



NATIONAL CARE AND SUPPORT ECONOMY STRATEGY

June 2023

University of the Sunshine Coast Submission

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Introduction

The University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC) welcomes consultation on the draft National Care and Support Economy Strategy 2023 and is pleased to provide a brief submission.

UniSC's main feedback is that while the draft Strategy references current skills shortages and future workforce needs, it is silent on the important role universities play, and will increasingly play, in educating and training this critical workforce. Given that more than 50% of the current workforce has a higher education qualification, we content that referencing the contribution of universities is an important inclusion in the final Strategy. UniSC's recommendations therefore respond to the draft Strategy *Goal 1, Objective 1.2: The workforce has the right skills and training to deliver quality care and support.*

UniSC would welcome the opportunity to elaborate on any aspect of our submission. If this is of interest, please contact Professor Michael Wilmore, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at DVCAcademic@usc.edu.au.

About UniSC

UniSC was founded by its community in 1996 after Sunshine Coast residents campaigned for locally provided tertiary education opportunities. As the first greenfield university to open in Australia since 1975, UniSC has helped unlock the innovation, productivity, and potential of its regional communities through the contributions from its 33,000 graduates and 17,500 current students studying a diverse offering of in-demand higher education programs.

Consistent with our mission to improve access to higher education in underserved locations, UniSC has strategically expanded its footprint into more regional communities, encompassing areas from Moreton Bay to the Fraser Coast. UniSC has experienced significant undergraduate enrolment growth across all equity groups over the last five years. In 2022, students who reported having a disability at UniSC accounted for 13.5 per cent of all domestic undergraduates, with enrolment growth of 237 per cent from 2019 to 2022 (compared to national enrolment growth of 60.8 per cent over the period 2017 to 2021). The indigenous undergraduate enrolments in 2022 at UniSC represented 3.3 per cent of the total, compared with a 1.57 per cent proportion of national enrolments overall. More than 40% of UniSC students are the first in their families to attend university, and 59.4% of UniSC students are over 20 years of age.

UniSC offers a range of programs and integrated qualifications relevant to the sector and is expanding its range of micro-credentials to provide lifelong learning opportunities. The following recommendations respond to relevant objectives from the discussion paper consultation questions impacting student experiences and outcomes relevant to higher education.

Goal 1: Quality care and support

Objective 1.2: The workforce has the right skills and training to deliver quality care and support

Recommendation 1

UniSC recommends that future allocations of university student places are aligned with regional care and support economy workforce needs based on ABS demographic and labour force data as well as the proportion of the population either already enrolled in a university program or having completed higher education qualifications.

While acknowledging the additional 20,000 Commonwealth Supported Places for universities that have been funded for the 2023 and 2024 calendar years, UniSC believes that the Strategy should embed the academic development of the workforce to ensure that the delivery of quality of care is enhanced through education. UniSC has a number of relevant qualifications, ranging from short courses and micro-credentials to postgraduate degrees, that are designed to enhance an individual's knowledge and skills relevant to be able to upskill the workforce.

Recommendation 2

UniSC recommends that the Strategy identify the need to partner with universities to identify opportunities for work experience, internships, work integrated learning and placements to provide the pipeline of employees to meet the future workforce demand.

Currently, free vocational education and training (VET) places compete with university sub-bachelor offerings in areas such as community services and allied health assistance. NDIS and aged care providers indicated in UniSC's Jobs Queensland-funded research that they prefer employing undergraduate students as personal assistants because they have the skills required and are also on the trajectory to a full professional qualification, which means they can also offer longer-term professional positions when students graduate. One of the problems with high turnover in the aged and disability care sectors is the lack of career progression. The advantage of growing the care workforce through undergraduate students completing integrated sub-bachelor qualifications is that they can fill short-term lower-skilled care positions while also addressing the shortage of allied health professionals in the longer-term.

There is also a need to provide financial incentives for students undertaking relevant higher education studies, to provide greater choice for prospective care workers, depending on their career aspirations.

Furthermore, extending the funding for universities to design and deliver micro-credentials that address the skills shortage in the care workforce is essential. Of the 28 micro-credentials funded in the initial round of Federal Government funding for universities, none address the skills required for the aged and disability workforce (other than digital skills). The Government should consider quarantining funding for skills development required to meet the demands of the social assistance and care industries.