



State Growth Population Strategy discussion paper

University of Tasmania Submission

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UNIVERSITY of
TASMANIA 

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Acknowledgment of Country

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

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

We acknowledge with deep respect that this knowledge represents a range of cultural practices, wisdom, traditions, and ways of knowing the world.

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

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

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

Executive Summary

The University of Tasmania supports the proposed approach in the Discussion Paper to achieve population growth in a sustainable way that respects what is uniquely Tasmanian, drives equity across different population cohorts and ensures everyone benefits.

Education is a primary vehicle through which we can attract and grow Tasmania's population in a sustained and intentional way. Higher levels of education help to overcome poverty, injustice, and inequality, promoting human rights while benefiting our environment, health and economic outlook. With higher levels of education, employment rates increase, along with productivity and average incomes. Crime and substance abuse drop. Data shows we become healthier, and we live longer. More knowledge leads to more sustainable environmental management. Further, through education, we can create safe spaces for learning, enlightenment, and development for all.

The National Skills Commission (2022) projects that over the five years to November 2026, 91.7% of new jobs will require post-school education, and more than three-fifths of the total projected employment growth will be in high skill level jobs. These projections create opportunities to attract, grow and retain Tasmania's population.

The University of Tasmania can contribute to meeting the ambitious population goals by working in partnership with the State Government to:

- Formalise strategies between the State and the University that coordinate our attraction and retention of interstate and international migrants;
- Consider mechanisms to encourage education providers, as key attractors of interstate and international migrants, to provide suitable and sufficient levels of housing to students they attract;
- Ensure the provision of support services from education providers, to reduce pressure on essential services needed for all Tasmanians;
- Support the retention of migrants by co-designing internship models that help keep interstate and international graduates in Tasmania;
- Develop an approach to scale the implementation of a community-led, place-based employment models through the \$15 million Regional Jobs Hub program, that increases access, employment, workforce preparedness and participation across Tasmania's regions

By working closely with the State Government, together to build the Tasmanian population and workforce in critical areas for Tasmania and enhance life-long learning and skill building through improved regional access and engagement.

We provide access and expertise for and from Tasmania

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴ ABS (2018), 2016 Census QuickStats

Formalise strategies between the State and the University that coordinate our attraction and retention of interstate and international migrants

Since developing our strategic plan, the University has been committed to creating a distinctive curriculum that helps retain our Tasmanian students, supports them to learn what is needed for their communities, in the regions where they live, and is attractive to people from interstate and overseas.

These distinctive courses, such as Marine and Antarctic Sciences in Hobart, Agricultural Science, Allied Health and Food Innovation in Launceston, and Equipment Design and Technology in Burnie, leverage connection with the environment, proximity to industry and community, as well as field trips to unique locations and experiences that can only be found on the island. Our distinctive curricula also includes partnering with industry and other research bodies such as the Australian Antarctic Division and CSIRO which maximise the unique opportunities only found here.

And we know these offerings are working to attract new cohorts. For example, in 2021 we saw interstate applications increase by 25%, indicating that our distinctive offerings are resonating with students. Similarly, as part of our commitment to diversify our international student cohort to reduce high concentration from individual countries, we are seeing acceptances from countries other than China and India for 2023 are already higher than at the same point in time for pre-pandemic years, with 498 students compared to 327 in total enrolling in 2019. This includes growth in completely new markets such as Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka.

We welcome the opportunity to work closely with the State Government on how we can formalise our strategies to attract and retain new populations to Tasmania, through establishing an agreement that coordinates our attraction and retention efforts.



Offerings such as the Bachelor of Marine and Antarctic Studies create a unique opportunity to attract students from interstate and overseas to Tasmania.

With easy access to the Derwent estuary, D'Entrecasteaux Channel, and places like Eaglehawk Neck, students in these courses undertake their learning like nowhere else in the country. This includes, for example, having access to the latest seabed mapping and sensor technology, and through conducting real-life experiments.

These distinctive learning opportunities are working, with 93% growth in applications from interstate students, and 173% from international students, in 2022 compared to 2019.

Through drawing on the expertise of the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) and the largest concentration of marine scientists in the Southern Hemisphere, our unique degrees are providing students the skills for a career in the fast-growing marine, fisheries, aquaculture, and Antarctic sectors, with the ability to contribute to the understanding, management, and conservation of the world's marine environments.

Consider mechanisms to encourage education providers, as key attractors of interstate and international migrants, to provide suitable and sufficient levels of housing to students they attract

As we consider the population needs into the future, key to sustainable growth of the Tasmanian population will be the ability to access suitable and affordable housing, that not only provides appropriate living conditions, but also a strong sense of place.

The University of Tasmania currently provides almost 2,500 rooms across the State, up from just over 1,000 in 2014. This growth was initially to support our recruitment of international and interstate students, but has been increasingly to address the growing propensity of all students to look for student accommodation due to housing shortages and increasing costs.

The University works very hard and carefully to provide sufficient accommodation that is affordable for students with rents validated to be at 80% of or lower than the current rental market rate. In addition to this, the University also provides more than 1,600 scholarships and bursaries each year to assist students to meet the rising costs of living, in order for them to undertake and complete their studies successfully.

The provision of suitable housing and financial support to meet living costs requires a significant investment from the University, which is not met by private education providers. In 2022, 75% of international students in Tasmania were not studying with the University of Tasmania⁵. **We recommend the State develop mechanisms to encourage education providers, as key attractors of interstate and international migrants, to provide suitable and sufficient levels of housing for students they attract.** For example, the Government may wish to consider whether, after a sufficient amount of warning, a levy or similar could be placed on education providers that are found not to meet a minimum standard of accommodation and living support services.

Additionally, almost half of the new capacity of accommodation that the University has added was enacted under the NRAS scheme, and provided significant help for the University to build affordable accommodation across the State. **We would encourage the State to consider partnership mechanisms to provide support for the provision of affordable housing by non-Government organisations.**



A partnership between Migrant Resource Centre Tasmania (MRC Tas) and the University of Tasmania will provide much-needed affordable short-term accommodation to new Tasmanians with a refugee background.

Starting in December 2022, MRC Tas will lease unoccupied university student accommodation during the Christmas break, including six five-bedroom units in Launceston and seven rooms each accommodating two to three clients in Hobart, as well as a communal room to be used as a recreational space.

The University accommodation will be used to support new arrivals in the Australian Government's Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP).

MRC Tas CEO Gillian Long states "Despite a chronic shortage of rental properties in Tasmania, this innovative joint venture means that people fleeing war and other crises will have access to otherwise unoccupied short-term accommodation."

⁵ <https://www.education.gov.au/international-education-data-and-research/>

Ensure provision of support services from education providers that reduce pressure on essential services for all Tasmanians

Key in the consideration for growing Tasmania's population is how to do so without adding additional strain to essential services required by all Tasmanians. While the Government has a population target of 650,000 by 2050, there are clear sustainability and long-term carrying capacity considerations needed to be made. For example, where population growth should occur and how these decisions then influence liveability factors such as transport capability and congestion; increasing pressures on government services; housing supply and affordability; and maintaining Tasmania's low emissions profile with a growing population, are all critical challenges needing to be addressed.

The University can support the State to solve these challenges, through its teaching and learning activities and research expertise. For example, in response to psychology, nursing and pharmacy shortages, we expanded our health and allied health offerings in the North and North West to encourage more migration into these regions, as well as an enhanced workforce once students graduate. Further, our research into housing affordability, climate science, community wellness, health (to name a few) can contribute to enhanced policy decisions needed to ensure long-term carrying capacity is achieved.

The University provides extensive medical and pastoral care services to all its students, from learning and study support to wellbeing and counselling, career and employment support, and accessibility services. These services ensure that our students are supported throughout their study journey and that, as we attract new peoples to Tasmania, they do not add to the strain on current essential public services. But these services are not always offered by other providers, and we would **recommend that the State consider the ways in which it could ensure providers share the burden of providing pastoral care services, particularly medical and mental health support.** Similar to provision of housing, the State could consider a levy mechanism to ensure education providers offer sufficient support services to reduce the pressure on our essential services for Tasmanians.



With depression the second-highest ranked reason to see a GP in Tasmania, and a three month wait time for private psychology clinics, the need for more professionals and services is high.

To respond to this need, the University has recently expanded its psychology offerings, opening its second psychology clinic. This allows Masters students, as provisionally registered psychologists, to assist clients under supervision. "We have very long wait lists – there are people trying to access services in a timely manner but can't see a psychologist to get help," Psychologist Olivia Boer said. As well as timeliness, Olivia says the other issue is financial. "A large proportion of the population can't access private psychology services because of the cost," she said.

There has been strong uptake already, with Masters students seeing up to 30 clients a week. Demand is strong in the southern clinic too, with 120-150 clients visiting the clinic each week, up from 20-30 clients per week previously.

"As a university, we are committed to helping our community meet challenges like the continuing high demand for psychological services across Tasmania," Vice-Chancellor Professor Rufus Black said. "We have expanded access to psychology education so we can train more psychologists, and expand the community's access to much needed services."

Support the attraction and retention of potential migrants by co-designing internship models that help keep interstate and international graduates in Tasmania

To help retain our interstate and international graduates, it is imperative that graduates of vocational and higher education have not only the knowledge, but the skills and on-the-job experience that will enable them to both successfully enter the profession they have studied, and stay in their jobs. For example, we know that while our domestic graduates are some of the most highly paid⁶, international students find it much harder to gain full-time employment after graduation⁷.

Whilst the concept of internship or work experience placements is not new, higher education internship schemes⁸, and how they are funded⁹, are evolving. We know though, that these offerings are typically taken up by students from high SES backgrounds¹⁰, with the means of support to undertake unpaid work placements without interrupting their existing study, work, or other commitments. At the University, 80% of students are mature age, and more than 60% study part time, therefore their ability to engage in unpaid work is even more challenging. For students able to access financial assistance, these payments are often insufficient to manage the increasing cost of living, even if eligible for the full support payment¹¹. We would seek to work closely with the State Government to co-design an internship model that will allow all students to participate in workplace internship opportunities, irrespective of their study choices, social background or other life factors.

We know too that critical to the success of work experience placements is the willingness from employers to engage with universities and vocational trainers to establish the placements and enable the students to learn and grow their skills and experience. Many employers, particularly of SMEs, face challenges including multiple requests from differing organisations; a lack of clarity on the expectations, quality and knowledge of the student attending the placement; and limited experience in navigating the regulatory requirements of hosting the internships¹². In Tasmania, we have the additional challenge of working with employers who have never before experienced University, either through attendance or in partnership, and therefore ensuring that the relationship is easy and fruitful to them is imperative.

The University would encourage the opportunity to work closely with the State Government and industry partners to co-design internship models that will enable all students to undertake placements to improve their job-readiness and employability upon graduating.



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

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

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

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

⁶ www.qilt.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2022-gos-national-report.pdf

⁷ www.qilt.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2022-gos-international-report.pdf?sfvrsn=c15300c7_2

⁸ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-07/future-degree-apprenticeships.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/pay-apprenticeship-levy>

¹⁰ <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/WIL-in-universities-final-report-April-2019.pdf>

¹¹ <https://raisetherate.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Starved-Of-Opportunity-Young-Peoples-Experience-Of-Youth-Allowance-And-Newstart-November-25th.pdf>

¹² <https://acen.edu.au/innovative-models/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ATN-Final-Report-Expanding-Work-Integrated-Learning-WIL-Possibilities-October-2018.pdf>

Develop an approach to scale the implementation of community-led, place-based skills and employment models that increase access, employment, workforce preparedness and participation across our regions

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

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

Importantly there is an opportunity to better align the current RJH initiative with the increasing regional presence of the University through Study Hubs (Regional University Centres) largely funded by the Commonwealth. The opportunity is to develop learning, skills and employment clusters in regional areas and thus accrue economies of scale and scope.

Preliminary evidence indicates the effectiveness of the RJH model, and the **University recommends, in partnership with the Tasmanian Government, industries and communities, that we develop an approach to scale this program and deliver better employment outcomes and population stability across regional Australia.**



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

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

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