

Australian Universities Accord Panel  
c/- Accord Secretariat  
Department of Education  
GPO Box 9880  
Canberra ACT 2601

28 August 2023

Dear Panellists,

The Australian higher education sector is a critical driver of economic growth for the country and personal opportunity for individuals. It is responsible for pioneering valuable research, helping to develop and deliver the skilled individuals that industry and business need at scale, helping individuals to reach their potential and realise their dreams, and helping to connect Australia to the world.

Federation University (the University) appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the work of the Australian Universities Accord Review Panel (the Panel), whose members are responsible for the first full, broad review of the higher education system in 15 years. In a sector as vital as higher education, it is critical that the mission and objectives of governments and universities are as aligned as possible, and that the policy, funding and regulatory settings are right to deliver the system Australia needs. We are confident that the work of the Panel will bring us closer to that alignment.

The Panel's interim report (the Report) is an important step in the review process, and **the University is broadly supportive of the overall direction outlined in the Report**. In general, Federation University agrees that:

- There is a need for growth in the university sector, in order to both deliver the skilled individuals that industry needs and as a continued 'social and economic good' for the country.
- Much of the growth in student numbers will need to come from non-traditional cohorts, including underrepresented groups and the rural and regional communities that Federation University serves.
- There's thinking to be done and improvements to be made in the areas of:
  - Teaching, learning, and the use of technology in university education.
  - Student pathways into, through, and out of universities after school and throughout their lifetime.
  - Integration of vocational and higher education.
  - Student support – on and off campus.
  - The connection of universities to their communities.
  - How research is structured and funded.
  - The governance and funding structure for universities.

Specifically, **the University supports:**

- **The mission** outlined in the Report – namely that 'higher education's mission is to make a better future possible for Australia'.
- **The 10 key system shifts** that the Report outlines as being necessary to achieve the system Australia needs in the future.
- **The five priority actions**, although we would encourage the Panel (and the Government) to consider the Regional Universities Network (RUN) submission for advice about implementation of these.

- **Both the Universities Australia (UA) and the RUN submissions**, both of which we have provided input into, and both of which outline important consideration points raised in the Report.

The University would like to highlight / support the need for:

- **The proposed Tertiary Education Commission (TEC).**
- **The need to develop better outcome measures in the university sector**, which may be a task for the TEC.
- **Covering the full cost of research, increased HDR stipends, and aligning regional infrastructure funding to national priorities.**

The University requests further clarification on:

- **The proposed universal learning entitlement**, which we believe is too unclear, and should instead be a lifetime voucher attached to HECS/HELP.
- **The proposed national learning and teaching committee**, which we believe is insufficient, and should instead be progressed through a national centre of teaching and teaching technology excellence for all universities.

The University **disagrees with**:

- **The proposal for an international levy.**

The focus of this submission is highlighting – for the Panel’s benefit in formulating its final report – the University’s existing successes in progressing several of the key ‘strands’ of the Report, namely that:

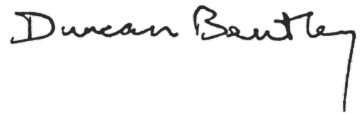
- **Universities have an important role to play in building the pipeline of skilled workers that industry needs, but it must be done in collaboration with industry, be based on substantially different teaching models, and involve better school-to-university pathways and more seamless VE/HE integration.** Federation University understands this, because it is deeply connected to industry, so understands the challenges of being relevant to and working with industry. As a dual sector provider, Federation University also understands a lot of the issues of educational alignment.
- **More must be done to encourage non-traditional cohorts into university study and that these – and all – students must be supported more both on and off campus. This includes efforts to provide a sense of belonging.** As a university serving many first-in-family, low socio-economic status, and rural and regional students, Federation University has done a lot of hard thinking about how to do this right and invested heavily in doing so. We wholeheartedly welcome more focus by the Panel – and the Government – in this endeavour and have suggestions for the ideal path forward.

All of the University’s efforts to provide a cooperative, experiential learning model alongside excellent student support aim to attract and retain hard-to-reach students, and help them succeed. However, all of these efforts have been delivered within the limited means of the University, and have often involved asking much of our partners. A more strategic, national approach to supporting students that includes resourcing and the re-calibration of the relevant policy, regulatory and funding settings – as discussed in the Report – would further assist the University and all other Australian universities.

This submission is deliberately short, but where possible case studies or examples have been provided in appendices to help illustrate practice for the Panel’s benefit.

The University would once again like to thank and congratulate the Panel for its work, and my staff and I remain at the Panel's disposal if we can support the progress of this work.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Duncan Bentley

Vice-Chancellor and President

## Federation University submission in response to the Panel's Interim Report

In the University's view, the two overarching key strands of the report are that:

- Universities have an important role to play in building the pipeline of skilled workers that industry needs.
- More must be done to encourage non-traditional cohorts into university study and keep them there.

We support the Panel's focus on these two critical themes, because – in our view – most of the rest of the issues and opportunities in the university sector are linked to one or both themes.

At the University, we are well aware of the importance and challenge of engaging one of those non-traditional cohorts – people from regional and remote areas. It is a core part of our mission, and has been for our entire existence. And a key reason we've been able to do so is our close work with industry, schools, vocational education and governments of all levels to address regional provision issues, develop industry relevant courses, smooth out education-to-employment pipelines, address both the cost and logistics of students accessing university education in the regions, and provide extra support for students in need.

We see the two key strands as two sides of the same coin and, **in enticing hard to reach students and engaging industry to do so, the University believes it already sits where the Panel wants the university sector to head**, and that the lessons we have learned servicing regional students and partnering with regional industry can be translated more broadly across the country.

### The need to close the gap between metropolitan and regional/remote students – a model for other cohorts

The odds are stacked against students in regional Australia:

- **Provision is patchy.** There is a dearth of childcare and kindergarten places in many regional communities. Once at school age, many students have to be driven or bussed long distances to attend school, where they'll often be taught key subjects by 'out of field' teachers. Once finished school, many students lack the option to further their studies close to home, because many communities lack a vocational or higher education provider.
- **There is insufficient familial and community knowledge about and aspiration for higher education.** Many regional families lack knowledge about what university study involves, what a degree can lead to, and what careers it can 'unlock'. Many families, and therefore many students, also feel an urgency to earn a living, or at least earn while they learn, making a multi-year unpaid education at university a less desirable path.
- **And even for those who *do* aspire to and 'make it' to university, the odds don't improve much.** These students are often forced to complete their degree away from their community and support networks, and often start 'behind the 8-ball' because of the gaps in their pre-university education, requiring remediation from the university if the issues are spotted, or years of frustration – and, often, failure – if they're not.

Simultaneously, in trying to even these odds for students, regional universities are forced to do more with less than their metropolitan counterparts. Regional universities:

- **Enrol the nation's highest rates of diverse and higher needs learners.** This includes 200% more low-SES students, 70% more regional and remote students, and 40% more Indigenous students than non-regional universities.
- **Have less financial means than non-regional universities,** and fewer financial levers to pull. This includes, on average, less student revenue, less international student revenue, and less investment revenue than non-regional universities.

Yet, within the challenging context of enticing regional people to and supporting them at university, **many of Australia's key growth industries are located in the regions we force our students away from to complete their**

**studies.** Now, and into the future, large numbers and large clusters of highly skilled, degree-trained individuals will be needed to realise the economic opportunity of the regions and help individuals reach their potential. This is especially important given there is no large, latent pool of labour with the requisite skills in the cities with the ability to or interest in moving to the regions in large numbers.

**Quality, industry-informed and job-relevant university education, delivered locally and featuring wrap-around support for students, is the key to engaging cohorts of hard to reach – including regional – students.**

## A cooperative, experiential learning model to engage regional students

The Report calls for more industry involvement in university education and better university-to-jobs pipelines for students. This is to deliver on both the social good (skilled individuals in high paying jobs) and economic good (sufficient labour force for high-skilled growth industries in particular locations, including the regions) of higher education in Australia. In the communities in which it operates, **the University has pioneered a cooperative, experiential learning model that has very close alignment with the direction the Report is advocating the entire university sector in Australia should head.**

The model is not new, and is well recognised overseas. See *Appendix 1: The overseas experience of the co-op model and the local experience in collaboration with IBM.*

Over multiple decades, our approach has involved working closely with schools, vocational education providers, industry, and governments to make the transition from, through, and out of all levels of education and into meaningful and skilled work more seamless. Ultimately, **this has helped to 'broaden the funnel', so that more regional students are choosing to study locally at our campuses, and helped to provide proximate growth industries with the skilled individuals they need.**

Below, we detail **the key elements of our cooperative, experiential learning model, provide key examples and case studies to illustrate how we do it, and outline what the Panel could look at / what the Australian Government could do to help.**

### Working with governments and schools to help with teacher supply in key subjects in regional schools

The first element of our cooperative learning model has been to play our part in addressing the issue of secondary school teachers teaching key subjects 'out of field'. This is because, in our experience, high occurrence of teaching 'out of field' leads to suboptimal student learning in the later years of secondary school that often stifles student interest in ongoing study in those subjects and, if they do make it to university, requires remediation in the first year.

In response, the University has worked to offer a Master of Specialist Teaching degree, designed to support existing teachers teaching out of field, as well as a Master of Teaching (Secondary) Hybrid Accelerated Pathway as part of the Victorian Government's *Teach the Future* campaign to help professionals seeking a career change to become teachers in regional areas using Permission to Teach registration.

To support this effort by universities, the University would advocate the Panel, and Australian Government, consider:

- **More pilot initiatives to help 'out of field' teachers gain the requisite skills** – such as the pathway example above – especially in the STEM fields.
- **Providing funding for regional universities to deliver specialist subjects into regional secondary schools from year 10**, if a school lacks a teacher qualified in that field.
- **Providing funding for universities to place more of their undergraduate teaching students in hard to staff regional secondary schools.**

### Working with vocational education providers to develop more flexible pathways for students

The second element of our cooperative learning model has been working with vocational education providers – and getting our own house in order as a dual-sector provider – to demonstrate exemplar pathways that allow students to move back and forth from vocational and higher education as their career requires. In short, this requires providers working together to align their approach, easily recognise learning, and build obvious entry, transition, and exit points into their courses.

For the best case study of one of the University's efforts in this area, see *Appendix 2: The IBM PTECH Program*.

To support this effort by universities, the University would advocate the Panel, and Australian Government, looking at:

- **Piloting self-accreditation for the VET operations of dual sector providers.** This would allow dual sector providers to more easily tailor student pathways between higher and vocational learning offerings, and their offerings in general. The University encourages the Panel to review the TAFE Directors Australia submissions to the Accord consultation process for detail about what this would involve.
- Progressing a recommendation from the Noonan Review into the Australian Qualifications Framework to allow, initially as a pilot, **a student to undertake a vocational minor as credit for a higher education qualification.**
- **Seeking to align the various reviews and processes underway in the education sector** toward the shared goal of better, more flexible post-secondary pathways and more permissive dual-sector provider settings.

### Working with industry to understand their needs, involve them in education, and develop employment pathways

The final – and most important – element of our cooperative learning model has been working with industry and involving them in the education and employment of our students, including: engaging constantly with industry to understand their skill needs and inform our course provision; involving them as much as possible in classroom instruction; providing as much blended learning – a mix of learning on campus and in workplaces via internships, placements and other experiential offerings – as possible; and working to ensure our graduates are 'first picked' for available local jobs. Our approach has the support of the Australian Industry Group, with whom we are partnering to provide cross-sector pathways in industry.

For a case study on this from Federation, see *Appendix 3: The Asia-Pacific Renewable Energy Training Centre*.

To support this effort by universities, the University would advocate the Panel, and Australian Government, consider:

- **Incentivising employers to offer paid placements and employment pathways.** In particular, this would overcome 'placement poverty' that is currently a huge blockage for the university sector, particularly in regional areas.

## Investing heavily to support regional students so that we keep them and they thrive

Rightly, the Report calls for more effort to attract diverse, traditionally under-represented cohorts of students into university education. It correctly acknowledges that these students will need vastly more support to enter, succeed at, and transition from a university education, but that these students – and *all* students – should have a right to expect to be well supported while at university. **It is no longer enough to assume that if we build it, they will come and succeed, but rather we must support students while they're with us to ensure that they have the best opportunity to do so.**

In the University's view, for regional students, part of that challenge is getting the education settings right and connecting learning to jobs. But that's not enough, so along with working with partners to develop a cooperative model of education that 'widens the funnel' to get more regional students into university, **the University has pioneered approaches to support and retain regional students through university in ways that align closely with the**

**Report, which can be shared more broadly across the system.** But there is more to do, which we'd ask the Panel and the Australian Government to consider.

Below, we detail **the key elements of our approach to student support, provide key examples and case studies to illustrate how we do it, and outline what the Panel could look at / what the Australian Government could do to help.**

### Supporting students with the cost of living and education

Students can only learn if they can *afford* to live *and* learn. Yet, increasingly, students in Australia are facing stifling cost of living pressures while trying to complete their university studies, a problem that is particularly acute for many of the underrepresented cohorts of students on which the Report focuses. Every day, the University sees regional learners decline to study at university or drop out after they start because they lack the means to support themselves and their families through the long period of time it takes to complete a university degree. This is a problem that is particularly acute for degrees that have long, unpaid placement periods.

The University offers three case studies of our efforts to support students with the cost of living and education:

- Scholarships to support students in need who are completing courses that require several unpaid placements (e.g., nursing, teaching, etc). See *Appendix 4: Scholarships*.
- Paid internships with one of our industry partners – IBM – so that students can earn while they learn. See *Appendix 5: IBM Internships*.
- Direct provision of food and other supports for students in need. See *Appendix 6: Nourishment Nook for Students*.

To support this effort by universities, the University would advocate the Panel, and Australian Government, consider:

- **Paying stipends to students who are required to undertake lengthy placements to attain degrees that are nationally significant or needed to address a skills shortage.** This could be done either directly to the student or via the university and could be partially funded by the payments that currently go to schools and hospitals. This would help students to deal with the cost-of-living shock of placements.
- **Incentivising employers to provide real work placements for students as they learn.** This is similar to what is offered in Canada (under the Student Work Placement Program, with up to 70% of a student's 'placement wage' subsidised in STEM and business degrees for eligible cohorts)<sup>1</sup> or for Australian apprentices and vocational education students (under the Priority Wage Subsidy and Hiring Incentive Schemes).
- **Championing curriculum reform – at the accreditation, sectoral and university level – so that students in placement-heavy courses are accommodated as best as possible.** For example, this would mean nursing students should not be required to undertake other assessment during placement periods.
- **Changing restrictions on Centrelink support from 'students engaged in full time study' to 'students engaged in full time or part time study'.** This would assist all students – but particularly students from underrepresented cohorts with complex lives and responsibilities – to retain support while studying.
- **Providing additional loadings on top of base funding for low-SES or high-need students.** This would provide universities with extra means to support students based on their needs profile, while also incentivising universities to enrol more non-traditional students. However, given the challenges regional students face in accessing university and the challenges regional universities face in servicing these students, it is imperative that this reality is reflected in any loadings, alongside consideration of low-SES or other high-need students.
- **Establishing a matched funding pool for universities and industries to provide scholarships for underrepresented cohorts.** This is based on a model we have proven works and would help to provide targeted and highly efficient support to students for whom cost is a very significant barrier to university study.

---

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/student-work-placements-wage-subsidies.html>

### Bringing learning as close to the student as possible

The Report rightly identifies the location of learning to be one of the key drivers for engaging students, and particularly underrepresented cohorts, in university education. **In the University's experience, hubs – like the Regional University Centres – are a start, but more can be achieved by fully harnessing technology and building the capability of teachers to deliver into hubs via a connected classrooms model.**

For the best case study of one of the University's efforts in this area, see *Appendix 7: Connected Classrooms*.

To support this effort by universities, the University would advocate the Panel, and Australian Government, consider:

- **Investing in a national learning and teaching centre of experimentation and excellence focused on harnessing world leading educational technologies for hybrid delivery, potentially funded by subscription by universities, which allows continued use of technologies developed and supplied through the centre.** It is a similar but expanded concept to the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. It would support Australian universities to trial, test, learn, and adopt at scale the best pedagogies and learning design using advanced technologies including artificial intelligence, the internet of things, virtual reality, augmented reality, digital twins, and simulation.
- **Providing learning and research infrastructure in the regions, which can support both local communities and every level of education.** For example, the Victorian Government's Tech School investment has leveraged additional funding from industry and universities in many of Victoria's key regional centres, focused on building the skills of school students aligned to key priority growth areas.
- **Implementing a framework to ensure better higher education access for regional students** – we are supportive of the RUN submission's call for a Universal Higher Education Access Commitment and fully advocate for the Panel's full consideration of the concept. Please see the RUN submission for a full articulation of the arguments in favour of the UHEAC and what it might look like. This would help to recognise and address the disparity between metropolitan and regional provision, acknowledge the disproportionately high number of low-SES and higher needs students that regional universities serve, and account for the different (and difficult) cost structures that regional universities face in trying to offer both a broad and deep educational platform.

### Providing the best possible support outside the classroom

Providing excellent health, mental health and peer support for students has long been an aspiration for Australian universities, but the Report rightly points out that attracting non-traditional cohorts into university study – and keeping them there – will require more effort and investment in 'out of classroom' support. The Report also, correctly, identifies this as a key driver influencing Australia's continued competitiveness in the international student market.

In the University's experience, this primarily takes three forms:

- **Ensuring students are ready to study at university.** Many of our students are not well prepared for university and often struggle to the point that they decide to leave us. We are establishing a new pathways college dedicated to supporting those who are not yet equipped to undertake a degree.
- **Establishing peer networks of students.** For case studies of the University's efforts in this area, see *Appendix 8: Peer Support Efforts*.
- **Focusing on health, mental health, and wellbeing.** For example, the University has established a psychology clinic in Ballarat to assist with local health needs, and a telehealth clinic in Gippsland, and will continue to invest where possible in the health, mental health, and wellbeing of our students.

To support this effort by universities, the University would advocate the Panel, and Australian Government, consider:

- **Increasing funding for enabling places,** including changing the enabling component so it is provided at an average rate of student contribution.



- **Allowing dual offers – enabling and degree**, which would remove student uncertainty about whether they'll be offered a degree place after completing an enabling program.
- **Adding enabling programs to the AQF**, which would allow greater recognition of enabling program completion, allowing students to stay engaged if their circumstances or location change.
- **Increasing funding for universities to provide health, mental health, disability, wellbeing, and peer support to their students.** This includes funding any professional or clinical assessments that students need as part of commencing or undertaking their university studies. This would significantly improve the academic experience and outcomes for these students and promote an inclusive and supportive environment within our universities.
- **Commit to developing policy and the national student charter to ensure a consistent national approach to student wellbeing, student welfare and student safety.**

## **Appendix 1 – The overseas experience of the co-op model and the local experience in collaboration with IBM.**

Cooperative models of education between universities, industry and school systems are not just a concept. These models have been used at scale in North America and parts of Europe for over 100 years.

For example, in Canada, cooperative models of education work as a three-way collaboration between universities, industry, and government, underpinned by government subsidies that provide employers with an incentive to actively participate in the co-op program by supporting them to offer students paid internships, cadetships, and placements.

A study by Deloitte in 2019 found that one cooperative university in Canada (University of Waterloo) contributed \$1.52 billion to Canada's GDP and \$1.16 billion to the local region's GDP, while creating and sustaining thousands of full-time equivalent jobs.<sup>2</sup>

Federation University has proven the model works here, too. For over 25 years, the technology park located on the University's Ballarat (Mt Helen) campus, jointly led by the University and IBM – and involving dozens of other partners – has become a world-leading model for collaboration between all levels of education, local government, and industry.

This collaboration has had a remarkable impact on the Ballarat region and the University:

- IBM has become an integral part of the University's education offering – deep collaborative partners in the University's efforts to design and teach relevant courses, link to industry, and ensure graduates are job-ready.
- IBM has employed 300-plus of the University's 400 Bachelor of IT Professional Practice) graduates in that time, and 70 per cent were still at IBM seven years later.
- 90 per cent of the University's IT graduates have found employment in the region, up from less than 40 per cent in 2001.

In totality, A 2020 economic impact statement assessed that the Federation University and IBM partnership, as part of the Park, had contributed \$125 million to GDP, \$62 million to household incomes, and 716 full time equivalent jobs.<sup>3</sup>

Federation University's cooperative collaboration with IBM has been so successful that IBM is now replicating it with other universities around Australia – Charles Sturt University and Edith Cowan University.

---

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://uwaterloo.ca/news/news/university-waterloo-creates-billions-economic-impact>

<sup>3</sup> Western Research Institute, *Ballarat Technology Park Impact Assessment*, prepared for Federation University and IBM Australia, November 2020, p.10.

## **Appendix 2 – The IBM PTECH Program**

The Federation College / IBM PTECH Program supports vocational education students by linking them with industry mentors as they work towards a STEM-related advanced diploma in addition to their senior secondary qualifications.

The key elements of the program include:

- **Matching students with an IBM mentor.** The mentor supports the students' learning, providing workplace opportunities and guiding them to make informed decisions regarding their education, training, and employment options – a relationship that endures while they complete their post-school qualification.
- **Helping students to transition from school to work or further study or university.** By linking vocational education students with a mentor while they're still at the College, the program provides students with the skills and support required to successfully navigate the transition to work or university.
- **Industry learning experiences and workplace visits** to help students to identify career interests and further study options, exposing students to higher education and the workplace earlier than is typical.
- **Defined pathways to achieving a higher qualification, coupled with innovative approaches to learning that use multiple teaching methods and tools.**

The PTECH model shows that collaboration between the education and industry sectors strengthens the connection between student learning and the skills that employers need. It improves young people's prospects of employment, including opportunities for employment with industry partners.

### **Appendix 3 – The Asia-Pacific Renewable Energy Training Centre.**

The University's work on the Asia-Pacific Renewable Energy Training Centre (APRETC) is an example of Federation University working with industry partners to understand their needs, involve them in education provision / adapt education provision to suit their needs, and mutually develop employment pathways.

In response to a Victorian Government commitment that 95% of the state's energy should be sourced from renewables by 2035 – with much of that coming from wind power – Federation University's consultation with the sector in 2016 identified that:

- much of the labour needed to support renewable energy generation is imported from overseas and over the next decade, an additional 15,000 FTEs will be needed in the sector,
- the growing number of renewable energy projects across the state showed a clear need for a local training centre to support the transition to clean energy.

Federation received \$50,000 from the Victorian Government for an initial business case for the development of APRETC, to provide a pipeline of TAFE and higher education graduates that could meet the burgeoning demands of the renewable energy sector.

Numerous energy companies recognised this project would support their growth in line with the state's renewable energy targets. In total, GPG, Acciona Energia, Tilt Renewables, and Vestas invested a combined \$1.8m to support the development of stage 1 of APRETC, Australia's first renewable energy training tower at Federation's Ballarat Campus (Mt Helen). The tower is a platform to deliver Global Wind Organisation (GWO) certified training for renewable energy workers.

The initial industry investment and endorsement for APRETC stage 1 resulted in the Victorian Government pledging \$6 million for the development of APRETC stage 2 in October 2022. Stage 2 of APRETC is an innovative technology centre that will deliver Australia's first dedicated BZEE certified wind turbine technician training program in 2024, as well as the world's first apprenticeship for Wind turbine blade technicians.

Once at scale, APRETC will provide apprenticeship programs, short courses, post-trade training and research that will support every aspect of the wind energy sector in the State. APRETC will be sustainable over the longer term with strong ROI based on forecast for jobs growth in the sector.

APRETC is an exemplar of training programs that are collaboratively designed, developed, and delivered with industry partners. The facility is a first for Australia and is an exemplar of how education providers, industry, and government can work together to address skills shortages and deliver transformational change to communities, while providing exciting employment opportunities.

#### **Appendix 4 – Scholarships**

Federation University has several examples of scholarship programs – delivered either alone or in partnership with employer partners – that help students with the cost of living, placement, and their education:

- **Teach the Future scholarships** for students in the Master of Teaching (Secondary) involves a \$15,000 stipend in the first year of study, plus employment at 0.8 (teaching 0.6) in a State school, with the option of ongoing employment on completion of the degree.
- **Foundation Scholarships**, which involve working closely with organisations to support our students through their entire degree. The scholarship funding is provided to assist the student with their living costs, with no specific requirements attached as to how they spend. The scholarships support a student for the duration of 4 years of the degree - \$7,000 in the first year, \$4,000 in the second, third and fourth year - meaning a student can be provided \$19,000 for the total duration of their studies.

### **Appendix 5 – IBM Internships.**

An example of Federation University partnering with one of our industry partners to offer students the opportunity to earn while they learn is the Federation – IBM Internships Program.

At Federation's Ballarat Campus, students in eligible degrees can apply for a prestigious IBM internship after completing semester one of their first year, which puts young people on a fast track to employment and creates a pipeline of skilled IT workers to meet the need of Australia's critical tech skills shortage.

The internships are 1,600-hour, 2.5-year merit-based internship at IBM in Ballarat that includes a scholarship and academic credit towards their degree. Students are expected to attend placement 1 to 2 days (12-16 hours) a week during semester and more frequently during non-teaching periods.

## **Appendix 6 – Nourishment Nook for Students**

An example of Federation University providing direct food and other supports for students is the ‘Nourishment Nook’, a confidential and free food pantry for students experiencing food insecurity, which was launched in July 2023 and now operates across four Federation University campuses. The first Nook had 170 students visit in the first week after launch, and the Nook network now supports hundreds of students across our campuses.

Adequate nutrition is vital for student wellbeing, mental health, and academic success, so the University created an on-campus pantry to meet the immediate needs of students experiencing food insecurity. In addition to providing food assistance, the Nook also offers additional resources and referrals to support services such as financial aid, counselling, and job assistance.

By offering the Nook, the University’s aim is to support students in their academic pursuits by alleviating the stress and challenges associated with food insecurity. It is part of a broader effort to promote student well-being, reduce barriers to success, and foster a sense of community and support on campus. Critically, students visiting the Nourishment Nook have their privacy respected, and staff work hard to create a non-judgmental environment.

The Nourishment Nooks are limited in what they can provide. Resourcing constraints have limited the capacity to extend the operating hours, and users are limited to one average-sized shopping bag per weekly visit so the service can support as many students as possible. The Nooks rely on food donations, volunteer efforts, and dedicated budgetary allocations from the University to run and maintain this program.

## **Appendix 7 – Connected Classrooms**

Federation University's Connected classrooms allows small or larger groups of students to join a study hub equipped with the latest technology using proven and leading-edge collaborative pedagogy. Spoke "connected classrooms" located in diverse regional campuses and locations, with peer or employer local facilitation are connected to subject matter experts in a hub on the network. This form of connected but personalised problem-based pedagogy breaks down key access barriers to study including travel time, work or carer commitments, and living in a remote location. The personalisation, group work on contextual, local problems and face-to-face collaboration makes this superior to pure online delivery.

The Connected Classrooms model:

- Uses commodity technology (e.g., Microsoft Office 365/Teams, surface hubs, laptops) to connect learners and facilitators through a digitally mediated learning environment. The technology is familiar and easy to use, reliable, available on a wide range of platforms (many already in student hands) and importantly it is scalable and robust.
- Allows learners or facilitators to join from a dedicated space and their personal devices. Learners enhance their ability to interact in the classroom by also joining from a personal device.
- Has seen the adaptation of the University's pedagogy to ensure students receive a seamlessly integrated and immersive experience, either on campus or via a Connected Classroom, that has been well received by students.
- Allow collaboration, group discussion and breakout, sharing of files and information, participation in chat and quizzes, and offer students the option to record, transcribe, or translate the interaction.
- Allows connection of smaller classes across campuses and regions, which with increasing adoption will become a key enabler of hybrid-flexible delivery and co-operative education across the regions we serve.
- Has strong support from local employers, including those situated a long way from a traditional campus, who have indicated increasing interest in hiring cohorts of students on an 'earn and learn' model using the co-op model.



## **Appendix 8 – Peer support**

Federation University has worked hard to develop and deploy peer support opportunities for students at all campuses. Some examples of these programs include:

- **Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS)**, a free, voluntary program that is offered in some of the courses that students find to be more challenging. The weekly one-hour study sessions run all semester and are facilitated by students who have previously achieved excellent results in the course, and who have completed a nationally accredited training program. The benefits of attending a PASS session on campus or online include learning effective study skills, developing communication, problem-solving and critical thinking skills, and working collaboratively with other students to understand the course content. Through actively working with their peers, students are more engaged and understand course content more deeply. Research has shown that students who attend PASS five or more times in a semester increase their chances of passing by 13 – 17% and the feedback from students that attend PASS has been overwhelmingly positive.
- **The Peer Mentor Program** provides new students with the opportunities to meet peers and build networks, learn about student life, and find the academic and social supports that they need for their study. At the commencement of semester, each new student is put in a group with a second-year student mentor that is studying the same program or discipline at the same campus. They meet weekly in the first five weeks of semester, providing mentees with an opportunity to raise any concerns they may have, gain insights about university life, or simply engage in a friendly chat. Mentors can also connect new students to a variety of on-campus events, academic skills workshops, and student support networks. By sharing personal experiences, strategies for success, and tips on how to navigate the university's resources, peer mentors are a vital component in the successful transition of new students into university life. Positive feedback is also linked to improved retention.

**The student groups program** differs from traditional clubs and societies in that it provides a variety of opportunities for students to link to peer networks and create meaningful social connections across different locations and campuses. The University currently has 36 active student groups spread across its Ballarat, Gippsland, Berwick, and Brisbane campuses, as well as three online groups. More than 1,000 of our students are currently members of one of these groups, which include cultural, social, sporting, academic, religious and special interest groups.