finding a common definition, and the diversity in university engagement across the sector, the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification gained strength in the USA. Since its inception in 2006, it has been the leading framework for institutional assessment and recognition of community engagement in US higher education. The framework allows universities to demonstrate their commitment to the communities they serve, supports the sharing of good practice, and encourages continuous improvement through periodic re-classification.

At the heart of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification is the definition of Community Engagement. Importantly the Carnegie Foundation provides a clear yet comprehensive definition of community engagement (Australian definition provided):

"The collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial creation and exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. The purpose of community engagement is the partnership (of knowledge and resources) between higher education institutions and the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching, and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good." (Engagement Australia, 2022)

For the Australian sector, an important addition with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples was made:

"All Australian higher education institutions are committed to the advancement and self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander peoples and reconciliation of First Nation peoples with the wider Australian community. This commitment is foundational to Community Engagement in the Australian context." (Engagement Australia, 2022)

Engagement Australia has adopted the Carnegie definition of community engagement to guide our support of the sector and to provide a clear single definition to guide our work. Our position is that this definition should be adopted by Australian higher education institutions to support a unified and inclusive understanding of community engagement, one that drives best practice and standards that compare with higher education internationally. This provides a consistency in definition long needed by the sector.

Position 1: Engagement Australia recommends sector-wide adoption of the Carnegie definition of community engagement

The Australian Carnegie Community Engagement Classification

A total of 361 institutions in the US are currently classified as Carnegie Community Engaged Campuses, with classification regarded as a mark of distinction and best practice. The American Council of Education (ACE) acts as the administrative and research host institution for the classification. In 2016, the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification began its process of internationalisation with pilot programs in Ireland and Canada.

In the period from 2018 to 2020, ten Australian universities collaborated to pilot the US-based Carnegie Community Engagement Classification for its appropriateness in Australia. This included, in partnership with the Carnegie foundation, contextualising the classification to Australian practice through adapting, piloting, and refining the application form and associated concepts. The ten pilot universities were supported by a further seven 'observer' universities who provided feedback on the process and outcomes of the pilot. Key aspects of the 'Australian-isation' of Carnegie included adjusting nomenclature in the application form to match the Australian context, making explicit the need for institutional commitment to the advancement and self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and providing greater focus on community engaged research as a key goal of an engaged university. Subsequently, the Australian Carnegie Community Engagement Classification was launched in 2022 with the first round of classifications given in 2023.

The Australian Carnegie Classification is led and administered by the Network for Community Engagement and Carnegie Classification Australia under the auspices of Engagement Australia and is supported by a thriving community of practice. The community of practice supports capacity building for impactful university-community partnerships and also for universities seeking to institutionalise community engagement, enhance their evaluation of community-engaged practices, and seek Carnegie classification.

Participating universities benefit greatly from the institutional self-study of their commitment to community engagement and the detailed feedback received by Carnegie (Firth & Gusheh, 2022). The Carnegie definition has been shaped by decades of research into deep, reciprocal, and impactful community engagement and sets the foundation for high standards with respect to the processes, outcomes and impacts of university-community engagement. The classification brings a level of rigour in assessment not previously seen in the sector.

Through the process of developing their application, institutions will consider the breadth and depth of their current practice as well as the strategies, tools, resourcing, and metrics that enable them to design, deliver and monitor

their impact. Community engagement transforms the way an institution enacts its core missions of knowledge creation and dissemination by requiring institutions to rethink how research and teaching and learning can happen with community collaborators. As such, Carnegie encourages a shift from knowledge sharing and knowledge exchange to knowledge co-creation with community (Johnson & Saltmarsh, 2020). Through such co-creation via reciprocal partnerships, university can transform their academic practices and culture and achieve mutually beneficial educational, social, and civic outcomes *with* community (Johnson & Saltmarsh, 2020).

Carnegie's institutional self-study, reflection, and continual improvement cycle accompanied with strong philosophical and structural underpinnings supported by the extant literature on community engagement support the rigour and growth-mindset needed for Australian institutions to advance their community engagement. Further still, the focus on system-wide evaluation of outcomes and impacts for university and community highlight the importance of achieving mutually beneficial and broader social impact (such evaluation is likely to be a topic of a future position stand). This is to optimise the societal benefit and demonstrate the broader impact

implicated by the the Higher Education Standards Framework and the Universities Accord.

Position 2: Engagement Australia recommends Australian institutions engage with the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification as a means to support continual reflection on and improvement in engaged practices that enhance civic outcomes.

Engaged Partnerships

Throughout history universities have been vehicles of social and technological innovation and change, though despite their role developing new understandings and perspectives, their scope was often shaped more through government priority and market demand than by a desire to support the communities they served. For many years universities were the system responsible for educating the country's future professionals, where approaches to research and learning were internal activities that occasionally engaged outside the boundaries of academia, and where social responsibility extended to changing public discourse.

In this respect, the inclusion of social responsibility in the mission of a university is not new. However, its more recent emergence as a third pillar in the mission of universities was spurred by

the inclusion of "strong civic leadership, engagement with local and regional communities, and a commitment to social responsibility" within the Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF, Criterion 13; Australian Government, 2021). Since the late 90s we have witnessed the emergence of entrepreneurship programs and stronger connection with industry on research. More recently, despite the myriad of uncertainties and risks that surround us, there is a growing recognition of our role in community and commitment to public good

The Australian Universities Accord Interim report identified the need for civic institutions that have an unconditional commitment to social responsibility. We see significant examples of this type of activity across the sector. Institutions like Southern Cross University who opened their campus to shelter residents in the Northern New South Wales floods, Griffith University who provides dental care in remote Western Queensland, the University of Melbourne who supported vaccine development during the pandemic and the University of South Australia who is working to reduce youth homelessness. The challenges and opportunities of the present moment demand active involvement of universities in community.

However, not all engagement is created equal. The Carnegie Community Engagement Classification challenges our institutions to think beyond superficial, one-way engagement to consider the intentional design of activities that are undertaken with community members in reciprocal partnership. At its heart, best practice engagement builds the capacity of all individuals, groups, and organisations involved, to understand and collaboratively address issues of public concern and pursue public good.

Under the framework, community engagement is only possible when relationships are grounded in the qualities of reciprocity, mutual respect, shared authority, and co-creation of goals and outcomes (Johnson and Saltmarsh, 2020). Such relationships are by their very nature trans-disciplinary (knowledge transcending the disciplines and the higher education institution), asset-based (where the strengths, skills, and knowledges of those in the community are validated and legitimised) and transformational (Engagement Australia, 2022). Reciprocal partnerships, as defined by Carnegie are characterised by collaborative community and higher education institutions definitions of:
1. problems, opportunities, and goals;
2. strategies and solutions; and
3. measures of success.

In this way, community engagement requires the recognition, respect, and valuing of the knowledge, perspectives, and resources of community partners (Johnson and Saltmarsh, 2020). This kind of deep partnership takes time, trust, a commitment to following through and an investment in people and initiatives. Importantly this work requires an intentional strategy and clear understanding of an organisation's core values and mission. So much of the engagement activity at Australian universities goes unseen and unrecognised by the wider university. Relationships are often managed at an individual level and as a result, are fragile and at risk if a staff member leaves. A focus on reciprocity, encourages the conversation about mutual benefit and intentional design with community, with clear outcomes in mind. While many partnerships span multiple years and emerge significantly over time, a commitment to reciprocity ensures that the partnership, outcomes, initiatives, and approaches evolve with the partnership.

Engagement Australia champions the importance of reciprocal partnerships in civic engagement. It platforms the best practice of partnerships with community, industry and government and argues for a higher education ecosystem that enables and values community engagement through

institutional accountability. This work is important in a world that is characterised as being in a state of metamorphosis (Beck, 2016). The state of disruption that we are witnessing sees old certainties falling away, with something quite new taking its place. Collectively, we are re-evaluating societal priorities and values. The broader societal role of the university, one that goes beyond the traditional academic functions is needed now more than ever. As such, Engagement Australia recommends Australian universities enhance their broader social role through the development of reciprocal partnerships with community.

Position 3: Engagement Australia recommends that Australian institutions pursue engaged partnerships with community that are reciprocal and mutually beneficial as defined by the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification. University-community engagement partnerships should be characterised by collaborative definitions of:

1. **Problems, opportunities, and goals**

2. **Strategies and solutions; and**

3. **Measures of success**

This requires recognition, respect, and value of the knowledge, perspectives, and resources of community partners

as collaborators (Engagement Australia, 2022, p.4). As such these partnerships are typified by "co-creation of knowledge, learning, goals, and outcomes" (Johnson & Saltmarsh, 2022, p.112) between partners, as opposed to one-way knowledge transfer from university to community.

Furthering institutionalisation

The requirement for universities to demonstrate 'strong civic leadership, engagement with local and regional communities, and a commitment to social responsibility' (HESF, Criterion 13; Australian Government, 2021) has driven a maturing of engagement practice, however unlike the learning and teaching, research and governance standards, there have been no accountability mechanisms in place to track the performance of universities in meeting this statutory requirement. This has resulted in a lack of enabling mechanisms to carry out and report against this work.

Engagement Australia argues that the best way to measure an institution's commitment to, and meeting of, Criterion 13 is through the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification. The classification broadly considers how "Institutionalised" (Furco, 2010, p. 388) community engagement is within a higher education institution. That is, how intertwined community engagement is with institutional identity and culture, commitments, priorities, practices, and evaluation mechanisms (Driscoll, 2009; Hutson et al, 2019).

Specifically, institutionalisation means that community engagement is*,

» Clearly defined by the institution

» Explicitly and genuinely a part of the institution's identity and culture

» Prioritised in the strategic planning of the institution

» Infused into the teaching, research, and outreach activities of the institution

» Supported by workload, incentive, and reward structures

» Appropriately resourced by the institution

» Evidenced by the depth and breadth of reciprocal partnerships with community leading to mutually beneficial outcomes and impact

» Supported by system-wide evaluation practices that both substantiate mutually beneficial outcomes and impact and influence the nature of ongoing partnerships

* For a more detailed understanding of indices of institutionalisation, review the full Carnegie application form on the Engagement Australia website (Engagement Australia, 2022)

As discussed by Hutson et al., (2019, p.6), sustained institutionalisation of community engagement "is the successful and full integration of community engagement into the structural framework of the institution as evidenced by full campus and community support, understanding, implementation, and leadership". Through such institutionalisation, community engagement can become a key means of Australian universities partnering for the civic outcomes implicated in the HESF. It is Engagement Australia's position that the institutionalisation of community engagement should be a focus of Australian universities seeking to enhance their core functions and civic outcomes in support the social good.

Position statement 4: Engagement Australia supports pursuing the institutionalisation of community engagement in Australian universities as the most effective and enduring means to enable best-practice and mutually impactful university-community engagement at scale.

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Knowledge sharing and networking

There is a wealth of outstanding community engagement practice embedded across Australian higher education. The challenge for our sector has always been one of dissemination. Barriers such as distance, competitive advantage, staff workload and the perception of leadership's willingness to share institutional information are real and take intentional effort to overcome. With the dissolution of the Office of Learning and Teaching and removal of the Australian Grants and Fellowship programs that prioritised dissemination, we are often left to conference presentations, papers or higher education media or awards programs to highlight the good practice happening across our sector.

Engagement by nature is a team sport, yet so many engagement professionals work in pockets of isolation and struggle to get reach across their organisations. Indeed, it is common to find outstanding practice taking place in areas you were not aware of until an article is published, or it hits social media. For Australian higher education to truly impact the communities we serve and contribute to lasting social good, we must make space and time to bring staff together, showcase

practice and importantly intentionally train for best practice approaches. Deep reciprocity requires practices that address power imbalances and enable knowledge exchange particularly when working in diverse, cross-cultural settings marked by disadvantage (Cyril et al., 2015). Importantly, this opportunity for connection must extend beyond those identified as engagement professionals to build capability broad and deep within the institution.

Finally, we need to value and reward cross institutional partnerships. There are some outstanding examples of this across the country including the VIC Indigenous Engineering Winter School (VIEWS) Program in Victoria that is raising the aspiration of Indigenous high school student for STEM and 'Imagined Futures', an equity focused consortium led by UNSW, UTS and Macquarie University that delivers a literacy focused program for years 7-9 students in partner high schools.

The Carnegie Network Community of Practice has provided a much-needed vehicle to share good practice and support staff across our institutions to connect and share lessons learnt. With regular professional development sessions and communications that are sent to more than 1500 subscribers, the Network supports institutions to explore, develop and expand their

practice. So far, in 2023 over 900 people from the COP have registered for one or more Carnegie related event. In an increasingly resource constrained sector, we no longer have the luxury of reinventing the wheel. Collaboration is now the key to success and something that we need to drive as a sector between our institutions and across our partnership networks. It is Engagement Australia's position that engagement in communities of practice and knowledge sharing between institutions is critical for enhancing engagement practices and civic impact.

Position 5: Engagement Australia recommends that in the pursuit of best-practice community engagement, Australian universities engage in communities of practice and knowledge sharing between institutions. Beyond competition, knowledge sharing and networking can enhance practices and the cumulative civic impact of the sector.

Conclusion

As the sector embarks on significant reform via the Universities Accord there is a profound opportunity for Australian universities to enhance their teaching, research, and civic impact through engaged partnerships that are reciprocal and transformational. As put forward in this position

stand, the Australian Carnegie Community Engagement Classification provides appropriate theoretical and philosophical underpinnings, in addition to a classification process that enables institutions to reflect upon and seek to advance their community engagement. Such advancement is achieved through the institutionalisation of community engagement into the mission, culture, and practices of our universities. This institutionalisation should be supported by thriving cross-institutional communities of practice and knowledge sharing. It is hoped that this position stand is useful in supporting the understanding of EA's purpose in addition to our views on university-community engagement in the Australian higher education sector. This position stand sets the foundation for future positions on specific concepts related to best-practice community engagement. Figure 1 provides the summary of positions for ease of reference.

Summary of Positions

1

Position 1
Engagement Australia recommends sector-wide adoption of the Carnegie definition of community engagement

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Position 2
Engagement Australia recommends Australian institutions engage with the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification as a means to support continual reflection on and improvement in engaged practices that enhance civic outcomes.

3

Position 3
Engagement Australia recommends that Australian institutions pursue engaged partnerships with community that are reciprocal and mutually beneficial as defined by the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification. University-community engagement partnerships should be characterised by collaborative definitions of:

1. Problems, opportunities, and goals
2. Strategies and Solutions; and
3. Measures of success

This requires recognition, respect, and value of the knowledge, perspectives, and resources of community partners as collaborators (Engagement Australia, 2022, p.4). As such these partnerships are typified by "co-creation of knowledge, learning, goals, and outcomes" (Johnson & Saltmarsh, 2022, p.112) between partners, as opposed to one-way knowledge transfer from university to community.

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Position 4:

Engagement Australia supports pursuing the institutionalisation of community engagement in Australian universities as the most effective and enduring means to enable best-practice and mutually impactful university-community engagement at scale. Specifically, institutionalisation means that community engagement is*,

» Clearly defined by the institution

» Explicitly and genuinely a part of the institution's identity and culture

» Prioritised in the strategic planning of the institution

» Infused into the teaching, research, and outreach activities of the institution

» Supported by workload, incentive, and reward structures

» Appropriately resourced by the institution

» Evidenced by the depth and breadth of reciprocal partnerships with community leading to mutually beneficial outcomes and impact

» Supported by system-wide evaluation practices that both substantiate mutually beneficial outcomes and impact and influence the nature of ongoing partnerships

 * For a more detailed understanding of indices of institutionalisation, review the full Carnegie application form on the Engagement Australia website.

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Position 5: Engagement Australia recommends that in the pursuit of best-practice community engagement, Australian universities engage in communities of practice and knowledge sharing between institutions. Beyond competition, knowledge sharing and networking can enhance practices and the cumulative civic impact of the sector.

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VC's View Point:

Reimagining the Public role of Universities

Professor Barney Glover AO FTSE FRSN

The Australian Universities Accord reform process is an all too rare opportunity to collectively re-imagine the public role of universities. As a member of the Accord panel, I have been struck by the clarity of vision of what the function of a university is in society. The wholistic review of education that Australia is currently engaged with, from early childhood through to higher education, is a chance to catalyse generational change and transformation.

We are living through a time of considerable disruption. New forms of civic engagement – digital and actual – are challenging traditional principles and structures. It is an ideal time for universities to reassert and, to an extent, reconceive their responsibilities as civic institutions committed to social good.

The focus on social good guides the empowerment of students, the impact of research, and how universities work with the many communities they serve. The cliché of the ivory tower no longer fits the purpose of a university, particularly in a country like Australia where campuses are increasingly porous, and university acts set out clear obligations to the communities universities are embedded within.

Social responsibility is emerging as a core and equal part of the mission of universities. To better ensure Australia will reach its full potential both economically and culturally, universities must make unconditional commitments to it.

Former vice-president at King's College London, Jonathan Grant argues the commitment to social responsibility is low within higher education, both historically and today. However, his analysis of the top 71 universities in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2018, points to an increase of both conditional and unconditional commitments of social responsibility from founding to current mission statements.

The Australian Universities Accord Interim report reinforces the need of unconditional commitment of social

responsibility. The report argues the need to better recognise and resource community engagement to enable the important work of being anchor institutions.

This is the case at Western Sydney University, where service and engagement are interwoven throughout its Parliamentary Act. The university-wide approach to community engagement reflects the idea that universities have a broader societal role beyond traditional academic functions.

Western Sydney University, with its campus network spanning the major urban centres of its region, speaks to the importance of working with communities on addressing opportunities and challenges. The region, with its growing population, transition in industry and central business district revitalisations, is a complex space of potential and need.

Individuals within the region are among the nation's most skilled, exceeding the national average. A 2022 Centre for Western Sydney report revealed 27.2 per cent of the region's residents hold a degree, compared to 26.3 per cent nationally. This report is a story of transformation, but also highlights the areas of need that civic institutions

– chiefly, universities – must work to understand and address.

Through engagement, purposeful partnerships and expertise, Western Sydney University has drawn the attention of policy makers to longstanding inequities the pandemic laid bare; the pockets of profound

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"Truly civic institutions are those that do social good with, and not for, the communities that simultaneously shape, and are shaped by the engagement."

income and equity disparity. Despite good progress, Western Sydney residents have not reached the same level of income attainment as the rest of Greater Sydney. There is a higher representation of low income households as well as the highest number of women providing unpaid care than the rest of Sydney. The vulnerabilities of the region are visible through infrastructure needs, including digital inclusion.

Western Sydney University's campus locations make visible the social goods that higher education provides. This campus network reaches into the communities of the region, where the need of social responsibility and community engagement are clear. Understanding the local through community engagement allows for co-created initiatives, such as the University's recently announced, Fairfield Connect. This hub is being designed with the Fairfield community will provide opportunities for job skilling, pathway opportunities, facility use and opportunities for SMEs through the university's Launch Pad technology business incubation program.

The impact of Fairfield Connect will be gauged through continued engagement and consultation, particularly in a space where there are high rates of unemployment, humanitarian migration, and a disproportionate representation in the lower income bands. Formalising the role that universities play as anchors as well as capturing the work that they do and how to evaluate it are crucial next steps.

Place-based compacts between universities and the communities they serve is one potential step forward.

The compacts would provide a mechanism to evidence a university's commitment of being an anchor institution. This approach, with the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, introduced to Australia in 2022, provides universities with an opportunity to undertake a rigorous and independent review of their investment and commitment to community engagement. Combined, they demonstrate an accountability of our social responsibility.

It may seem obvious, but now more than ever, university engagement needs to be a two-way street. Even with the best intentions, it hasn't always been the case. Truly civic institutions are those that do social good *with*, and not *for*, the communities that simultaneously shape, and are shaped by the engagement. Universities are ideally placed to make that a reality in the decades ahead.

Professor Barney Glover
AO FTSE FRSN
Vice-Chancellor and President of Western Sydney University

Professor Barney Glover AO assumed his position as Vice-Chancellor and President of Western Sydney University in January 2014.

His career includes significant expertise at the most senior levels of university management as well as demonstrable leadership across the higher education sector. This currently includes as Convenor of the NSW Vice-Chancellor's Committee, Chair of the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching Working Group, Panel Member of the Australian Universities Accord, and the Australia-based Patron of the Association for Tertiary Education Management (ATEM).

Professor Glover is an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO), a Fellow of the Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE), and a Member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors (MAICD).
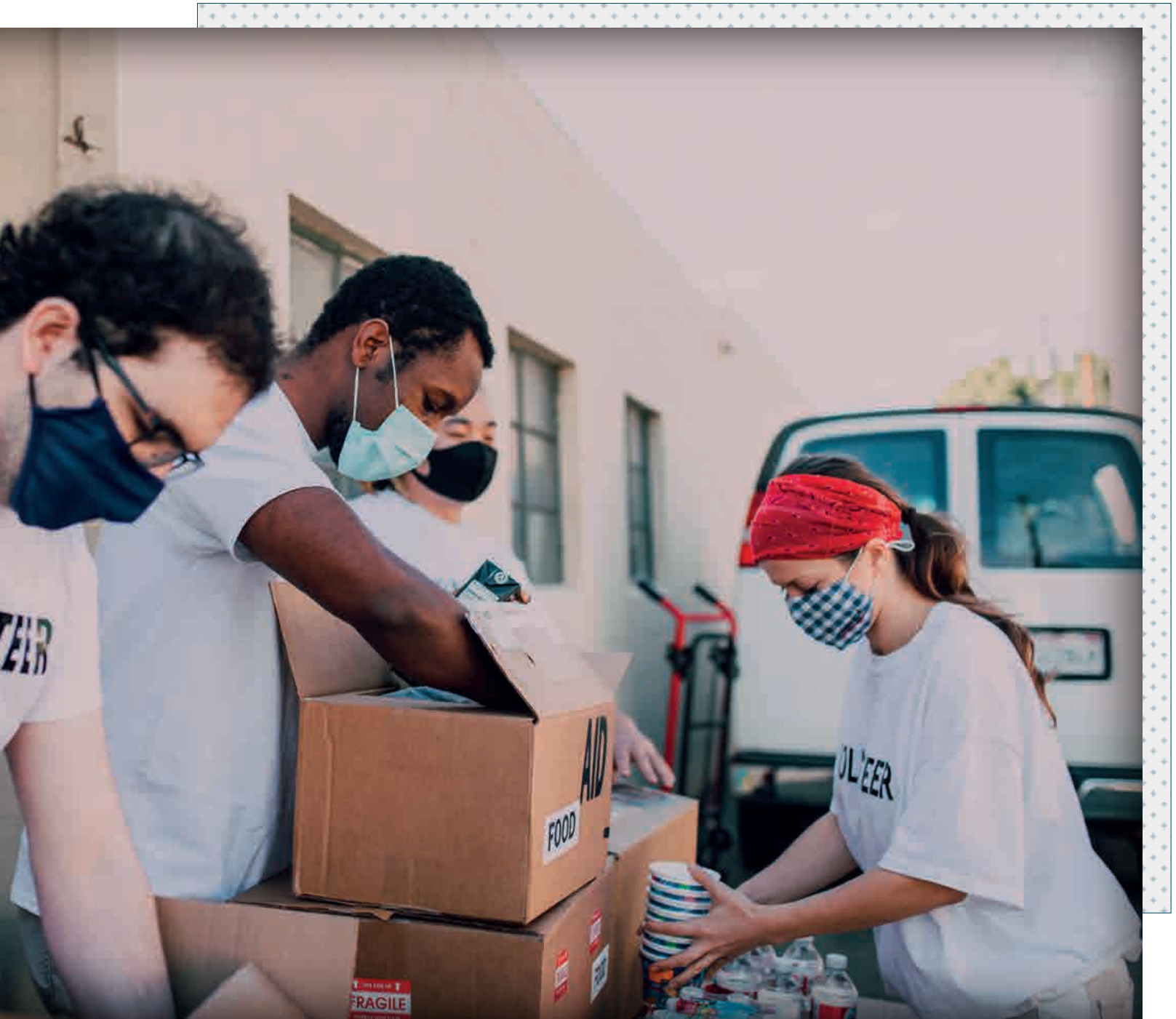
VC's View Point:

A University's Place in Thriving Communities

Professor Zlatko Skrbis

I was heartened to read the Accord interim report. The panel, supported by feedback from Australian universities has given a great deal of thought to how the sector can advance in the next three decades. There is a clear intention to sharpen the focus of Australian universities towards the social and economic development of Australia and to support the prosperity of our nation. There is a strong indication that we may end up with the policy and incentive structures which will help strengthen the university system and help create more impactful universities.

Of particular interest was the report's focus on widening access to universities. Australian workforce trends and projections identify that a university education will be critical for job creation, employment and national prosperity. Research shows that improving access for those who have traditionally experienced barriers to higher education is a worthy 'nation building' pursuit. We should never take the transformational power of higher education for granted. I applaud the interim report's recommendation to extend demand-driven funding for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, regardless of geographic origin. This was a recommendation we had supported in ACU's submission to the Accord discussion paper. If this comes to fruition, it will be an exciting development for the sector. It's also timely for ACU as we embark on establishing our first Pro Vice-Chancellor, Indigenous to further the work of our First People's directorate.

ACU is currently finalising an important piece of work on envisioning its own future: the 10-year strategic plan or 'Vision 2033' as it has become known. Vision 2033 will direct the university to enable flourishing lives, foster thriving communities, and build ethical futures. It sets out to deliver on our mission statement: commitment to the

pursuit of knowledge, the dignity of the human person, and the common good. "Engaged communities" is one of the four success indices that will help us achieve our strategic ambitions. Serving in solidarity by "thinking and acting in terms of community" (Pope Francis,

community engagement should be appropriately recognised and resourced. As a mission-focused university, this is something we do already. Consistently, our recommendation to the Accord panel was that the Commonwealth should support base funding for

there is appropriate respect, reciprocity, and subsidiarity with our community partners. Through approaches that

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> *"Universities that can partner effectively and honour the knowledge, contributions, and perspectives of those they work with, will enrich their own research, teaching, and outreach programs to optimise their impact for the benefit of society."*

Fratelli Tutti, 2020) and engaging in authentic and reciprocal partnerships will be key to realising our vision.

Effective community engagement is also implicated in the Accord interim report as a means to augment the impact of core university activities (i.e., teaching, research, and service). I was thrilled to read the 'Serving our Communities' section of the interim report which recognises that

university-community engagement.

At ACU, community engagement is a critical means by which we activate our mission and affirm our Catholic identity. Our mission necessitates striving for the common good and the betterment of society. The principles of Catholic Social Teaching that underpin our mission are consistent with engaged approaches to teaching, research, and outreach. That is, approaches where

honour the knowledge and perspectives of all partners, meaningful knowledge exchange can occur for the benefit of the university and the communities it serves.

ACU has a broad commitment to community engagement. In our curriculum, almost 4000 students

per year participate in community engagement as part of a discipline-specific community engagement unit

change makers. In the research space, the Stakeholder Engaged Scholarship Unit (SESU) furthers co-led and co-

Prominent and long-running examples include the Solomon Islands Teacher Education Immersion program (winner

of study. These experiences help shape the attributes that are the hallmarks of an ACU graduate: a person who benefits from an education that extends beyond their personal benefit, and where a 'broader' professional and personal sense of purpose is encouraged. Such an education develops tomorrow's

designed research with our not-for-profit community partners that is both mutually beneficial and impactful. ACU also has a broad suite of community partnerships domestically and internationally that work to transform society and enrich the academic and intellectual life of our staff and students.

of the Uniservitate Regional Award for Catholic Service-Learning in Higher Education), the iPLAY program which in partnership with the NSW Department of Education has enhanced the capacity of over 3000 primary school teachers to teach physical education across more than 200 schools, and the Clemente

program, empowering community members with educational barriers to grow through the transformational power of liberal arts education. The practice of community engagement is supported by ACU Engagement, a centralised unit specifically designed to further the institution's capacity for this work. ACU Engagement has a presence at each of our seven campuses nationally.

Community engagement will be critical to ACU delivering on the ambitions of Vision 2033 and through this work support the ambitions of the Universities Accord. To advance this work will require reflecting on our practice and seeking to continually improve. In our response to the Accord discussion paper, ACU highlighted the Australian Carnegie Community Engagement Classification as a means to support the wider institutionalisation of community-engaged practices. It was great to see the interim report identify that "classification measures that aim to increase community engagement efforts should be considered" (p.97). Carnegie is ACU's preferred framework given its consideration of the approach, purpose, outcomes, and impacts of university-community engagement. The Carnegie classification serves as a means for our institutions to strive for best practice in community engagement that leads to truly impactful and

mutually beneficial outcomes. This of course requires the appropriate institutional enablers, and at ACU we are 'leaning in' to a journey of continual reflection and improvement.

A university's place in a thriving community should be that of an active and engaged collaborator, who through authentic partnerships can serve in solidarity with other community institutions. Universities that can partner effectively and honour the knowledge, contributions, and perspectives of those they work with, will enrich their own research, teaching, and outreach programs to optimise their impact for the benefit of society. Further, university-community partnerships with these qualities will be more enduring, adaptable, and transformational. The Carnegie classification positions universities as co-creators of knowledge as opposed to privileged disseminators of knowledge. The quality and authenticity of our partnerships is a key measure of our success but also the key pathway allowing us to support the thriving of our communities.

Professor Zlatko Skrbis
Vice-Chancellor and President, Australian Catholic University

Professor Zlatko Skrbis is the Vice-Chancellor and President of Australian Catholic University (ACU). He is also President of the Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities (SACRU). Professor Skrbis holds a PhD in sociology and maintains an internationally recognised research profile. He has made significant contributions in the areas of migration, social theory, and life-course studies. As Vice-Chancellor and President of ACU, he is working to ensure that the university is globally recognised as a future-focused and impact driven institution that improves the lives of others through excellence in education, research, and service.
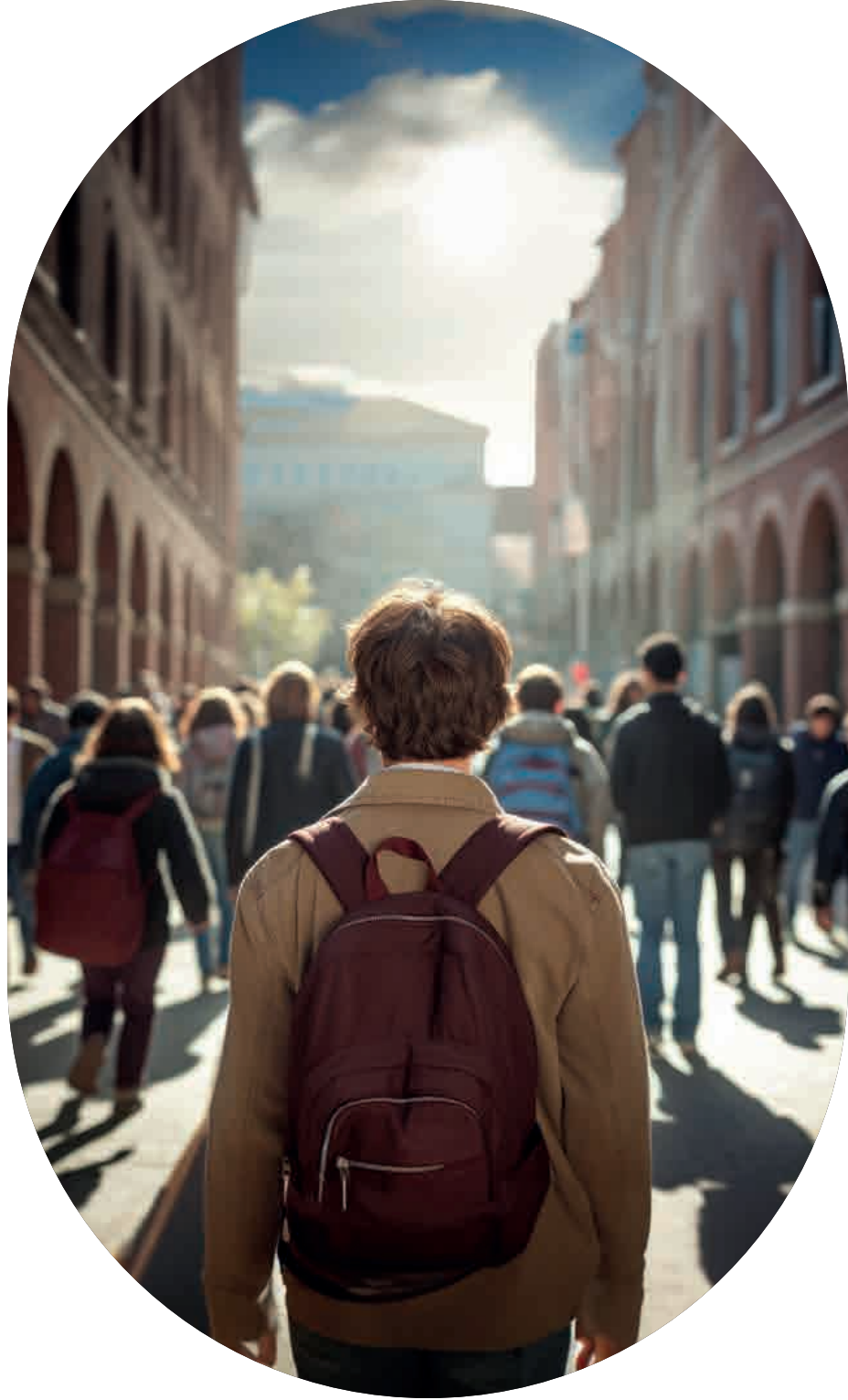
International Article

Civic Connections: How UK universities are pivoting to more place-based approaches and the implications for Australia

Natalie Day

Abstract

In 2019, the UK's Civic University Commission examined the economic, social, environmental and cultural role universities play in their towns and cities.

Despite many great examples of civic activity, they rarely saw a strategic approach based on the real needs of the local community. This much needed spotlight reignited discussion and debate about the role of universities in place and their civic obligations. Today there is much momentum around civic agendas in the UK – through the nationally focused Civic University Network (CUN); a number of institution-led Civic University Agreements; and increasing emphasis on place and levelling up via policies, people and partnership. As Australia grapples with its own moment of sector reflection through the Accord, what are the UK lessons and learnings that can help Australian universities to ensure that their geographic role and responsibility is used more effectively as an agent to drive positive societal change?

This paper explores how the civic agenda has gathered steam in recent years in the UK, what it looks like in practice and where it has the most potential to influence positive change for places and people. Drawing on the experience of UK universities, with a particular spotlight on Sheffield Hallam University, the author aims to explore implications and opportunities for Australia, with tangible recommendations for both Australian policy makers and the higher education sector itself as both parts of the system grapple with some big questions about the future of the sector and its obligation to publics and places.

Civic Connections: How UK universities are pivoting to more place-based approaches and the implications for Australia

To say it's been a rocky few years for the United Kingdom is an understatement. The country has lurched from one crisis to the next – from the aftermath of Brexit, to an unprecedented global pandemic, to the more recent cost-of-living crisis and economic collapse, compounded by the war in the Ukraine and an increasingly fragile geopolitical environment. Industrial relations disputes dominate headlines as postal workers, train drivers, nurses, junior doctors, teachers, academics, screenwriters and ambulance drivers have all hit the streets to demand change. Despite government platitudes about 'levelling up', regional inequality remains stubbornly entrenched. From the inside, it can feel like a country where government and publics are increasingly disconnected; from the outside, it is difficult to comprehend

the impacts of the combinations of arguably self-inflicted wounds and external shocks.

Against this background, universities have been undergoing their own period of reflection and soul-searching. As our social fabric has been tested and with our economic grounding unstable, what role do universities play in helping to

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> *"Universities have an irreplaceable and unique role in helping their communities to thrive – and their own success is bound up with the success of the places that give birth to them."*

heal a divided and damaged Britain? And what does a divided Britain actually want from universities? This comes on the back of a decade-long freeze on undergraduate fees, placing significant financial pressure on universities, as well as a climate where government is asking harder and harder questions about the value of higher education with a forensic focus on graduate outcomes and earnings. The civic agenda

opened up another important route to demonstrating that value for money and reference to society.

This paper explores how the civic agenda has gathered steam in recent years in the UK, what it looks like in practice and where it has the most potential to influence positive change for places and people. Drawing on the experience of UK universities, with a particular spotlight on Sheffield Hallam University, the aim is to explore and test implications and opportunities for Australia, both for the higher education sector itself and for policy makers already grappling with some big questions about the future of the sector and its relationship to communities through the University Accord process. This aims to build on related discussions within Transform and beyond, where scholars such as Professor Sharon Bell and others have rightly explored how universities can and should engage in times when we can no longer take for granted our communities' continuing trust, or assume public confidence and unquestioning acceptance of the "university" (Bell, 2019).

Being Civic

'Civic' might be the more modern buzzword in the university context, but it is a concept that has been prevalent in the aims and objectives of higher education institutions for centuries, with many universities founded on the idea of empowering their local communities to thrive and prosper through advanced knowledge and opportunity. Ultimately, 'being civic' is about the moral obligations of a university to society. This applies not just to those that it educates, but arguably more importantly, to the majority of the community who never set foot on a university campus. The term 'civic' might easily (and rightly) be replaced with 'community benefit', but regardless of language, the ethos of civic should be core to a university's mission and approach.

Civic Journeys

Within the UK, 'civic' is a concept that has had growing traction following the 2018/19 Civic University Commission, led by Lord Bob Kerslake, the former head of the UK civil service and supported by the UPP Foundation (UPP Foundation, 2019). Launched in 2018, the Commission found that many institutions were working in their community in an ad hoc way. While there were numerous examples

of people and universities being passionate about their civic outreach and engagement, few institutions approached their place in a systemic and strategic way. The Commission's final report, 'Truly Civic' argued that "universities have an irreplaceable and unique role in helping their communities to thrive – and their own success is bound up with the success of the places that give birth to them". They found that while universities were dependent on public funding, they were increasingly disconnected from the public themselves.

The Commission also identified that civic engagement had been largely occurring in an environment of indifference where UK policy had been relatively territorially agnostic for many years – with many of the influential levers and funding mechanisms being nationally designed and place-blind. This then entrenched rather than addressed huge inequalities across the country. Policy levers did not fully leverage the central role that universities can and do play, through research, industry engagement and fundamentally through producing highly skilled graduates, in contributing to national economic and societal objectives. It argued that where universities were civic orientated, this was happening despite, not because, of government incentivisation or pressure

and that the UK faced a pivotal moment where government could either enhance or undermine the civic potential of universities to contribute positively to local agendas.

The Commission provided a much-needed spotlight on universities' obligations to their place. It highlighted the opportunities, while also challenging a perceived shift in the sector where universities had increasingly seen themselves as global first, national second and local third – taking their communities for granted. It recommended that universities needed clear strategies, rooted in analysis and co-created with key partners, in the form of Civic University Agreements, which would outline their institutional priorities and clear commitments to their place. It also proposed the establishment of a Civic University Network, to share best practice and understanding and promote the civic potential of the sector to policy makers and beyond.

Civic Contexts

Importantly the Commission's work was happening against a background of national turmoil and tension in the wake of Brexit. In 2016, universities were increasingly out of step with their communities and with the national referendum vote by some margin.

During the referendum campaign, 103 out of 130 university vice-chancellors were signatories to a pro-Remain open letter (Grove, 2016). Yet, in over 54.4 per cent of voting areas which contained one or more university, this university view was in the minority (BBC, 2021). There was, and remains, a pressing need for the sector to reconnect with large parts of the country left out of educational and economic opportunities. At the same time, there was a real risk of universities being removed from critical national conversations on the future economic and social direction of the UK, swept up in what appeared to be an anti-expert, anti-establishment climate. The sector and government were not closely aligned, with politicians at best agnostic, but increasingly hostile to universities, with threats of 'culture wars' fuelling tensions and suspicions.

Civic Networks

One of the central recommendations of the Commission was the establishment of a Civic University Network (Civic University Network, n.d.). With seed funding from the Department for Education, the Carnegie Trust, Arts Council England and the UPP Foundation, the Network was launched in early 2020 as the world grappled with the pandemic, and traditional ways of working and collaborating were being rapidly reimagined and redefined. My own institution, Sheffield Hallam University – an institution which prides itself on its civic mission – successfully won a competitive tender process to lead the Network, supported by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement and the Institute for Community Studies, with partner universities including Newcastle, Birmingham and Glasgow.

The Network aims to identify and enhance ways to maximise the civic impact of universities in their place, while also working with government and strategic partners to realise and harness the potential of universities to drive positive change. With over 100 members across the UK, the Network has successfully tapped into the huge appetite for connections, sharing of best practice and problem sharing between institutions and with key stakeholders. Membership spans the breadth of missions across the university sector across the four nations, from small specialist institutions to the Russell Group (akin to the Australian Group of 8) to big regional players, who are arguably the most engaged. The pandemic, paradoxically, made these connections easier, as the pivot to online events and forums provided the opportunity to offer a rich array of programmes, events and workshops in a more accessible and efficient way. There was also a synergy as the pandemic helped shine a light on universities as critical institutions during a crisis – on the one hand leading to development of the vaccine in record times to also repurposing buildings and car parks for NHS staff and pop-up vaccination centres on the other.

Civic Resources and Agreements

Since its establishment, the Network has also produced a steady flow of rich resources in recognition of the growing appetite for institutions to understand how best to 'do' civic engagement. This ranges from an analysis of civic approaches (Civic University. n.d.) and policy mapping tools (Civic University. n.d.) to frameworks and step-by-step guides to help institutions develop and define the focus of their Civic University Agreements (Civic University. n.d.).

The Commission itself identified four principles that should underpin Civic University Agreements (CUAs) which university leaders formally pledged their support for. These included:

1. **Place** – asking institutions to pledge their commitment to attaching a high priority to the economic, social, environmental and cultural life of their local communities;

2. **Public** – ensuring that a university's civic role is informed by evidence-based analysis of the needs of the place, developed and informed by local partners and communities;

3. **Partnerships** – embedding partnerships with other anchor institutions and beyond to overcome challenges; and

4. **Measurement and impact** – imploring institutions to be clear about what they will do, and how they will measure and evidence impact with confidence.

Today, from Newcastle to Nottingham, Aston to Aberystwyth, CUAs are a prominent fixture of broader civic engagement. Over 70 universities have developed CUAs, either as individual institutions or, in places like Lewisham, Greater Manchester, Nottingham and Lincoln, as a collective vision across multiple universities, aspiring to bring together their combined strength for the benefit of their place, people and communities. As with any self-regulated endeavour, some are stronger than others, depending on where institutions are at in their civic journey alongside the unique characteristics and quirks of individual geographies and regions. But as an indication of the appetite and previous absence of appropriate mechanisms to help universities be

more strategic in this space, the take-up of CUAs reflects a groundswell of enthusiasm for this agenda.

Civic impact?

Recognising that Agreements can help frame ambitions and provide a focal point for more strategic local activities but are less helpful in capturing targets and metrics to demonstrate impact, the Network also developed a Civic Impact Framework (Civic University Network. n.d.). This is designed to support universities and their partners to measure civic impact across a comprehensive set of themes, encompassing both leadership and strategy, as well as impact in specific social, economic and environmental domains. It is not about imposing new sets of obligations or establishing unwelcome new ranking systems, but about maximising the positive impact universities can have on their communities (Calvert, 2023). This is achieved through a clear process of mapping, partnering and agreeing on key impact areas and outcomes, which are underpinned by clarity on resourcing, evaluation and learning.

The Civic Impact Framework was an important first step in navigating the murky realm of measuring activity and progress. In order to further advance understanding, evidence

and approaches to this important question, in 2022, Sheffield Hallam secured £3.7 million from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to establish a National Civic Impact Accelerator (NCIA) which aims to explore and enhance civic interventions and impact within and across place. Over the next three years, the team will be working to rapidly mobilise intelligence about place-based working; exploring how to unlock leadership potential and capacity building for civic engagement, within and outside the higher education sector; and driving more innovative practice by scaling up effective partnerships and developing shared frameworks for practical action. Drawing from international experience will be critical to this, including from the numerous positive stories from across Australia, the USA, Canada and Europe.

Understanding impact is particularly important as we approach this next phase in the UK's civic journey. The Commission's report is over five years old; many of the CUAs will be reaching the end of their valuable shelf-life. The test going forward will be to see whether or not universities systematically refresh and reinvigorate their CUAs with regularity; and how institutions publicly measure and report the impact and effectiveness of their original CUAs using the frameworks and other metrics

Figure 1 *| Domains of civic activity and progress cycle*
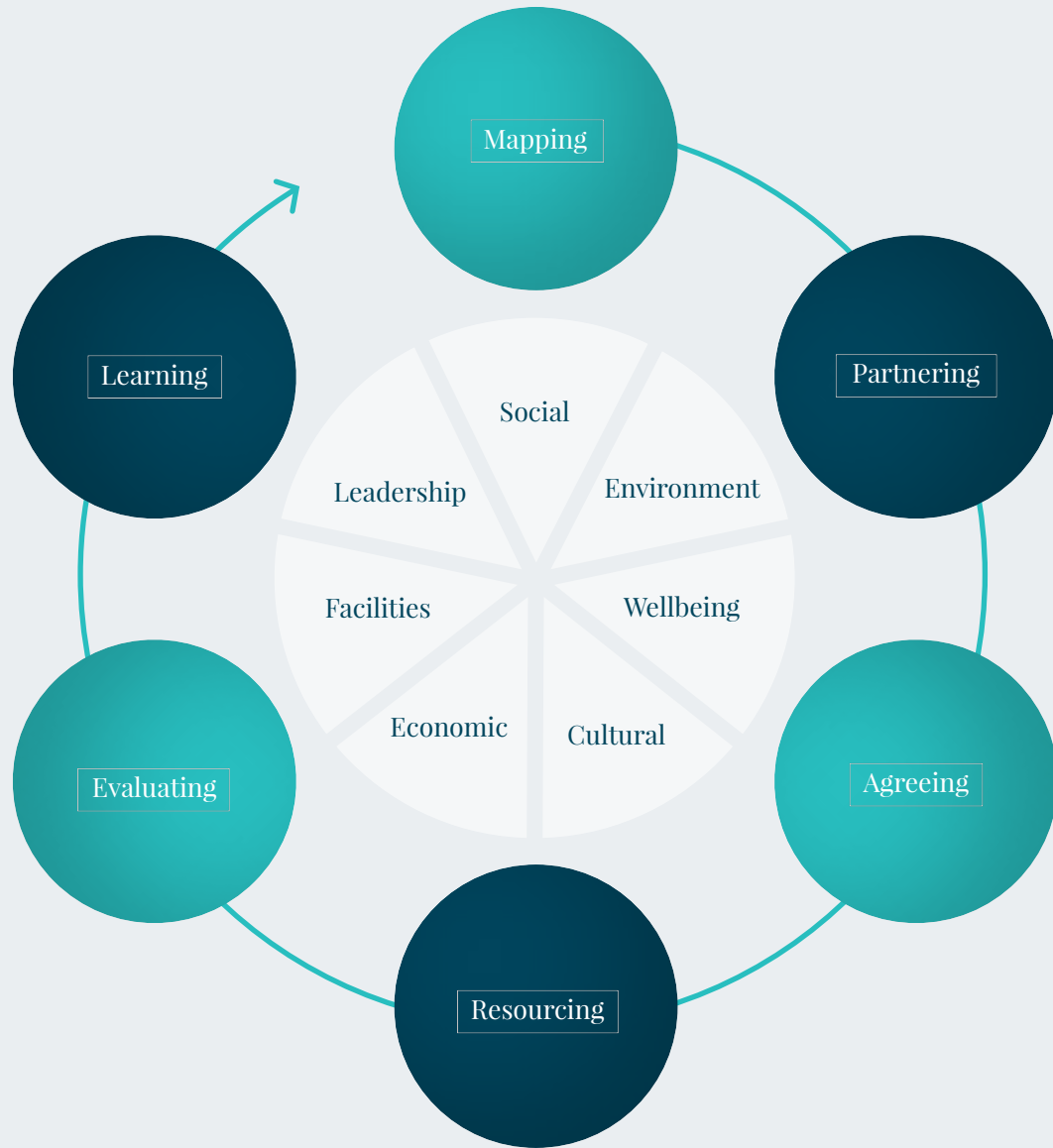
described above. As Jonathan Grant and others have argued, there is always risk of 'civic washing' and a potential gap between the rhetoric of civic engagement and what universities do in practice, particularly in those institutions whose reputations are firmly focused on international standings, rather than local citizens (Grant, 2022). As many UK universities navigate a particularly tight financial operating position, driven by a fixed (and diluted) fee resource, mixed domestic recruitment, and a volatile international market, there is a danger that 'civic' is deprioritised right when the local community needs it the most. This is where the NCIA's evidence base and outreach becomes even more important.

Civic and Policy

Beyond these targeted resources to help universities grapple with their 'civic mission', there are important synergies and connections to broader government priorities where a civic lens can help to re-enforce, re-frame, and re-energise policy development. A key aspect of the work of the Civic University Network has been to help identify key debates where civic perspectives and priorities can mobilise action on critical local and national agendas. This can be challenging because despite 'levelling up' being a dominant policy theme of the Conservative Government,

particularly under the leadership of former Prime Minister Boris Johnson, much of government policy and research funding systems remain stubbornly place blind.

Since its establishment in 2020, the Network has worked on agendas ranging from reimagining the relationship between universities and the National Health Service – building on the effective place-based collaborations that happened at scale and at pace during the pandemic (Civic University Network, 2021). Within the climate action agenda, it has also explored how universities are supporting place and communities in a just transition to net zero (Civic University Network, 2021) and how by working collaboratively with partners in a geography can help deliver national leadership.

To look in more detail at one of these policy inventions, and specifically one related to education policy, the Civic University Network, in collaboration with the Independent Commission for the College of the Future, led an extensive piece of work on how Further Education (FE) Colleges (the equivalent to TAFE institutions in the Australian context) and universities could work more effectively together to transform lives and places. This is a long-standing UK policy dilemma, where both parts of

the sector are too often pitted against each other nationally and locally to the detriment of learners, employers, institutions and local geographies. This, my co-authors and I argued, was significantly undermining the capacity of the broader skills system to deliver on pressing societal challenges, rooted in local contexts, such as closing skills gaps, supporting economic recovery, and delivering on net-zero goals.

The report, *Going Further and Higher (Always; Cooper; Day & Morgan, 2022)*, found that unequal investment and a lack of clarity on the role that universities and colleges play has meant a significant waste of potential, leading to years of unnecessary tension. At the same time, the post-16 education and skills system can suffer from being too confusing and difficult to navigate for both students and employers, with competition between institutions exacerbating this.

In a set of recommendations targeted at both sector leaders and government, the report called for universities to agree and embrace the local geography and specialisms that already exist; to work with FE colleges to develop a cohesive education and skilled pathways offer for local people, employers and communities built around lifelong learning and removing inefficient duplication and competition and

delivered through a clear partnership arrangement.

At the same time, it called on governments to set an ambitious 10-year strategy for the entire skills system – something sorely lacking in England, with balanced investment and reinstated maintenance support. Importantly, the report called for government to set out distinct but complementary roles for colleges and universities as equal partners in a more coherent system that works for local people, employers and communities – and empowers these institutions to work more ambitiously and coherently for the local skills ecosystem.

Civic case study – Sheffield Hallam University

Thus far this paper has focused on how civic agendas play out in national debates and networks, but it is instructive to look in more detail at individual institutional experiences, as case studies in how organisations approach their civic journey through a more practical, local lens. As one of the largest and most diverse universities in the UK, Sheffield Hallam, my own institution, is a useful starting point.

A former polytechnic, with origins dating back to 1843, Sheffield Hallam is firmly rooted in the region that it serves.

Sheffield is a former steel capital, the fifth largest city in the UK, significantly shaped by the industrial revolution and struggling to articulate its place and future in the modern economy. Nestled within South Yorkshire, Sheffield is a city with high levels of deprivation, stark economic and social inequality, and poorly served by government investment and infrastructure.

Universities have become the lifeblood of Sheffield. In the 1970s, 70,000 people worked in the steel industry and there were 6,000 students in higher education in Sheffield. Today, those figures are reversed, with 70,000 students across two major universities. Our institution, Sheffield Hallam University attracts over 36,000 students, with 50% from within 40 miles of the institution – the vast majority of them first-in-family to attend university, and with over 78% of students with one or more markers of potential disadvantage. Place therefore matters at Hallam.

An early adopter of the CUA idea, we first set out to ask our key partners and residents to reflect on what we do and what they think we should be doing. In 2019, after much public outreach including at shopping centres and train stations, alongside external polling and targeted conversations with key partners, the results showed that we had work to do in terms of our impact and reach.

While 39% of respondents were either very proud (12%) or fairly proud (27%) of the role played by Sheffield Hallam in their region, a significant (38%) were completely indifferent. The results showed the need for us to improve understanding of our regional impact. There was also overwhelming message from 70% of respondents around which areas of our work they saw as most important. This included:

» **training more nurses, physiotherapists, paramedics and local health workers (79%);**

» **providing extra support for disadvantaged groups to study at university (75%); and,**

» **partnering with local businesses to ensure teaching provides work-ready students with the skills the region needs (70%).**

This public consultation, in addition to the work with key regional partners, directly informed the commitments outlined in our Civic University Agreement, ensuring that our plans were joined-up and support some of the key challenges and priorities identified by our partners and our local community.

In 2021, Sheffield Hallam launched its CUA with the central aspiration to deliver for the people in our local communities and to be a beacon of what's possible (Sheffield Hallam University. n.d.). Proudly a university 'of' place, working closely with regional partners, the CUA reflected how civic is aligned to our core purpose as an institution. It is part of our institutional fabric, our mission and our values – rather than some sort of bolt-on priority that never gets appropriate traction within an organisation.

The CUA set up concrete commitments against each priority area, and have empowered the institution to realign internal infrastructure to prioritise civic, with place perspectives and priorities at the heart of decision making.

Our commitments reflect the breadth and depth of reach and impact that universities can influence – ranging from driving a stronger economy and jobs; to delivering education and skills development; to supporting the health and wellbeing of local people; and engendering a sense of community and regeneration. They aim to be targeted, measurable, and impactful. Some examples include:

» **By 2022, every Hallam undergraduate will have a work experience or placement in every year of study;**

» **By 2024, we'll offer at least 2,500 work-based degree apprenticeships;**

» **Providing all regional SMEs with easy access to business support and advice;**

» **Doubling the annual intake of students studying healthcare by 2025;**

» **Expanding our research to provide regional healthcare systems with innovations to improve local people's lives;**

» **Delivering campus redevelopment plans that significantly improves and acts as a major gateway to the city and provides new public green spaces; and**

» **Providing free access to facilities for regional and voluntary groups.**

Nearly two years on, we are proud to have delivered against these commitments and we are confident that we are having the desired impact and outreach within our community but there is much more to do. The process is now underway to refresh our CUA, enabling us to again measure our impact and to continuously test our approach, our priorities and our influence with local people and partners as part of an ongoing process. This, naturally, has to be set against the very real range of challenges still facing the city, which are arguably becoming even

more challenging in the face of the cost-of-living crisis, economic instability and a health and social case system on its knees. These challenges impact on every aspect of people's lives. No university can fix these systemic issues on their own – it requires long-term working and partnership for the common good. It speaks again to what being civic is all about – that moral purpose.

Civic structures and systems

Zoning back out from Sheffield Hallam to broader sector trends in the civic space, we are seeing increasing evidence of the civic mission changing the structures and systems within universities. We have already considered the rise of strategic civic infrastructure, in the form of CUAs and other formats which explicitly outline how and where a university will deliver for its region. Another recent trend is the increase in 'civic professionals'. An increasing number of universities are identifying senior leaders, often at Pro-Vice Chancellor or Deputy-Vice Chancellor level, who are the central advocate and champion of place-based agendas. These figures offer a visible symbol of the strategic importance and significance of civic agendas and are often supported by central 'civic teams' who might pull together knowledge exchange and public outreach

specialists, as well as experts on local agendas or characteristics.

Alongside these elements of people and leadership, we see increasing numbers of civic activities and platforms for engagement. Take, for example, the University of Derby's Civic Hub, a 'one-stop shop for all things civic' and the best place to find out about all the locally related projects, research programmes and initiatives that local partners get involved with (University of Derby. n.d.). At London Metropolitan University, the London Met Lab aims to bring together staff, students, partners and academic expertise to co-design solutions to the social challenges within the UK's capital (London Metropolitan University. n.d.). And in Wales, initiatives such as the North Wales Public Service Lab, led by Wrexham Glyndŵr University, is enabling people from across the public and third sector to come together to define problems, co-create solutions and share knowledge for the benefit of their local communities and region (Wrexham Glyndŵr University. n.d.).

Through CUN workshops to understand these approaches, it is striking how the investment is typically pretty modest – and focused on getting a strategic grip on existing activities, essentially to align resources to make the sum bigger than the parts in terms of civic outreach and investment.

These are deliberate investments in people and infrastructure to deliver change. But the gap between strategic intent and significant impact in places and communities remains a challenge, on which all institutions need to be able to honestly acknowledge and think through. At the same time, there is an ongoing challenge to the sector to reimagine and reframe existing levers and activities which are often core to a university, but through a place-based lens.

This is particularly the case because funding streams for place-based activity are diffuse and messy: there is no central funding pot or funding intent which draws these together. For example, universities are required to produce access and widening participation plans as well as knowledge-exchange strategies; as institutions we submit to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and the Teaching and Student Outcomes Excellence Framework (TEF), but there is no accountability or policy mechanism which brings these together or considers them through a place-based lens.

Figure 2 reflects what it all looks like in reality – a messy tangle of overlapping pots and priorities, with links of varying strengths to local agendas and partners, depending on
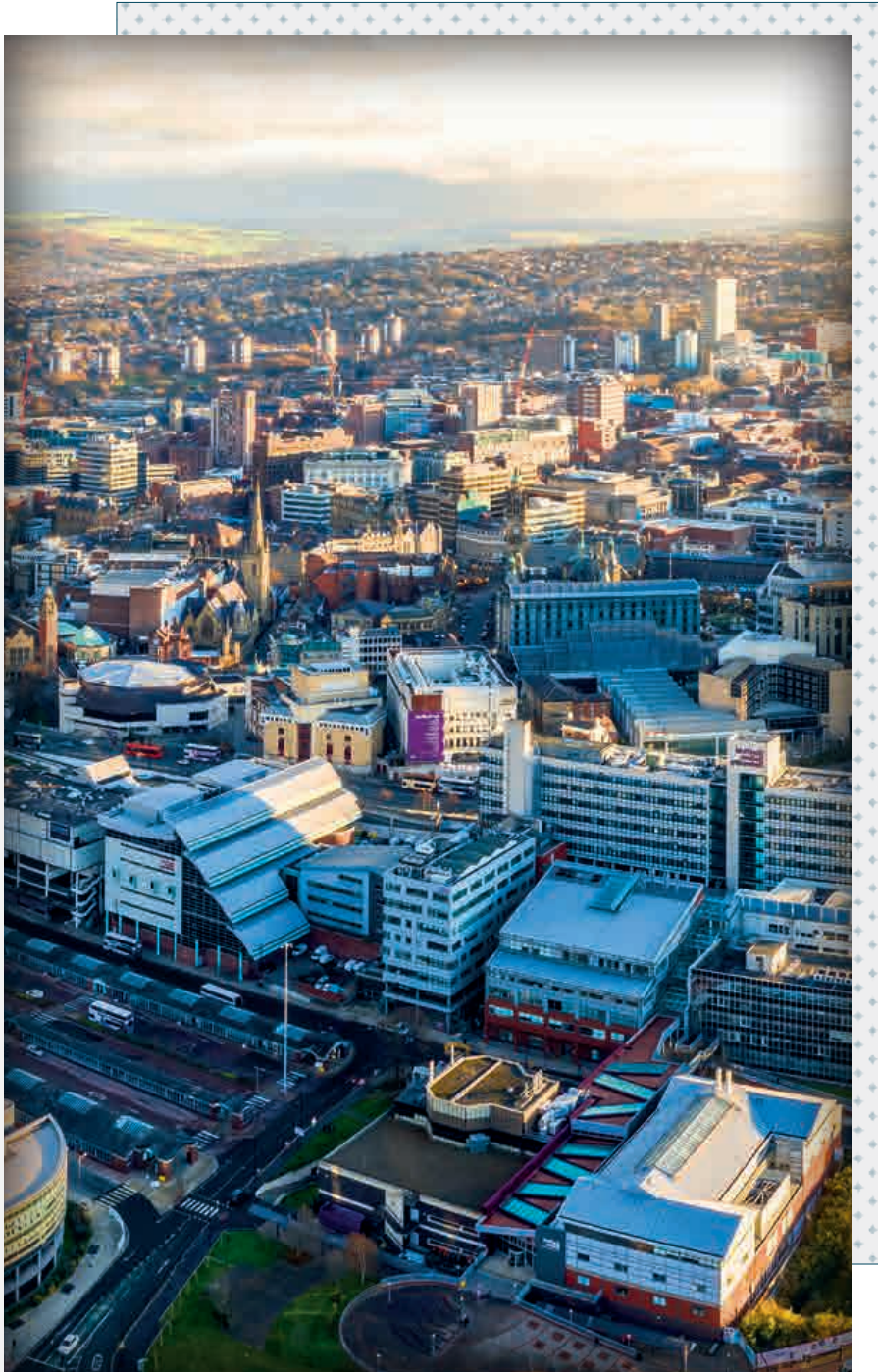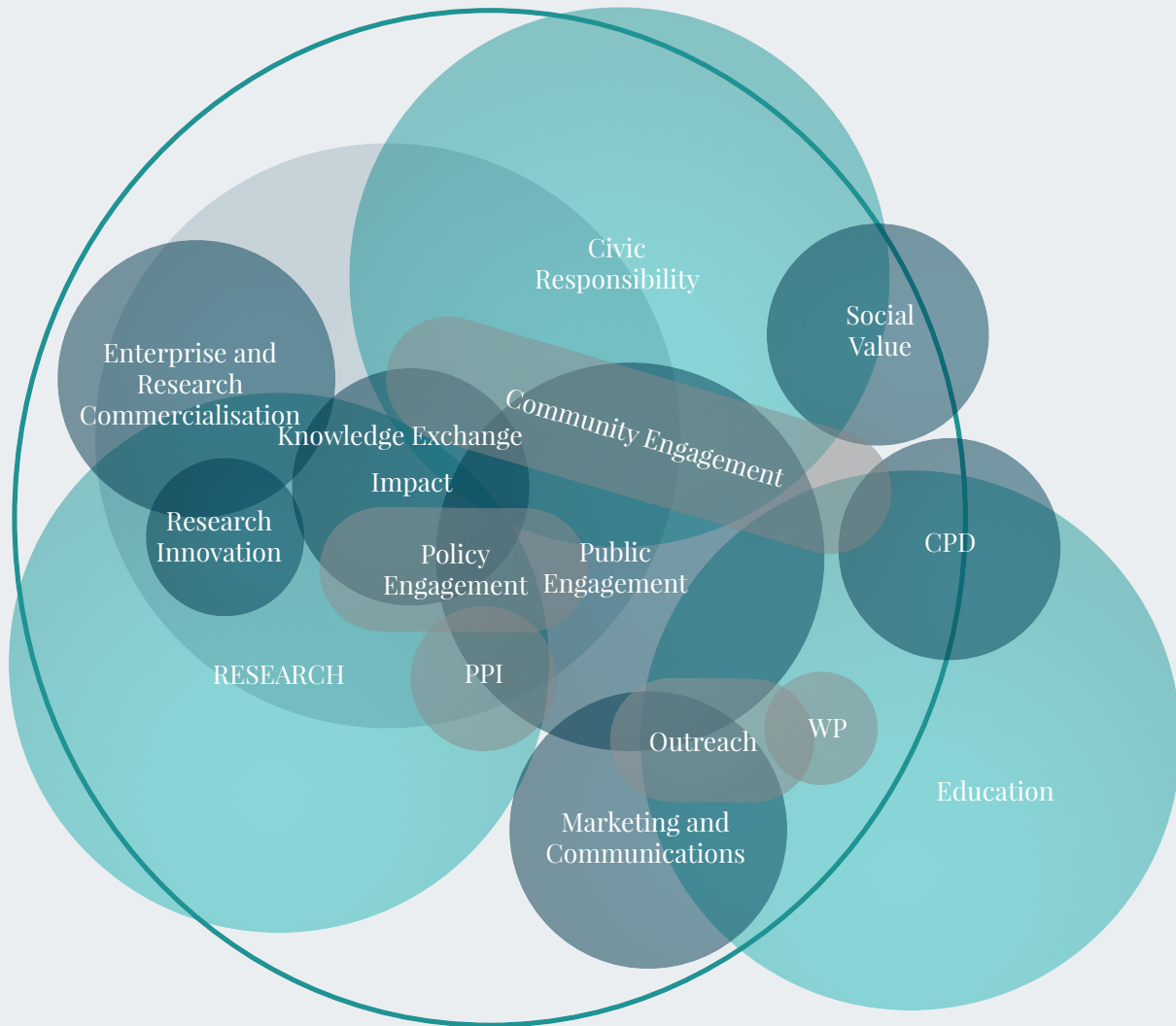
the institution's profile, priorities and geographies (Graphic courtesy of the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement. 2022). In practice, the multiple sources of funding and different policy imperatives have created in many universities a legacy of overlapping functions which are not necessarily efficiently or proactively aligned. The National Centre for Co-ordination and Public Engagement, our strategic partner in the CUN, has extensive experience working with university leadership teams to attempt to 'untangle' and re-organise their engagement activity to realise better strategic alignment, but this is challenging and slow work.

Civic and the Accord – implications for Australia

Much like the UK experience on the back of the Civic University Commission, Australia is at its own crossroads in terms of reimaging the purpose and potential of the sector to drive positive change and respond to the modern complexities and contradictions of the societies in which they serve. The University Accord ambitiously seeks to reshape the Australian education landscape over a 30-year horizon, with a vast remit ranging from access and accountability to investment, international education

Figure 2 | *Funding civic*

Civic
Responsibility

Social
Value

Enterprise and
Research
Commercialisation

Community Engagement

Knowledge Exchange

Impact

Research
Innovation

CPD

Policy
Engagement

Public
Engagement

RESEARCH

PPI

WP

Outreach

Education

Marketing and
Communications

and innovation. The Accord process has a significantly wider scope than the UK equivalent of the Augar Review of Post-16 Education and Funding, which reported in 2019 to much fanfare under the then Prime Minister Theresa May. Now, over four years - and four Prime Ministers, and five different Universities Ministers - later, our sector has only recently received a rather lacklustre official government response to some controversial proposals around student number controls, minimum entry requirements, and fee adjustments to foundation level degrees. This prolonged delay has created a clear tension between government and universities, as a state of uncertainty has eroded our capacity for these more imaginative and creative conversations about the future direction of our sector and our funding position becomes increasingly precarious.

As a jealous observer from afar, the Accord conversation appears more positively framed through a genuine desire to reset the sector on a more proactive footing to ensure that universities are best placed to respond to societal needs for an Australia 30 years hence. Connections to 'community' are central, albeit with a broad interpretation of what community is – ranging from local geographical communities to communities of practice, student communities, cultural communities, business communities and beyond. This may be an implicit reflection of a more inclusive, positive framing of university policy from a new Labour government, or it may be a more permanent reflection of policy direction post pandemic, where community and belonging are more central.

National benchmarking?

There is already growing momentum in Australia for a deeper understanding of the 'civic' or community benefit that universities can provide. Similar to the Civic University movement in the UK, the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification approach has been gaining traction in Australia. This model aspires to help universities to demonstrate their commitment to the communities they serve and to share good practices in the sector. First developed in the USA in 2006, this international outreach pilot programme has sought to support reciprocal partnerships between communities and the higher education sector in Australia, Ireland and Canada since 2016 (Engagement Australia. n.d.).

Amongst the numerous consultation responses to the Accord process, sector bodies such as Engagement Australia have argued for more widespread adoption of the Carnegie Framework to provide a national benchmark from which to build capacity and evidence engaged practice. This seems like a sensible approach as it is through more robust understandings and evidence of impact and outreach that universities can realise their potential to drive change and reach communities around them. There is, however, some benefit from a flexibility in approach – what connects the University of Wollongong to the University of Western Australia might not always be obvious and institutions need to forge the civic path that works best for their geography and their institution. While we encouraged the adoption of the CUA model in UK, it was not exclusive. Institutions could develop their own approach. The key objective was not for a hegemonized approach but for a mindset shift for the sector to embrace more strategic place-based alignment.

Whatever model is used, there is also a clear opportunity to connect more explicitly to existing infrastructure and approaches internationally, such as the NCIA and the Civic University Network in the UK, in order to build expertise and shared experience through international networks and exchange.

Regional University Centres

One of the flagship ideas of the Accord's Interim Report is the creation

of 14 new Regional University Centres, driven by an ambitious policy aim to unlock opportunities for higher education outside the major cities, with the dual purpose of making the entire system more equitable and turbocharging participation rates to deliver a highly skilled workforce.

While the geography and demography are quite different from the UK, Australia has also struggled with persistently low levels of attainment in regional and remote areas – with just under 27 per cent of participation rates in inner regional areas; 21 per cent in outer regional; and just 16.6 per cent in remote and very remote areas. At the same time, big city dwellers are twice as likely to have a higher education qualification than those in regional or remote Australia – entrenching divides of aspiration and attainment. Australian students are also more likely to stay-at-home during study, meaning that if university provision is not available in their immediate geography, they are less likely to move to pursue it.

Policy interventions which create more opportunities and address educational cold spots are therefore critical. But importantly, these regional hubs must be accompanied by the infrastructure and incentives to raise aspiration within disadvantaged groups through effective school outreach and mentoring,

and importantly, through financial support mechanisms and appropriate maintenance subsidies.

Civic can also be a powerful friend here. Smaller campuses in regional or remote areas are uniquely placed to connect with local councils, employers, and public services through Regional Advisory Boards, placement programmes, secondments, locally relevant research and innovation, as well as physical infrastructure, through shared facilities. In a recent visit to La Trobe's Wodonga Campus, one was struck by the local dog walking group sharing the café with students and staff, swapping notes on upcoming activities on and off campus. But most importantly, embedding civic partnerships from the outset, potentially through a regional CUA, provides an opportunity to articulate joint objectives of driving skills in that region, raising aspirations – particularly for younger generations, while also aiming to address inequality and reinvigorate regional centres.

There is, of course, history here. Many communities have felt let down and often ignored by small regional campuses who are beholden to the main campus in the big city and failed to engage locally. Again, the civic mission provides a pathway through this – with benefits for all sides, but

it needs to be genuine, based on partnership, shared objectives and trust. Leadership matters, for example. There needs to be a visual regional leader within the university structure to be the voice, champion and critical friend within and outside the university. Within universities, this is particularly important to ensure that students have parity of esteem, whether they are in Sydney or Shepperton, through a 'one-university' approach to service delivery, quality provision, and appropriate infrastructure.

Civic suggestions

The Accord presents an opportunity for both government and the sector to reset the relationship of universities and their communities. But there are opportunities and obligations on both sides. Policy priorities and funding levers have huge potential to drive positive change and realign objectives to a more civic orientation. At the same time, there is much that universities can and should do, regardless of the broader policy landscape. Below are some starting suggestions for both government and for the sector to consider, drawing on the UK experience and recognising the opportunity presented by the Accord process.

Recommendations for Government:

Accompany ambition with investment to turbocharge participation and progression so all students can reach their full potential wherever their live. The Interim Accord report sets out the scale of the challenge – with more than nine in ten new jobs requiring post-school qualifications, and 50 per cent of new jobs expected to require a bachelor's degree or higher by 2026 (Australian Government. 2022 & 2023). All of which requires 'substantial growth in participation from cohorts currently underrepresented in Australian higher education.' This won't happen overnight, and it won't happen without sustained systematic and structural funding, at all stages of the education system.

Systematise and incentivise participation through compulsory Access and Participation Plans which put a much-valued spotlight on the profile and support mechanisms in place to attract, retain and support students from more disadvantaged backgrounds. Drawing inspiration from the English model, overseen by the Office for Students, these compulsory four-year plans would require all Australian universities to set out how they will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to boost

participation, including robust targets and outlines of how institutions will measure and evaluate impact, investment and interventions (The Office for Students. n.d.).

Embrace the role of universities in driving positive change in local regions and address regional inequalities, working in partnership with governments. This means recognising and leveraging the potential of universities to deliver broader social and economic policy objectives, in more creative ways, in policy domains where universities might not be obvious delivery agents.

Be creative through research structures & policy levers which put place at the centre, incentivising universities to focus 'local', with an emphasis on impact as key. The UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF) is a helpful reference here, with 'impact' valued at 25% of the institution's overall score. While not without challenges, this has led to an important culture shift within institutional research strategies to value and prioritise the potential of research to generate real-world positive impacts. Impact, as described by REF, is not descriptively focused on local impact – and arguably this could be made more prominent – but it has led to more locally-focused research organically.

Embed a more connected and coherent post-18 system based on partnerships, focused on local skills needs. In a recent policy 'manifesto' authored with Professor Sir Chris Husbands ahead of the UK election next year, we argued for a modest funding pot to drive higher and further education collaboration in areas where advanced training provision is under-developed – particularly in those towns and smaller cities which do not have a university presence. The new Regional University Campuses could be central to this type of collaboration, alongside national strategies, funding and accountability system which address unproductive competition and tension.

Recommendations for Universities:

The UK experience shows that there is much that can be done, particularly in the absence of policy incentives, and that this is important in signalling the commitment of a university to they local region and community. Drawing on this, the following recommendations are offered to Australian universities:

Reorientate towards strategic place-based agenda, recognising their university's power as an anchor institution and - leveraging the enormous depth and reach of universities within their region, beyond teaching and learning.

Agree on local geography and place partnerships at the centre. With multiple campuses or spawling urban boundaries, it is important to identify where an institution wants to have most impact, and with whom they wish to work to drive positive local change. This can be complicated and different campuses may need more nuanced approaches, but a clearer sense of place and purpose is vital.

Identify and champion core priorities for civic impact, based on consultation – 'with' rather than 'to' the communities and partners within your place. This might then be articulated through a public mechanism like the CUA or the Carnegie Framework, but it must be authentic, deliverable and ambitious, with regular review mechanisms and accompanied by a robust evidence-gathering approach to understand if and where impact is happening as a result of these priorities.

Make civic core to your institution mission and structures – not a bolt on. From the Vice-Chancellor down, civic needs to be embedded in your institutional culture and character if it is to be genuine.

Embed impact incentives, measurement and evaluation in structures and systems throughout the institution, to ensure a robust understanding of what's working and what's not. Fortunately, the international evidence base is growing in this emerging field, with the NCIA and the OECD important players in this space. Establishing expectations from the outset is key, particularly in terms of making the case to government and other potential funders down the track.

Get better as a sector at articulating civic missions, sharing best practice, being a good partner, and ensuring join-up. The UK's Civic University Network serves an important purpose in this regard, in terms of providing a central hub and resource for universities, partners and policy-makers to help leverage the power of the sector to drive positive change. A similar network or hub, potentially through Engagement Australia or another established mechanism, would be beneficial to building momentum and cross-institutional collaboration and exchange.

Get beyond participation and progression targets to really make a difference in local communities, recognising that this is a shared and collective endeavour between schools and universities. Addressing the barriers to widening participation holds the key to greater social justice and speaks directly to our moral obligation as anchor institutions in our towns and regions.

And finally, **don't wait** - civic reorientation doesn't need to be government policy for effective action. There is much that can be done with modest resource but powerful positioning, building on the vast array of existing partnerships and place-based impact.

Civic Conclusions

The rise of the civic university agenda within the UK higher education sector has coincided with a critical point in the economic, political and social future of the country. Of the many challenges facing the UK, whether it is equity or inequality, productivity or participation, universities can help find creative solutions to entrenched problems. The challenge is whether the civic agenda, unsupported by policy agendas and undermined by increasing financial pressures on the sector, can continue to deliver the momentum and impacts required to drive change locally. Given the increasing economic and social challenges facing local communities, this civic agenda has arguably never been more important.

For Australia, the Accord process presents a real opportunity and the energy and enthusiasm for resetting relations between the government and the sector is hugely positive. There is a risk that expectations become

unmanageable or unattainable, particularly within constrained fiscal pressures and amongst a set of other important questions for the future of the sector – around research, around funding, and around international students. This is why it's important for both policy makers and sector leaders to have honest conversations about what's needed and what's possible both now and longer-term. Civic can take many forms, but its potential is powerful.

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Natalie Day is Head of Policy and Strategy at Sheffield Hallam University in the United Kingdom, and has over 20 years of experience in government, think tanks, national academics and universities. An Australian who started her career working as an electoral officer for the Honourable Julia Gilliard and then as a special adviser to the then Victorian Treasurer, John Brumby, Natalie moved to the UK where she first undertook senior policy roles at Demos, the influential think tank, and then at the Royal Society. Natalie has worked at the interface of research, education and policy at the universities of Melbourne, Oxford, Sussex, Sheffield and most recently, Sheffield Hallam. She has written extensively about the role of universities in society, including the influential report, 'Making University Matter: how higher education can help to heal a divided Britain', co-authored with Professor Sir Chris Husbands and the late (and much missed) Lord Bob Kerslake. She was one of the founding members of the UK's Civic University Network, and a passionate supporter of the robust interchange of policy ideas and experience between Australia and the UK. She is a graduate of RMIT and Deakin universities

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Practice Article:

The Stakeholder Engaged Scholarship Unit (SESU): An institutional approach to community-led research

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Abstract

At a time when there is increasing expectation that universities produce outwardly impactful and engaged research, more attention has been given to the way universities work with community to actively embed community perspectives into their teaching, research, and outreach activities.

This paper offers the Stakeholder Engaged Scholarship Unit (SESU) at Australian Catholic University (ACU) as one example of a university's institutional approach to furthering engaged and impactful community-led research. We discuss the institutional conditions that gave rise to the SESU at ACU. We then outline, using case studies of two completed projects, how the SESU has followed a community-led, reciprocal approach when undertaking research with community. We describe how, following in the tradition of established approaches to community-university research, SESU projects foreground the establishment of respectful, trusting relationships and reciprocal partnerships. This includes

1. Australian Catholic University

the sharing of expertise to produce outcomes and outputs that benefit communities directly and provide capacity building for community organisations and academic staff. We finish by sharing our learnings based on the challenges and opportunities that have arisen during the SESU's first three years. We propose that centralising trusting, reciprocal partnerships with community, embedding community-led research within an institution's academic culture, and facilitating opportunities to make research more accessible to community organisations, are essential ingredients for universities wishing to enact meaningful, mutually beneficial research with community.

Key words

Community-led research, community-engaged research, Stakeholder Engaged Scholarship Unit (SESU), co-design, mutually beneficial partnerships, social justice research.

Introduction

At a time of transformational change for higher education in Australia, there is a need to revisit, reconceptualise, and reconfigure approaches to university research. This has been recognised through the federal government's recent review of the Australian Research Council Act 2001, which included consideration of both Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) and the Engagement and Impact (EI) schemes (Australian Government, 2023a). Although the outcomes for ERA and EI are yet to be fully realised, it remains clear that there exists a need for research to be increasingly outwardly impactful, connected to the public good, and conducted in ways that include community in the identification and exploration of solutions to societal challenges (Australian Government, 2023c). Such approaches have the potential to address the "wicked issues" (Firth, 2018, p. 35) that our nation is facing in the next 30 years, such as essential workforce shortages, the threat of climate change, ensuring economic stability in a period of rapidly advancing technological and social change, and addressing healthy aging in a period of increasing social isolation. Further still, the increasing enthusiasm for outwardly impactful and engaged research (as kick-started by the Turnbull government in 2015; Knott, 2015), speaks directly to the requirement of Australian universities to "demonstrate strong civic leadership, engagement with its local and regional communities, and a commitment to social responsibility" (Higher Education Threshold Standards, 2021, Criterion 13; Australian Government, 2021). Research, as with other university activities such as teaching and outreach, should not be immune from such an important endeavour.

In 2023, at the time of writing this paper, the Australian government is developing an Australian Universities Accord that aims to reimagine universities for the next 30 years (Australian Government, 2023b). The Accord is asking big questions such as, "what actions and solutions are needed now, to address the major challenges underway in our society, economy, and environment?" and "what kind of higher education system does Australia need in two- and three-decades' time?" (O'Kane, 2023, p. 4). The Accord aims to better align universities with Australia's national needs through stronger future collaboration with community, industry, and government on solutions to problems of local and national concern. The Terms of Reference includes themes of governance, accountability, community, and delivering new knowledge, innovation, and capability (Australian Government, 2023b). The interim report highlights the need for government systems and support structures for high-impact research involving community, industry, and government at various levels (Australian Government, 2023c). Enhancing the mechanisms for sharing and translating research are also implicated and we argue that community-led approaches

support both sharing of research, and – through the co-creation of knowledge – limit the need for 'translation'. These approaches to research can support the ambitions of the Accord, the civic implications of the Higher Education Standards Framework, and lead universities to better function as civic institutions that transform society (Harkavy, 2006; Shephard & Egan, 2018).

Furthering the argument that 2023 is a transformational time for Australian higher education, the Australian Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement, sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, has received its first submissions for classification. The framework of the Carnegie Elective Classification has been adopted as the leading guideline in the United States for advancing the institutionalisation of community engagement in higher education (Engagement Australia, 2022b). It was first piloted in 2005 and has been refined over time in response to changes in the sector and new research (Saltmarsh & Johnson, 2020). In addition to pursuing classification, universities receive feedback on how to further impactful engagement with community across their institutions and implement systems and practices to prioritise reciprocal and mutually beneficial community engagement across their teaching, research, and

outreach activities. The Carnegie Foundation defines community engagement as:

> *The collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial creation and exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity (Engagement Australia, 2022a, p. 4).*

The definition further identifies that "the purpose of community engagement is the partnership (of knowledge and resources) between higher education institutions and the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity [… to] address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good" (Engagement Australia, 2022a, p. 4). The similarity between the ambitions of the Universities Accord and the standards of the Carnegie Foundation hardly needs to be spelled out. As such, a case study of a university's institutional approach to furthering engaged and impactful community-led research is both timely and relevant. In the following section, we discuss the institutional conditions that gave rise to the Stakeholder Engaged Scholarship Unit (SESU) at Australian Catholic University (ACU).

Background: The formation of the SESU

ACU is the only public Catholic university in Australia, established in 1991 after the amalgamation of four Catholic teaching and nursing colleges. As a relatively young national university, ACU operates seven Australian campuses along the eastern seaboard at Brisbane in Queensland, Blacktown, North Sydney and Strathfield in New South Wales, Canberra in the Australian Capital Territory, and Melbourne and Ballarat in Victoria. ACU also has an international campus in Rome. As distinct from secular universities, its mission and values are informed by the principles of Catholic Social Thought (Byron, 1999; Carey, 2001) and champion the pursuit of knowledge, the dignity of the human person and the common good. This prioritisation of the value of all persons and the public good have been an impetus for the SESU.

Over the past decade ACU's research has been directed by the institution-wide "Research Intensification Strategy". Importantly, it led to improved results in ERA assessments especially in chosen Fields of Research (FoR) and boosted the University's research profile in several international world rankings. The strategy inspired the establishment of research institutes and centres, the

awarding of research workload with a view to producing publications in highly ranked journals (and other publication outlets) and targeted approaches to achieve success in research grant schemes. As a product, academics who could, or show potential to, achieve high quality publications and bring in research income received more generous research workload allocations. In many cases, the strategy supported research aligned with the ACU mission, including social justice research. However, there were increasingly limited opportunities for not-for-profit community organisations to partner with ACU on research in areas they identified as important and to produce practical outputs that would help advance their community-based work. It was difficult for academics to take on such work, as they were not guaranteed to receive appropriate workload allocations in return. Instead, there was a strong prioritisation of investigator-led research, with researchers focussing on contributions they could make to their own academic fields.

While the Research Intensification Strategy was highly successful for ACU (for example, ranking first or equal first in the latest ERA assessment in 10 FoRs, including psychology, nursing, public health and health services), there were also some unintended

consequences which gave rise to the SESU. As an institution founded in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, it was identified that alongside the Research Intensification Strategy, there needed to be a structured pathway to increase ACU's capacity for research connected with its mission and values that is reflective of community voice and has a strong civic purpose. The SESU was, therefore, designed to engage academics with community to: 1) activate the research and evaluation priorities of not-for-profit partner organisations; and 2) as a result, produce positive social, cultural and economic outcomes, especially for communities facing the most disadvantage. So, in late 2019, ACU welcomed the news from the Vice-Chancellor and President of the establishment of the SESU the following year to specifically call for research proposals from community organisations, with a promise of collaboratively designing and delivering the research together.

In the SESU's model of community-led research, the research process is driven by the priorities of the community partners collaborating with the SESU. ACU does not envisage specific research topics or outcomes for SESU projects, but invites the community organisations it works with to establish these. Flexner et al. (2021) ask the

following questions of researchers and universities to invite reflection on the value of community-led paradigms:

> *What would the research environment be like if, rather than researchers coming up with ideas and then trying to work with communities to study them, the community was given the initiative to tell researchers what they want? What if the entire research process was then led from the community level, with the researcher placed in a position of facilitator, using their expertise not to direct but to serve community research interests? (para. 4)*

In Flexner et al.'s view, community-led approaches, while related to community-based research and participatory action research, move one step further, with the community being invited to lead and guide the research process. They acknowledge the intentionality of "the language of step-taking and movement" given the complexity of achieving community-led research in its truest form (para. 5). The SESU is ACU's attempt to move in this direction. It is tasked with activating projects proposed by community organisations through an annual expressions of interest (EOI) process. ACU academics are then invited to facilitate the research as it is envisaged by the community partner and to work

collaboratively with them to refine the research questions and methodology and to undertake the research.

As with participatory action research, community-based research, co-designed research, and asset-based community development, the SESU recognises the value of relationships between community and university that are mutually beneficial and enable sharing of expertise from the community to the university and from the university to the community throughout the research process. These approaches align with the SESU's core principles, including establishing respectful, trusting relationships and reciprocal partnerships, collaboration and sharing of knowledge and resources, and producing outcomes and outputs that benefit communities directly (Wallerstein, 2020; Wright et al., 2020).

Capacity-building for all parties is one way in which the SESU centres reciprocity in its research and scholarship. When community organisations are partnered with ACU staff, there is a strong focus on learning for all members of the research team, not just in the discovery of new knowledge through the research but also to grow the research capacities of community organisations and the capacity of academics to engage in

community-led research. The SESU also establishes mentorship opportunities for early career researchers from more experienced researchers as part of its focus on capacity-building.

Since launching in 2020, the SESU has activated 19 projects in partnership with a total of 21 organisations (17 non-profit Catholic and secular community organisations, three Catholic Church agencies and one government department). They are diverse in scope and impact for a range of communities facing disadvantage: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, migrants and refugees, people experiencing modern slavery, family violence, mental health challenges, homelessness, psychosocial disability and so on. 34 academics have been engaged from across the University's faculties and research institutes, forming in many cases interdisciplinary teams. In the past, academics were appointed to SESU projects by executive leaders in faculties and institutes based on their knowledge of staff with relevant expertise to the chosen projects. However, after receiving feedback from academic staff, the SESU pivoted to an annual open call for applications from academics to join the shortlisted projects after the community EOI period closes.

The SESU has been able to achieve a broad reach in a short period of time because there are significant institutional supports enabling the SESU to be ACU's centralised department for community-initiated research. A university-wide policy dedicated to the SESU establishes that the SESU's operating budget is to come from a levy on the University's faculties. The budget supports two continuing staff in core positions, a full-time manager and a part time administration and research officer, both of which are responsible for the operations of the SESU and the provision of project management and basic research support to projects. Importantly, the policy makes clear that this operating budget will also provide dedicated project funds to cover a significant portion of (and sometimes all) financial costs associated with the research activities. This includes funds for the buy-out of academic time to compensate the academic workload allocations ACU staff receive to support their SESU work. This enables ACU to provide the academics with relief from some of their other responsibilities, such as teaching, through the appointment of other staff to take on such work.

It is important to ACU that community voice inform all key decisions of the SESU, so an advisory group – comprising 50% community members

and 50% university members – was established in the policy. The community representatives in the Advisory Group have extensive experience in the community development sector. This ensures input from expert practitioners who understand the community and social services sector and are experienced in addressing various forms of disadvantage. There is one community member from each of the cities in which ACU has its largest campuses – Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. The university members of the Advisory Group are drawn from three of the University's portfolios: 1) mission and identity, 2) research and enterprise, and 3) education. This structure supports the SESU to work across faculties and research institutes.

The Advisory Group is responsible for strategic decisions of the SESU, such as which organisations are successful in their EOIs and, therefore, which communities and projects the SESU commits funding to each year. The strategic direction of the Advisory Group has shaped the spirit of SESU partnerships. For example, the set of criteria they established to review community applications ensures the chosen projects,

1. are aligned with the ACU mission to advance the dignity of the human person and the common good, and the University's ethos as a Catholic university,

2. have capacity for measurable impact, and

3. have potential to add value to the issue, organisation and/or sector.

In practice, these criteria have led the SESU to invite EOIs from religious (Catholic and otherwise) and secular organisations which are:

1. committed to improving outcomes for communities facing disadvantage or marginalisation, or

2. wishing to advance the Catholic tradition.

The next section communicates two case studies of completed SESU projects to highlight how the SESU strives to be community-driven and reciprocal in its approach to research. Each case study presents different phases of the research lifecycle. The first case study focuses on the process of establishing a collaborative research partnership to enable university and community to design and deliver research together. The second case study demonstrates the community impact that can be achieved through a strong partnership, well beyond the

completion of the initial research study.

SESU partnerships, projects and community impacts: Case study 1 – An example of community-led, co-designed research

i. Project overview: Investigating the economic and social impacts of COVID-19 in Victoria

In 2020 the SESU partnered with Catholic Social Services Victoria (CSSV) and St Mary's House of Welcome (SMHOW) on research into the COVID-19 pandemic in Victoria. It aimed to understand how the pandemic's economic and social impacts in Melbourne and regional Victoria affected the demand for social services and the capacity of social service providers to respond. It was hoped this would assist the SESU's partners (and organisations within their networks) in their strategic thinking, policies, and service provision years into the future. The research found that the government's rhetoric of economic recovery ignored falls in employment and labour force participation. Those who were most affected by the pandemic were people who had already been experiencing the most vulnerability pre-pandemic, including women, young workers,
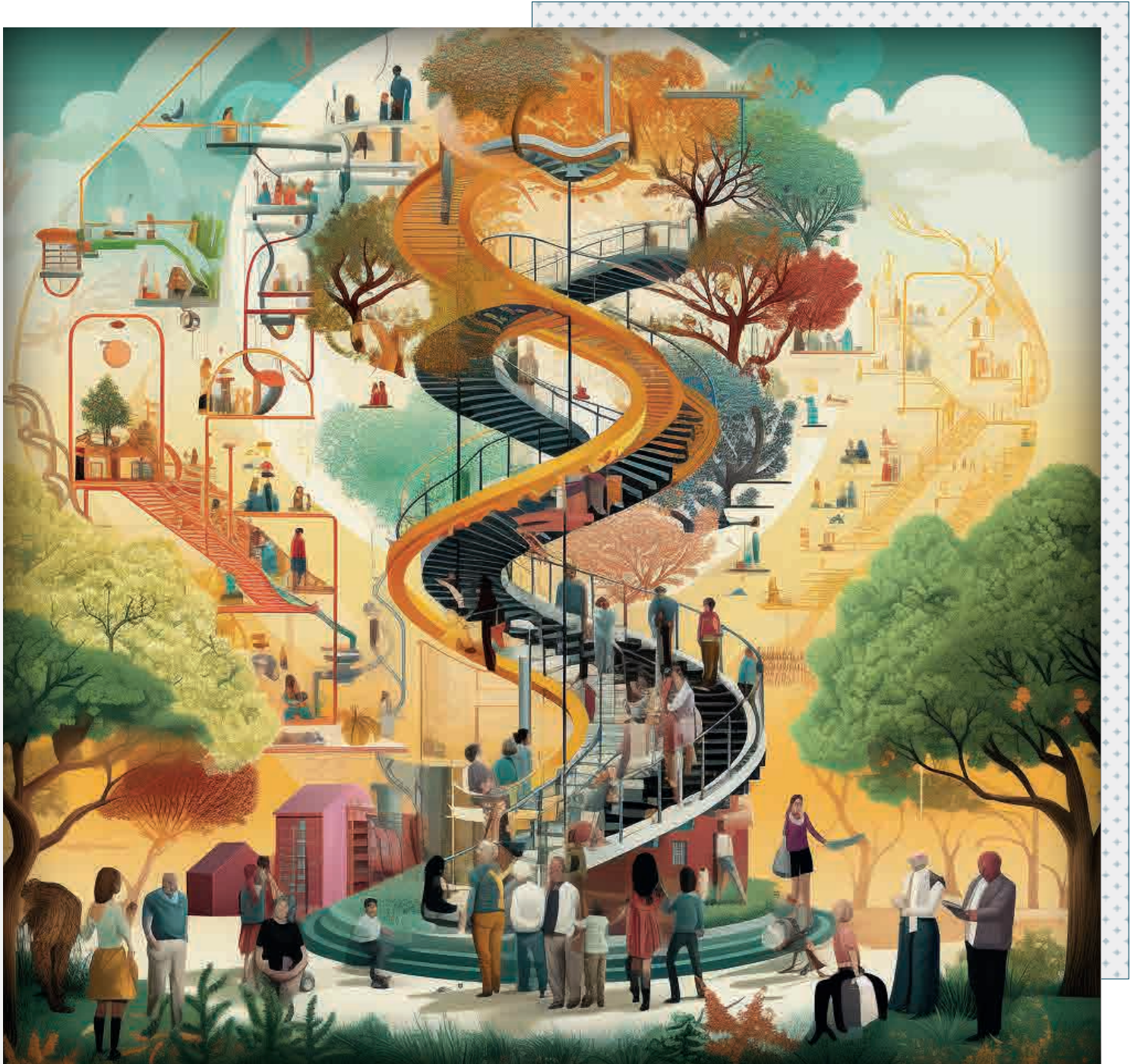
temporary migrants and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Barnes & Doidge, 2022).[2]

ii. Establishing the partnership

The process of establishing this project was different to others in the same period. Initially, five community organisations were brought together into partnership with the SESU. This is because, as part of its call for EOIs, ACU had invited submissions for a large multi-partner project to better understand how COVID-19 would impact the community development sector following the uncertainty engendered by the pandemic in early 2020.[3] After applying separately to the SESU to join this project, the team focused project planning discussions from the outset on identifying the research interests of each organisation after they had been brought into partnership together.

After several meetings to discuss their ideas, it became clear that a scoping exercise would be beneficial to explore each organisations' core research ambitions. An ACU academic met with each organisation in scoping interviews to ask them separately about how their organisation had responded to the challenge of COVID-19, their objectives, and views on the project scope (for example, the geographical locations

and social issues that should be explored and the outputs that would be most meaningful at the conclusion of the research). Analysis of the interviews highlighted both shared and diverse themes and priorities. These were discussed in several meetings of the multiagency research team.

The scoping exercise and subsequent discussions revealed shared interests for two of the community partners, as distinct from the priorities of the remaining three partners. All agreed on the importance of being respectful of and responsive to each organisations' research intentions, and decided to split the project and the research team in two. While not the original intention, the split meant the community organisations would not be asked to commit their time to a project that only partially met their research aspirations to accommodate the core needs of the other agencies. After the split, one arm would be narrower in its focus – on the lived experiences of people on temporary visas, experiencing homelessness and/ or financial precarity for the first time as a result of the pandemic and how the three community partner agencies responded to their emerging needs. The other arm would explore a wider lens – how COVID-19 would influence the demand for social services in Victoria. This wider-focused project with CSSV

and SMHOW is further described below to illustrate the project in action.

iii. Co-designing and co-delivering the research

Once the project teams had been divided, the scoping exercise shaped discussions between CSSV, SMHOW and ACU to co-design the research. ACU also took a preliminary look at academic and grey literature to assist with the discussions and refine the research questions. A detailed project plan was then prepared and it documented the group's shared interest in a socio-economic analysis of the pandemic in Victoria by: documenting the existing unemployment and under-employment forecasts after the termination of the government's financial support scheme, JobKeeper; understanding the impact of excluding temporary visa holders from JobKeeper; estimating the potential impact of lower household income due to unemployment and under-employment; documenting trends in income, wealth and housing inequality during the pandemic; estimating changes to labour supply; and documenting the increased demand for social services (especially with respect to domestic violence and mental health) and the impact this had on program delivery for social and community service providers.

The process of delivering the research was also shared between the three organisations. ACU undertook the research by working closely with CSSV and SMHOW over many months to obtain and analyse relevant service data, review key economic data from public and private agencies and recruit and interview senior representatives at various social service organisations to capture their experiences of impacts to services due to COVID-19.

Given the SESU's partners did not have capacity to assist with writing up the research results, they contributed in other ways to the project outputs. For instance, an interim report was planned for release halfway through the project to summarise findings up to that point; and meetings were held both prior to and after the release of the interim report. These discussions were useful in capturing detailed feedback from CSSV and SMHOW, which led to improvements overall. What did they make of the themes that had emerged from the data? Did the interim report include the kinds of information that would help them to plan their future service delivery? Would the report be useful to other social service agencies in Victoria to inform both service delivery and advocacy to government based on the findings? CSSV and SMHOW, as well as organisations in their networks, were also able to

use the findings in their work until the final report was disseminated. A similar process was adopted for the final report, of working with CSSV and SMHOW to listen to and embed their feedback.

iv. Disseminating the findings

All organisations contributed to a public launch of the research at ACU ahead of the 2022 federal election, with invitations issued to various sectors: Victorian social services, university, government and industry. During the launch, there were powerful calls to advocate for change and lobby government to act on the basis of the true impact of the pandemic, especially for those experiencing marginalisation. The launch event reflected the collaborative research approach that had been adopted throughout the project, with each organisation working together to determine the best format for the event, confirm speakers, deliver presentations, and so on. This continued following the event where each organisation promoted the findings widely, including through sharing the report and meetings with politicians and the social services sector.

v. An example of community-led, co-designed community-university research

Which principles of community-engaged research were put into action and how did the partnership impact community and the social services sector? A respectful, trusting and reciprocal partnership was foundational to this research from the co-design to the implementation phase. It is well established that reciprocal and respectful partnerships are core to effective community-engaged research (McLean & Behringer, 2008; Furco, 2010; Southerland et al., 2013). The Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement encourages universities to prioritise reciprocity in partnerships:

> *Reciprocal partnerships are characterised by collaborative community and higher education institutions' definitions of (1) problems, opportunities, and goals; (2) strategies and solutions; and (3) measures of success. In this way, community engagement requires recognition, respect, and value of the knowledge, perspectives, and resources of community partners (Engagement Australia, 2022a, p. 4).*

Adopting these principles enables the co-production of trans-disciplinary knowledge and societal transformation (Engagement Australia, 2022a).

In this project, ACU did not have

any specific intentions, except for the research to be meaningful to its community partners. Extensive time was spent listening to what the SESU's partners wanted for the research via a scoping exercise. The back-and-forth process undertaken to refine the project's scope, and the feedback on the interim and final reports helped to align the project's aims and methods wholly with community priorities throughout the project's lifecycle. CSSV and SMHOW's expertise identified the problems and solutions and contributed to relevant and timely research for the social services sector.

Building a mutually beneficial partnership nurtured the co-design process, and the pairing of CSSV and SMHOW enhanced the quality of the project. Although they had similar research interests regarding the impact of the pandemic, CCSV and SMHOW offered different perspectives during the project design stage and adopted varying responsibilities as the project unfolded. CSSV, as a peak body that represents 45 member agencies across the Victorian Catholic social services sector was pivotal in widening the lens of investigation. They ensured the project addressed a range of social problems and at-risk groups, which they saw as key for the research to have value across the social services

sector in Victoria. CSSV consulted widely within their membership base during the research design and as the project unfolded, including recruiting research participants from within their members and seeking valuable feedback on the interim report. CSSV also widely disseminated the findings to their members and beyond, especially through their established relationships with politicians. SMHOW, on the other hand, works directly at the 'coalface' in Melbourne's Fitzroy, providing a centre for people experiencing poverty, homelessness, mental health issues, psychosocial disability, social isolation, or a combination of these, to access fundamental supports. SMHOW brought the perspective of a small-scale social service provider working in one of the busiest parts of Melbourne during the pandemic. Their experiences were especially useful during project planning as they explained the emerging priorities they themselves and other social service providers had during an extremely difficult period. Thus, CSSV and SMHOW benefitted from their contribution to the project and from the research findings in mutual yet different ways, unique to their organisational remit and research needs.

After the project launch, CSSV and SMHOW reflected on the value of the

collaborative partnership. Mr Josh Lourensz, Executive Director, CSSV commented that for CSSV:

> *This research process helped us build productive relationships between ourselves and our members and was a part of making Catholic social service agencies feel like there are shared projects and visions that we can meaningfully participate in together. The process of putting this report together has helped us think through what kind of work is meaningful in the future.*[4]

Ms Robina Bradley, CEO, SMHOW similarly explained that the project has "built pride, confidence in partnering and a sense of contribution during a very demanding period".

SESU partnerships, projects and community impacts: Case study 2 – Community-led research engendering positive community impact

i. Project overview: Improving employability prospects for recently arrived migrants and refugees in western Sydney

In 2021 the SESU partnered with SydWest Multicultural Services (SydWest) to evaluate their employability programs under their

Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) services for recently arrived migrants and refugees in Blacktown and Mount Druitt, NSW. As part of these programs, SydWest support newly arrived migrants and refugees in western Sydney to increase their employability skills, identify employment pathways and develop relationships with job providers. SydWest were interested in understanding how effective their programs were in preparing clients for meaningful employment journeys.

An evaluation framework was developed, informed by the National Settlement Outcomes Standards, to assess the impact of SydWest's programs and possible future actions regarding their program. ACU and SydWest worked closely throughout the research process. SydWest staff were particularly instrumental in developing the research design, recruiting participants – especially in making the study accessible to their clients – providing feedback on the draft report, and in actioning the research findings.

After collecting data from a wide-range of local stakeholders connected with the program (for example, SydWest clients, staff, and external training and employment providers), SydWest's employability programs and services were found to be highly effective across all standards assessed and provided the majority of clients with a supportive, culturally sensitive, and empathic service. However, the program's local stakeholders recognised significant barriers faced by highly skilled and highly credentialled refugees in western Sydney in resuming their former careers. Despite the government-reported skill and labour shortage in Australia (Albanese & O'Connor, 2022), migrants and refugees bring a rich array of skills that are not being fully utilised.[5] There were systemic issues beyond SydWest's control that required targeted actions across many sectors.

ii. Activating a call to action in western Sydney

SydWest and ACU worked together to deliver a public launch of the research in November 2022 at ACU's Blacktown campus. Given the barriers faced by highly skilled and credentialled migrants and refugees, both organisations agreed that the launch should mobilise a multiagency response to this issue. The organisations planned and hosted an employability roundtable during the launch, where representatives from local industry, government, education, social services and employment agencies workshopped how employability prospects could be improved for this cohort in the Blacktown LGA and surrounding areas.

At the event, two SydWest clients shared their lived experience as refugees seeking to return to their previous careers in Australia – a powerful moment in the proceedings that brought the research to life. SydWest's CEO, ACU's Vice-Chancellor and the State MP for Blacktown spoke about the need for future action. ACU's lead researcher delivered a proposed model that emerged through the research – an interagency, cross-sector working group dedicated to refugee and asylum seeker employment challenges, which would meet regularly to workshop, develop and implement strategies in response to this challenge. The employability roundtable was focused on possible future actions the working group could take to address the barriers to meaningful employment. Attendees were then invited to express their interest in joining the working group.[6]

Importantly, SydWest and ACU acted on the momentum engendered by the launch event and supported continued, meaningful engagement with the research. For example, SydWest joined forces with Workforce Australia, and together with ACU, hosted a second roundtable event in the weeks following to begin planning the establishment of the working group. Representatives from the Federal Department of Employment and Workplace

Relations, western Sydney-based community service organisations, local employers, and education and training organisations came together to brainstorm a set of key priority areas for the group.

iii. Impacts of the research: Establishment of a cross-sector employment working group

The Sydney Greater West Migrant and Refugee Employment Working Group was established in February 2023 as a community-based approach to community development, arising out of this place-based, community-led research. At the first meeting, representatives from SydWest, Workforce Australia, ACU, state government and local social service, educational and registered training organisations attended. They agreed on key priorities, including to engage local business chambers and industry associations in the working group, especially in sectors where there are jobs shortages in Blacktown and surrounding areas. The group has been meeting regularly since. The group turned their attention to an accelerator employment event in western Sydney in October 2023. It was attended by 250 refugee and migrant job seekers who were able to apply for jobs on the spot, grow their networks with prospective employers and receive advice and

feedback. As the working group is still in its infancy, further outcomes will become clear into the future.

The research was primarily designed as a service evaluation, so we wish to briefly highlight how it was useful to SydWest for their employability programs and services. After the report launch, Mr Saurav Shrestha, Settlement Services Team Leader at SydWest, commented that undertaking this project with ACU added value to their working relationships and brought positive changes to their services for refugee clients. For example, within a month of the launch event, SydWest activated another research recommendation by establishing a new position in their organisational chart, Employment, Education and Training Specialist. This position will develop new partnerships and represent SydWest migrant and refugee clients more effectively in partnered employability programs.

As noted above, SESU projects are designed to be mutually beneficial for all parties, and completing this project was also valuable to the ACU academic who worked on the project, Dr Haydn Aarons. Dr Aarons commented afterwards that,

"I was able to use my research skills to assist with a real-life problem

which was immensely satisfying; the research will make a difference to the organisation we partnered with, and for the people who the partners work with."

In these ways, the research was beneficial to SydWest and ACU, as well as to the local Blacktown community that they each serve.

iv. Community-led research that benefits communities experiencing disadvantage

This partnership demonstrates the potential of community-led research to generate positive community impacts. The collaboratively designed and delivered research helped support a community organisation to improve employability outcomes for newly arrived refugees and migrants. Further, the research acted as the driver to mobilise key stakeholders in the western Sydney area to work together to find targeted solutions to an issue identified by the community.

This example highlights how community-led research is distinct, in philosophy and practice, from research consultancy. Unlike typical consultancy arrangements between university and community which usually cease once the deliverables – and the recommendations – have been 'handed over' to the organisation, it was important to both ACU and

SydWest that the research partnership continued after the conclusion of the study. There is value in co-creating a clear engagement plan as part of the research process, as was done in this project, and in a university choosing to walk with a community organisation to create broader impact in one area of social injustice.

Discussion: Learnings from the SESU's first three years of operation

There are challenges that universities must address if seeking to undertake community-led research. It is not enough for a university to say that they want to do community-led research or that they value community; they must also re-configure some of their existing processes so that partnerships and projects bring value to community. Equally, there are opportunities that arise when universities engage in community-led research. This section presents some of the learnings – both challenges and opportunities – the SESU has encountered at ACU.

i. Centralising the importance and value of partnerships, upon which all community-led research projects are built

In the last three years of working with a diverse range of partners, we have seen best results when there is investment in the establishment of a partnership in the truest sense of the word. The building of a strong relationship between community and university must always come first; the success of a collaborative project flows from the fruits of such a sound relational foundation. In other words, the project 'gets done' *through* the partnership that is built, and the quality of the partnership can enhance outcomes and impacts. This approach involves a commitment to invest in building a positive and trusting relationship with community partners. This is not a new concept within community-engaged research; it has been acknowledged that "Developing a sustainable partnership requires time, resources, and a commitment to principles of reciprocity, co-learning, honoring contributions and diversity, transparency, honesty, and trust from the beginning of the partnership relationship" (Alexander et al., 2020, pp. 324-325). However, it should not be ignored if the temptation arises to rush this relationship-building process to get a project underway, or default to traditionally more hierarchical or unequal research partnerships favouring the university. In the modern 'corporate' university there is always a risk that relationship development can be diminished due to external pressures.

Approaching partnerships with an active appreciation of each party's knowledge and skills is key to developing a solid relationship and producing quality, usable research. As documented in the framework of the Carnegie Elective Classification and widely recognised in academic literature on approaches to co-created research, much is to be gained from universities entering with an attitude of respect for the contributions of the community members to the relationship, rather than with a notion of the university as 'the experts' (Saltmarsh & Johnson, 2020; Wallerstein, 2020; Wright et al., 2020). Community-led research thrives only when university staff value the experience and expertise of their partners, both as the research is designed and implemented. Moving away from a traditional research paradigm that prioritises the production of academic knowledge, the SESU borrows from the traditions of community-based participatory research (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008), participatory action research (Troppe, 1994), community-led (Flexner et al., 2021) and assets-based work (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).This work assumes that "the involvement of community members […] has the potential to improve the quality of produced knowledge" rather than dilute its academic rigour (Wright et al., 2020, p. 463).

Community members engaging with the university may come with varying levels of research experience and expertise; they may look to academic staff to help develop their ideas, but ultimately, projects work best and achieve the best results when community knowledge is listened to and actively embedded into the project. As Furco (2010) notes, one mark of the 'engaged university' is that "the values and norms that guide the work of partnership honour the expertise, experience and talents that each partner brings to the collaboration" (p. 387). This creates mutual understanding and respect across teams from different sectors and produces mutual benefits for community and university. On a related note, when designing research, there is also great value in ensuring that university staff listen fully to how the community staff understand the issue and wish for it to be addressed. As the first case study above highlighted, this helped the SESU to align projects' aims and methods with community priorities so the outputs have greater utility for partner organisations.

Respectful listening is important when planning a project, but also throughout the life of the project, particularly during data collection and when the time comes to prepare and disseminate the project outputs. The staff at the community organisations the SESU has worked with – managers, coordinators, and front-line workers – have the best knowledge of their service users' needs, and the most optimal recruitment methods to ensure contact with them will be well-timed and respectful of their unique circumstances. They are also ready to share ideas about the kind of information to include in the project outputs to make the most impact, the most appropriate audiences for the findings, and the formats to best communicate those findings, whether a report, a brochure, a video, an infographic, or a combination of these.

While establishing a good relationship with community partners precedes and makes possible the research project, maintaining connections after the project has officially closed is also important to help determine whether and how the research is creating the change intended for the organisation, their staff and service users and, in some cases, the sector. SESU staff keep in contact with partners from previous projects to share further opportunities with them and hear about how the research has impacted their service, staff or service users. Where possible, SESU staff also support the organisations to implement the research in practice, as was demonstrated in the second case study.

ii. Institutionalising community-engaged research within universities

In the SESU's experience, to make the above-described investments in relationship-building up front, there needs to be institutional commitment to reciprocal, collaborative research. The SESU learnt quickly that it was not appropriate to expect academic staff to give their time to relationship-building and carefully understanding the research priorities of community partners without receiving a workload allocation for this phase. The SESU's academic workload model has been adjusted since to enable two separate allocations to be given – one at the outset for building rapport and planning the project with partners, and a second larger allocation after the project has been designed for the delivery of the research. There is benefit in universities thinking through whether their current processes allow academic and professional staff adequate time to build a quality relationship with a community partner.

Indeed, the SESU's experience regarding the need for universities to make practical commitments to community-engaged research is reflected in numerous existing tools. These tools support universities to adopt community-engaged approaches in all their activities. The

Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement, as noted earlier, is one tool that universities can use to self-evaluate their own institutional journeys in community engagement. The classification process is designed to build on the work of scholars, such as Furco, who have encouraged university leaders to pay careful attention to how they can best enable service learning (an engaged approach to teaching) at their institutions. Furco's much-cited "Self-Assessment Rubric" and supporting tools (originally published in 1999 and revised numerous times) are designed for university leaders to assess their current institutional commitment to service learning and to develop an action plan for their institution's improvement. Though Furco's focus for the rubric is on service-learning rather than community-engaged research, the numerous dimensions that support institutionalisation within it hold true. Particularly relevant to the point above about the need for fair academic workloads, Furco (2002) notes that a university will have reached "Sustained Institutionalization" (the third stage of the journey towards institutionalisation) in the area of faculty support and involvement when faculty have substantially supported the infusion of service-learning into "faculty members' individual professional work" (p. 7).

Beyond service learning, Furco (2010) has also described the emergence of the "engaged campus" (as noted above) – the impetus for community engagement to be built into academic culture across the institution's teaching, research and service activities – rather than seeing it as supplementary to their core business.

iii. Establishing project teams: 'Matchmaking' and education

Collaborative research with community requires an approach to research that not all academics will readily understand or adapt to – an important consideration for any university wishing to institutionalise some form of community-led research. The SESU is often leading a 'matchmaking' of sorts – bringing community partners and academics into a relationship. To arrive at the right 'fit' of academic staff to the community partner, care should be taken not just with regard to discipline knowledge and interest in the community-proposed research area, but also with cultural alignment to ensure a positive and rewarding experience for all.

A great number of the academics engaged by the SESU have actively embraced the community-led approach (and many also have prior experience with this kind of research). However,

on a small number of occasions, the SESU encountered academics who have struggled to transition from their previous understandings of what research should be and how it should be done. These understandings usually reflect the established research paradigm within universities where academics may partner with community, but identification of the research problem and solution may not be community-led or co-produced. There have been some academics that have attempted to steer the research in ways that are not reflective of the core interests of the community partner to address the academics' own areas of interest.

Mentorship and coaching can be a handy tool in these situations, however there might be instances where an academic will be unwilling (or unable) to depart from doing research in their preferred way as it best aligns with their own knowledge or interests. For the SESU, in some cases mentorship and coaching has been very fruitful and the community-university relationship thrived. In other cases, the SESU had to terminate the involvement of the academics at an early stage in the partnership and work to rebuild a positive relationship with the community organisation.

Universities have a responsibility to

enact greater change in academic culture and provide greater preparation, training, and mentorship in reciprocal research with community for academics at HDR, early career and higher levels if they wish to embed mutually beneficial research that is outwardly impactful for communities as a legitimate and valued model of university research.

iv. The role of universities to act as 'connectors' to research

The SESU uses several tools to promote the learnings from its research projects, such as events, circulating outputs, media promotion, its own bi-annual newsletter and its website. After sharing the research in these ways, SESU staff and academics have received requests from community partners to provide more information about (and sometimes, the full reports from) other SESU projects, especially where the research relates to an area of work in which they deliver services. There is appetite, at least among many of the SESU's partners, to know more about the research the SESU is producing in response to community priorities. Community stakeholders are calling on the SESU to do more to connect them with other community-facing research. Despite efforts of the government to improve accessibility to research, through the EI Assessment,

much research is still inaccessible to community partners – hidden behind paywalls of non-open access journals.

In response to the interest from community, the SESU is exploring ways to establish an alumni network to create formal and informal opportunities for sharing across projects, where community partners and academics can connect with other project teams. The network will be designed with community partners to understand their views and tailor it accordingly. An established network should lead to a broader reach for the research and, ideally, the potential for new research and other partnerships between likeminded community organisations.

It will not be new to readers to hear that universities have a responsibility to think creatively about how best to share their research with the wider community. We invite universities to take greater action to 1) understand the research priorities of the organisations they partner with; and 2) seek creative ways or strategies to facilitate greater research connections between likeminded agencies within their own networks.

Conclusion

The SESU provides a contemporary example of a university adjusting institutional policy and structures to pave the way for community-engaged research that is community-led. By doing so, mutually beneficial outcomes and impacts for university and community partners have been achieved. Establishing the SESU has supported reciprocal research relationships that honour the knowledge, strengths, and assets of all partners involved, enriching the professional development of academics and community partners alike. At a time when the Universities Accord Panel envisages research that has wider impact through engaged approaches with community, industry, and government as 'partners' instead of 'end-users', this paper makes an important contribution to the literature. Reciprocal partnerships, as defined by the Carnegie Foundation, hold the key to augmenting best practice for universities and their partners. If the Universities Accord is to fully realise its ambitions for research that has wider impact, community-led research – as supported by government and university systems and incentive structures – should form a part of future initiatives.

Acknowledgements

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Dr Jillian Cox provides project and research support to SESU projects. She brings to ACU over 10 years' experience in research, teaching and administrative roles in the tertiary education sector. With a background in theology, history and gender studies, she is passionate about research that produces outcomes that create opportunity and fullness of life for communities experiencing disadvantage.

Jill is committed to working with new and existing community partners and can be contacted to discuss proposals for community-based research and staff involvement on SESU projects.

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Dr Matthew Pink
Associate Director, ACU Engagement

Dr Matthew Pink is the Associate Director, ACU Engagement at Australian Catholic University. His research areas of interest include the transformational processes of university-community engagement, sport for positive youth development in developing, and developed nations, and athlete welfare and development. Matthew is passionate about harnessing the power of universities and communities to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes that transform society.

Community partners and ACU at launch of Scarring effects of the pandemic economy: COVID-19's ongoing impact on jobs, insecurity and social services in Victoria

Community partners and ACU at Migrating from settlement to prosperity: An evaluation of SydWest's employability programs and services for recently arrived migrants and refugees in Blacktown and Mount Druitt, NSW

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[2] The report, Scarring effects of the pandemic economy: COVID-19's ongoing impact on jobs, insecurity and social services in Victoria, can be read online.

[3] At the same time, the EOI process enabled organisations to put forward research proposals to address their other non-COVID-specific research priorities.

[4] Quotes from partners and academics who have worked with the SESU have been gratefully used in this paper with their permission.

[5] The report, Migrating from settlement to prosperity: An evaluation of SydWest's employability programs and services for recently arrived migrants and refugees in Blacktown and Mount Druitt, NSW, can be read online.

[6] A news article about the report launch event, "ACU Report: Skilled Migrants Battle Job Lockout", can be read online.
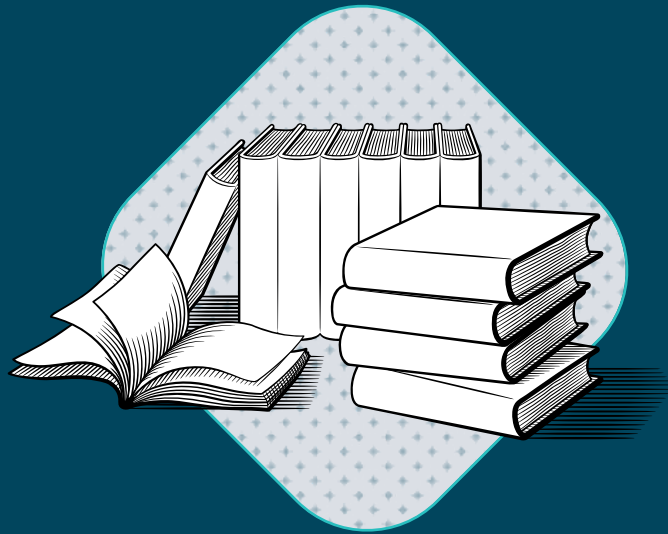
Case Studies

Case Study | *1*

Engaging for impact: the SA Housing Authority and Centre for Social Impact, Flinders University strategic partnership to support the transformation of the specialist homelessness services landscape in SA

Associate Professor Selina Tually, Ms Clare Rowley

The Centre for Social Impact (CSI), Flinders University prides itself on deep and long-term partnerships with industry with the purpose of transformative, outcomes-oriented system change through action research and evaluation.

One example of our engaged way of working is our current three-year partnership with the SA Housing Authority which formally began in late 2021. This partnership has built on years of working with the SA Housing Authority and other stakeholders

around reform of the specialist homelessness services landscape in SA and the learnings from (and relationships built through) the Adelaide Zero Project, the collaborative effort to end street sleeping in Adelaide's inner city.

The SA Housing Authority and CSI Flinders' partnership involves several elements, centred on evidence-based research and evaluation with and for the specialist homelessness services sector in South Australia, including the SA Housing Authority as a key stakeholder in the sector. Tually is named as the Fellow attached to the partnership. Strategic priorities and oversight are provided by a Partnership Steering Group comprised of relevant representatives of the SA Housing Authority and CSI Flinders. Tually is embedded with the Authority on a fractional basis and is available as a resource (approximately 0.5 FTE). The partnership is guided by a co-designed and nimble workplan, ensuring responsiveness to needs in a reforming landscape.

A key focus of activity in the partnership to date (albeit only one focus) has been co-producing the SA Specialist Homelessness Services and Domestic and Family Violence Sector Outcomes Measurement Framework. The Outcomes Measurement Framework has been an extensive co-design

effort, involving people with lived experience and the sector, to produce a framework that reflects the needs of all stakeholders. It serves to articulate the strategic objectives and aspirations for services and stakeholders to own and collectively work towards achieving. The framework is structured around three key focus areas – safety, housing and accommodation and wellbeing and support – with underpinning indicators and measures structured around identifying, preventing and responding to homelessness and the risk of homelessness, as well as the sustainment of client outcomes. The framework is a culture setting and advocacy tool for the sector and the SA Housing Authority.

Both the SA Housing Authority and CSI Flinders see a range of areas of mutual value in/from our partnership. For the SA Housing Authority, Tually's embeddedness with the Authority:

» **leverages her depth and breadth of experience in the homelessness, social housing and domestic and family violence research history.**

» **utilises her specialist research skills to complement the skill sets of government and sector workers to increase efficiency and effectiveness of projects and system reviews.**

» **increases the reach and efficiency of reviews and reflections on system structures, service delivery and reporting.**

» **feeds directly into localised programs and responses within the sector, bringing evidence bases for improved responses beyond what individual staff and services would be able to connect with.**

For CSI Flinders, the partnership allows an opportunity to undertake applied research in settings that translate directly to policy and practice. Collectively, the partnership allows maximisation of the benefits of co-produced outputs, as well as playing to collective strengths and skillsets of specific agencies and individuals within them.

The partnership is a vehicle for real world collaboration, the foundation of engagement and impact.

Associate Professor
Selina Tually
Deputy Director, Centre for Social Impact, Flinders

Ms Clare Rowley
Senior Project Officer, Office for Homelessness Sector Integration, SA Housing Authority

Case Study | *2*

ACU's Community –Engaged Learning Approach – An Evolving Story

Dr Jen Azordegan

At Australian Catholic University (ACU), a primary aim of 'community engagement' (CE) is to build capacity and affirm human dignity through sustainable and reciprocal collaborations with communities – particularly those experiencing disadvantage or marginalisation. It is a key means of advancing the university's mission to serve the common good and enhance the dignity and wellbeing of people and communities.

Within the sphere of learning and teaching, community engagement is embedded in the undergraduate curriculum in around 20 discipline-based community engagement units of study ("CE Units"). CE units are tied to ACU's three-part Core Curriculum which prompts students to explore social justice issues through the lens of the Catholic Social Teachings or philosophy. Indeed, community engagement and the Core Curriculum are regarded as "distinctive elements of an ACU education" in the university's current strategic plan. Over 3,500 students complete CE experiences as part of these units each year. Depending on the unit, the required hours for a CE placement range from 20-100 hours, amounting to ACU students spending more than 150,000 hours in and with community annually. A large portion of these community-engaged learning experiences are facilitated by carefully cultivated partnerships with community-based organisations. A centralised community engagement team based on each ACU campus is responsible for establishing and nurturing these relationships, with an aim for student opportunities that are sustainable, mutually beneficial, and responsive to the needs of the local community. Increasingly, School- and discipline-based teams are also forming partnerships with community to not only

provide more student opportunities, but also to create further points of interaction between the university and community, such as around co-designed research and curriculum.

Student and community partner feedback data has consistently shown the community engagement experience as being overwhelmingly positive and beneficial, especially around generating new insight into communities experiencing marginalisation or disadvantage. Additionally, students cite the effectiveness of the CE experience in developing critical transferable skills, such as cross-cultural communication, adaptability, and empathy—critical qualities in both an ever-changing employment landscape and in establishing a more just and compassionate society.

To further develop and deepen its community-engaged learning approach, ACU has looked to the Carnegie Elective Community Engagement Classification since 2019. As part of the original Australian pilot, ACU used the Carnegie Framework to conduct an intensive self-examination of the extent to which community engagement is embedded across its policies and practices. While the submission preparation process has verified many of ACU's steps to-date to establish widescale community-engaged learning, it has also highlighted key areas for further improvement.

Consequently, in teaching and learning, dedicated focus has turned to:

» Developing **professional development opportunities** for academic and professional staff involved in community-engaged teaching and research, including informal and formal learning spaces and a mini-grant program for developing CE units.

» Establishing a CE **Community of Practice** dedicated to linking engaged staff across Faculties and nourishing a budding **culture of community-engaged teaching.**

» Reviewing and refining **institutional supports and levers** that underpin community-engaged learning, such as clearer promotional paths for engaged academic staff and commensurate workload allocation.

» Creating **systematic methods of tracking the impact** of community-engaged learning from the perspective of multiple stakeholders.

» Turning the focus to **quality in community-engaged learning** experiences, starting with an intensive review of CE in the curriculum and recommendations to establish minimum standards and consistency across CE units.

This attention to institutional drivers supporting engaged staff and curriculum; building staff capacity and connection; and capturing impact has ensured that community-engaged learning continues to be an evolving story at ACU and one that is more firmly grounded in dynamic, meaningful, and sustained university-community relationships.

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Dr Jen Azordegan
Manager, Community-Engaged Learning, ACU Engagement, Australian Catholic University

Case Study | *3*

Medicine in Context: A Model for Community –Engaged Medical Education

Sowbhagya Micheal [1,2], Grace Fava [3], Jen Spannenberg[1]
Corresponding author: Dr Sowbhagya Micheal

Greater Western Sydney (GWS) is Australia's 3rd largest economy and one of the most diverse regions in the country with significant socio-economic disadvantages and health disparities. Western Sydney University held extensive consultations during the inception of its School of Medicine (WSUSoM) to acknowledge the needs of local communities.

Community members voiced the need for WSUSoM graduates to know the lived realities of diverse GWS communities. As a result of these consultations, the WSUSoM (established in 2007) proudly carries a social accountability mission to improve the health of the GWS communities and other under-served regions in Australia. At the crux of WSUSoM's social accountability is partnerships with community organisations based on a strengths approach, focusing on how both parties could co-produce socially accountable doctors who will practice medicine with a strong understanding of patients' contexts. It was mutually agreed that WSUSoM would adopt a community-engaged learning philosophy which

is embodied throughout the 5-year Doctor of Medicine curriculum, led by a flagship program called Medicine in Context (MiC).

The MiC program is underpinned by the 'Four of Fours' framework for community engagement. The four MiC curriculum works (co-design, co-delivery, co-assessment, and co-evaluation) are undertaken collaboratively by four major stakeholders (academics, professional staff, students, and community partners) using Boyer's four scholarships (Discovery, Integration, Teaching & Learning, and Engagement) and underpinned by four core values (mutual benefit, mutual respect, ongoing partnerships, and shared recognition). MiC uses pedagogies of

spiral and experiential learning and uses innovative teaching methods to introduce medical students to Social Determinants of Health. MiC also emphasises the roles of community-based health and social services and how they intersect with clinical care in various settings; hence, putting 'medicine' in its broader 'context'. The program has two taglines: (1) medical practice does not exist in a vacuum, and (2) MiC competencies will make the difference between good doctors and great doctors. MiC students attend community placements across GWS, ranging between single-day exposures to 5-week placements. During placements, students become part of community teams and learn about patient-centred care through first-hand experiences and observations. Students' community learning is supported through on-campus workshops and tutorials delivered by a multicultural, multidisciplinary academic team.

Since its inception, the MiC program has partnered with 239 community organisations (and counting). The program runs 400 placement opportunities (11,200 hours) and 67 workshop sessions (134 hours) annually through in-kind contributions from community partners. In return, WSUSoM staff and students contribute in-kind to community projects including

joint community grant applications, health promotion materials, health checks and community service accreditation rounds. The strength of MiC's community engagement was evident in partnerships thriving through two major curriculum changes and strict COVID-19 restrictions. During the COVID pandemic the MiC team and community partners found innovative ways to maintain partnerships. Students were able to support their placement organisations through developing health resources, for example on the topic of autism and fact sheets for Medicare access for people with autism, to support the wider community.

MiC partnerships has resulted in a pedagogically robust, positively evaluated program. Feedback has been positive with students expressing appreciation of working within communities, with comments such as "[MiC] *was an interesting way to see how community health is very centred on the demographics of the community itself, informed me of the holistic approach in treating patients (non-medical professionals are more necessary in some situations than doctors)*." Students and alumni have demonstrated high level of competency in incorporating Social Determinants of Health in their clinical learning and practice. Together, GWS communities

and WSUSoM are achieving the joint mission of creating socially accountable, community-engaged doctors for those who need the best of care.

Reference

1 School of Medicine, Western Sydney University, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith 2750

2 Translational Health Research Institute, Western Sydney University, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith 2750

3 Autism Advisory and Support Services, 88 Memorial Avenue, Liverpool, 2170

Corresponding author: Dr Sowbhagya Micheal, s.micheal@westernsydney.edu.au

Notes

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Who will you nominate?
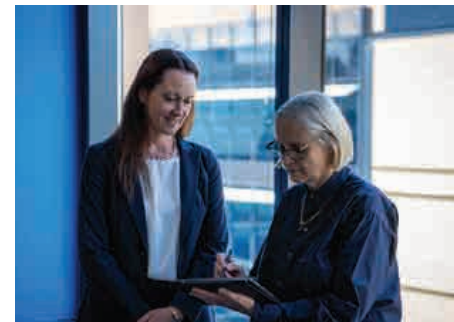
2024 Prime Minister's Prizes for Science

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"Receiving the Prime Minister's Prize for Innovation was a great honour. It recognised both Alison Todd and myself for the development of innovative DNA technologies which enabled us to build a company and transformed us from scientists into entrepreneurs."

Dr Elisa Mokany PhD

Chief Technology Officer for SpeeDx
– 2022 Prime Minister's Prize for Innovation recipient.

Dr Elisa Mokany (left) and SpeeDx's Chief Scientific Officer, Adjunct Professor Alison Todd AM FTSE PhD.

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"To receive the Prize for New Innovators is really exciting, and I'm extremely honoured... I hope my work can help inspire other researchers as they continue to grow and fall in love with science."

Associate Professor Brett Hallam

UNSW Sydney
– 2022 Prize for New Innovators recipient.

Associate Professor Brett Hallam.

Notes

Leading the Engagement Agenda

Engagement Australia champions the unique role universities have with society to address contemporary global challenges and trends through teaching, learning, research and partnerships. We do this by:

» providing and inspiring leadership;

» developing capacity and future leaders;

» enabling peer-learning;

» providing practical tools and tips; and

» providing a platform for collaboration and knowledge creation.

Engagement Australia supports the wider contextual standard definition of community engagement, previously developed by the US-based Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, which has succeeded in codifying the core characteristics and principles of community engagement. It defines community engagement as a method of teaching, learning and research that describes interactions between universities and their communities (business, industry, government, NGOs and other groups) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

Transform