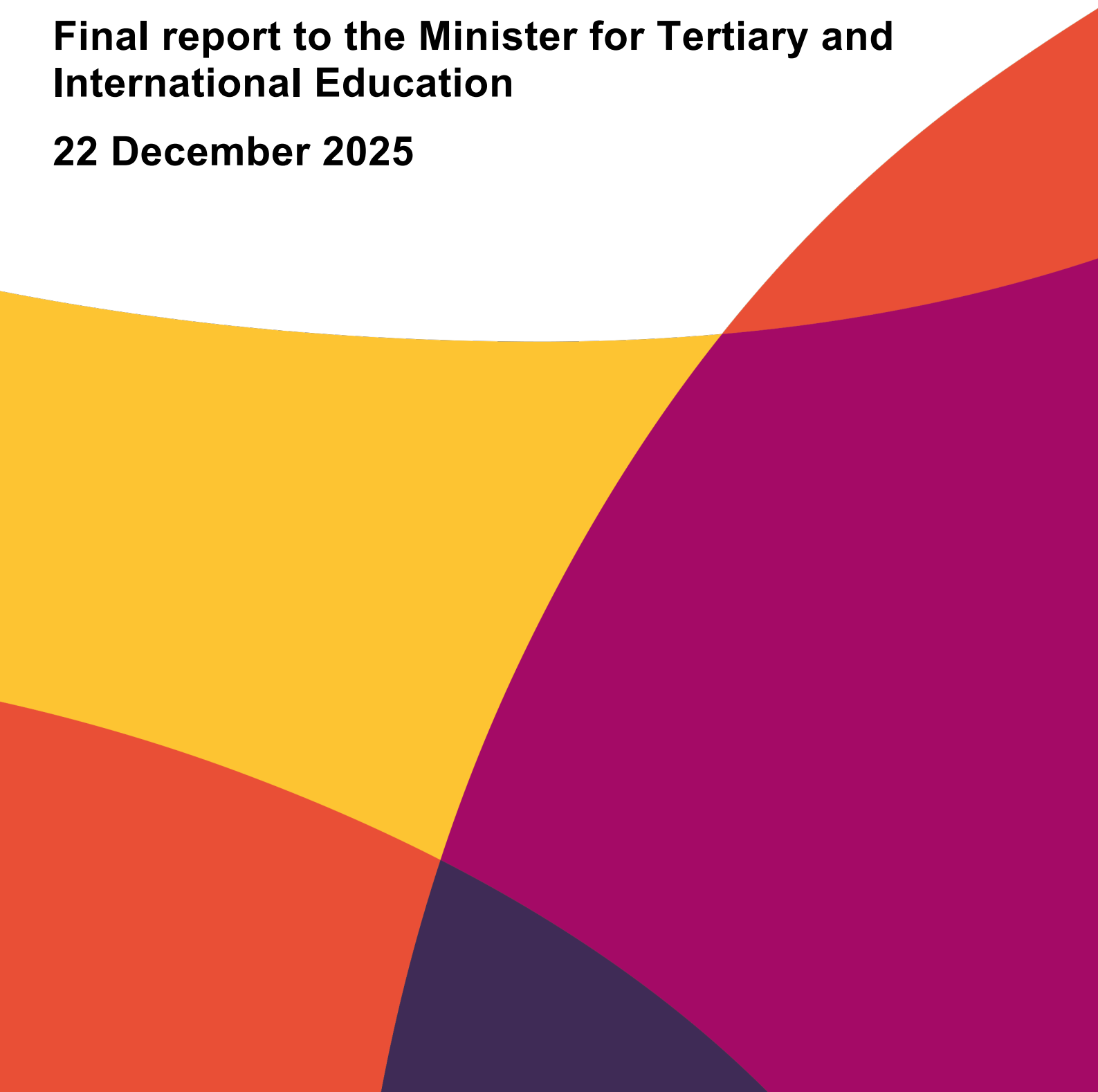


University Feasibility Study

Western Australian public universities

**Final report to the Minister for Tertiary and
International Education**

22 December 2025



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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and respect the Traditional Custodians of the lands, seas, skies and waterways where we are privileged to live and work.

We acknowledge Elders past and present, who generously share their knowledge and wisdom and continue to nurture Country, share culture, and strengthen communities. We acknowledge the strengths and cultural identities that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students bring to their places of learning and strive to build a culturally responsive system that supports them as they walk in the footsteps of their ancestors.

We acknowledge and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people we connect with; we commit to building a brighter future together, enriched by their oral histories, stories, lived experiences and living cultures.

Letter of transmission

Dear Minister

The Investigation Committee presents to you the University Feasibility Study Report. We thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this extremely critical task of positioning Western Australia's public university sector for a strong future.

We are firm in our view that the importance of a robust State university sector in supporting cultural enrichment, active citizenship and economic strength and diversification cannot be overstated. Innovation and the creation of new knowledge drive society and the economy forward.

As we worked through the issues and examined developments that have occurred since the 2023 Review of Western Australia's public university sector, it became increasingly evident that persisting with the existing legacy structures would not be in the best interests of students, the community or the economy.

We came to understand the full possibilities for transformation that were seen by the then Chief Scientist of Western Australia, Professor Peter Klinken AC, and the 2023 Review Panel. The rapid cost-benefit analysis provides clear quantitative evidence of the potential positive impact of bringing 2 or more of our public universities together.

Minister, you and your Government have shown insight and courage in pursuing this path, as mergers are never easy and always deeply contested. However, the vision that our State could build strength and prosperity with the shared commitment to Western Australia by building Australia's leading university is worth championing.



Hon Alannah MacTiernan (Chair)



Ms Lisa Rodgers PSM



Professor Bruce Walker AM

Glossary of terms and abbreviations

Term, acronym or abbreviation	Definition
2023 Report	University Sector Review: Western Australian public universities – Final Report to the Minister for Education (2 October 2023) by Harding et al.
2023 Review	Review of Western Australia’s public university sector (2023)
Aboriginal	Although the terms Indigenous and First Nations have been used in the 2023 Report and the Rapid CBA, this report follows the Western Australian Government’s advice to use the term Aboriginal people in preference to ‘Indigenous’ or ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ people, in recognition that Aboriginal peoples are the original inhabitants of Western Australia (Government of Western Australia, 2021)
Accord	Australian Universities Accord Review
Accord Report	Australian Universities Accord Final Report
ACEL	Australian Council for Educational Leaders
ANU	The Australian National University
ARC	Australian Research Council
ARWU	Academic Ranking of World Universities
ATEC	Australian Tertiary Education Commission
BCR	benefit-cost ratio – a metric used to evaluate whether the benefits of a project or policy outweigh its costs
CGS	Commonwealth Grant Scheme – a scheme where the Australian Government subsidises the cost of study for students studying in a Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP), and sets the CGS funding rate for each field of study (Australian Government Department of Education, 2025)
Consultant	Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu (Deloitte), which was engaged to undertake the rapid cost-benefit analysis (see Attachment 1 of this Feasibility Study)
CSPs	Commonwealth Supported Places – Through the CGS, the Australian Government subsidises the cost of study for students studying in a CSP, and sets the CGS funding rate for each field of study. (Australian Government Department of Education, 2025)
Curtin	Curtin University
DECRA	The Discovery Early Career Researcher Award scheme provides focused research support for early career researchers and provides three-years of funding with salary, on-costs and up to \$50,000 per year in project costs. (Australian Research Council, 2025)

Term, acronym or abbreviation	Definition
DEED	Department of Energy and Economic Diversification
dual-sector university	Universities with 2 common characteristics: - substantial student load in both vocational education and higher education - substantial research and award research doctorates. Australian dual-sector universities are: - Charles Darwin University - CQUniversity - Federation University - RMIT University - Swinburne University of Technology - Victoria University. (Bowman, et al., 2023)
ECU	Edith Cowan University
EFTSL	equivalent full-time student load
equity group student	Equity groups include students who: - are from non-English speaking backgrounds - have a disability - are women in non-traditional areas - identify as First Nations people (<i>noting that this is the term used by the Australian Government</i>) - are from low socio-economic status locations - are from regional and remote locations. (Australian Government Department of Education, 2025)
Feasibility Study	University Feasibility Study
Feasibility Study Report	University Feasibility Study Report
Federation	A structural alignment option, discussed in the 2023 Report, that refers to independent institutions sharing governance, brand and back-office functions (Harding et al., 2023a)
FHRI	Future Health Research and Innovation Fund is a sovereign wealth fund which aims to improve, through research and innovation, the health and prosperity of Western Australians, the sustainability of the health system and to advance the State's standing as a leader in research and innovation. (Western Australian Future Health Research and Innovation Fund, 2025)
FTE	full-time equivalent
GDP	gross domestic product
Go8	The Group of Eight – comprising Australia's leading research-intensive universities:

Term, acronym or abbreviation	Definition
	• The University of Melbourne • The Australian National University • The University of Sydney • The University of Queensland • The University of Western Australia • The University of Adelaide (to be Adelaide University from 2026 following its merger with the University of South Australia) • Monash University • UNSW Sydney.
HDR	Higher Degree by Research
HELP	Higher Education Loan Program assists eligible students with their student contribution or tuition fees from a university or other higher education provider. There are different types of HELP loans available, depending on the student's circumstances. (Australian Taxation Office, 2024)
HERDC	Higher Education Research Data Collection
HESA	<i>Higher Education Support Act 2003 (Cth)</i>
higher education	A form of tertiary education delivered by universities and accredited higher education providers. It encompasses qualifications at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, including: • undergraduate programs such as associate degrees and bachelor degrees (including honours) • postgraduate programs such as graduate certificates, graduate diplomas, master's degrees and doctoral degrees. (Study Assist, 2025)
higher education provider	Defined in the <i>Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Act 2011 (Cth)</i> as: 1. a constitutional corporation that offers or confers a regulated higher education award 2. a corporation that: • offers or confers a regulated higher education award • is established by or under a law of the Commonwealth or a Territory 3. a person who offers or confers a regulated higher education award for the completion of a course of study provided wholly or partly in a Territory. (<i>Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 (Cth)</i>)
international student	A citizen of any other country who is in Australia on a temporary student visa.

Term, acronym or abbreviation	Definition
	A key identifier for an international student is that they fall under legislation such as the <i>Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000</i> (Cth). This Feasibility Study uses the term ‘international’ rather than ‘overseas’ except where this term is used in legislation or statistics. (Australian Government, 2023)
Mission-based Compacts	Agreements between the Australian Government and higher education providers, which are a compulsory condition of them receiving Australian Government grants. Mission-based Compacts predate the Accord and were designed to incentivise universities to develop individual missions.
Monash	Monash University
Murdoch	Murdoch University
MYEFO	Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook
offshore student	A student who is residing overseas for the term/semester. Prior to 2017 the definition of an offshore student excluded students who were residing overseas for the term/semester and were undertaking a course, conducted in Australia via distance education or online. (Tertiary Collection of Student Information, n.d.)
onshore student	A student who is residing in Australia for the term/semester and is undertaking a program of study conducted by an Australian higher education provider. Prior to 2017, the definition of an onshore student included students who were residing overseas for the term/semester and were undertaking a course, conducted in Australia via distance education or online. (Tertiary Collection of Student Information, n.d.)
QILT	Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching are an Australian Government endorsed suite of surveys for higher education that cover the student life cycle from commencement to employment
QS	Quacquarelli Symonds (World University Rankings)
Rapid CBA	rapid cost-benefit analysis (see Attachment 1 of this Feasibility Study)
Regional Hub(s)	Regional University Study Hubs, previously known as Regional University Centres
SERD	Strategic Examination of Research and Development is a major initiative launched by the Australian Government’s Department of

Term, acronym or abbreviation	Definition
	Industry, Science and Resources to comprehensively review and strengthen Australia's research and development ecosystem (Department of Industry, Science and Resources, 2025, July)
SES	Socio-economic status is measured using Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data on the occupation, education level and income of all people living in designated areas. (The Centre for International Research on Education Systems, Victoria University, 2017)
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency
tertiary education	The level of education that follows the completion of secondary schooling and includes both higher education and vocational education and training (VET).
THE	Times Higher Education (World University Rankings)
U of T	University of Toronto
UoA	The University of Adelaide
UoM	The University of Melbourne
UoS	The University of Sydney
UNDA	The University of Notre Dame Australia
UNSW	University of New South Wales
UQ	The University of Queensland
UWA	The University of Western Australia
VET	vocational education and training

Executive summary

Universities are the cornerstones of active citizenship, a source of cultural enrichment and the bedrock of science and new knowledge. Western Australia's (WA's) 5 universities – 4 of which are public – were established under State legislation between 1911 and 1989 and have been critical drivers of the State's innovation, economic strength and cultural and social diversity. This has engendered strong allegiance to each university from past and present students.

However, in 2023, amid growing concern over a decline in the performance and the financial stability of public universities, the WA Government commissioned the Review of Western Australia's public university sector (2023 Review). The purpose of the 2023 Review was to explore what was needed to deliver improved performance and financial sustainability for WA's public university sector.

The 2023 Review Final Report (2023 Report) found that the WA public university sector's performance was lagging most other Australian jurisdictions on research, research training and domestic and international student enrolments, and that the potential of the 4 WA public universities was not being fully realised. The 2023 Report found that the case for structural change by way of a merger was compelling and immediate, and that enhancing the sector's longer-term performance warranted intervention.

This University Feasibility Study (Feasibility Study) marks the next stage of that work. This includes an update of data underpinning the 2023 Report, policy analysis, stakeholder consultation and a rapid cost-benefit analysis (Rapid CBA, see Attachment 1) of various merger options identified as delivering beneficial structural reform.

Since the 2023 Review, the WA public universities and their Vice-Chancellors have worked to grow and improve their financial positions. The Feasibility Study Investigation Committee (the Committee) acknowledges the leadership that the universities have shown in advancing their financial sustainability and growth.

The Committee has found that there is no immediate risk of a WA public university failing financially. However, it is clear that the current structures are failing to address the ongoing decline in overall performance and competitiveness. Indeed, the steps taken to secure their financial position may have further eroded the quality of education and research.

Detailed examination of the changes to the regulatory and funding environment since 2023 confirms that the findings of the 2023 Review still stand and, without structural reform, universities will not deliver on the State's ambition for a high-performance sector that offers excellence, financial sustainability and which drives economic growth and diversification.

WA's share of research income achieved by the State's 4 public universities continues to decline. Of concern, 5 individual eastern state universities received more of Australia's research funding than the combined total received by all 4 WA public universities.

Since 2023, total overall domestic applications have declined for WA public universities. Further, as referenced in the Rapid CBA, undergraduate completion rates at Murdoch (49%) and Curtin (56%) universities were significantly lower than completion rates at UWA (75%) and the top 4 national public universities in Australia. This evidence supports the views of stakeholders shared with the Committee that the State's higher education sector is struggling to attract and meet the needs of local students.

There are risks in a business model that heavily relies on international student income. Changing national policy settings, interstate competition and universities in Asia overtaking Australia in global university rankings are eroding WA's market competitiveness. The combined

total overseas student income for WA's 4 public universities in 2024 was less than each of that of the top 4 Group of 8 Eight (Go8) universities. This is attributable to a number of universities relying on a high volume of low-fee-paying students.

The Committee's consultations with stakeholders highlighted the importance of attracting Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students in developing a healthy research ecosphere. The average proportion of HDR students across WA's public universities has decreased from 4.6% to 3.8% between 2021 and 2024, with all 4 universities experiencing a decline.

Stakeholders external to public universities argued overwhelmingly for major change. Leaders from independent research entities and the science and business communities, expressed deep concern that the fragmentation of the State's research and teaching efforts was leading to underperformance across our public universities. These concerns were shared by a number of senior academics, also reflecting the evidence of the 2023 Report.

The Committee heard that there is an opportunity to galvanise capability towards State-based integrated research efforts aimed at faster translation of discoveries into real-world impact. Streamlined decision-making and enhanced support structures for researchers, that are possible with larger entities, are necessary to make WA truly competitive.

The WA Government's focus on economic diversification, and the trajectory of national governance, funding and regulatory reforms arising from the Australian Universities Accord Review (the Accord), provides an opportunity for WA public universities to increase their scale, as well as their national and global reach.

The Rapid CBA that forms the heart of this Feasibility Study found that there are clear, quantifiable economic benefits underpinning the case for a merger. Across the 3 merger options modelled in the Rapid CBA, each delivered positive benefit-cost ratios (BCR) based on assumptions of higher completion rates, increased research expenditure and increased international student tuition income.

The Committee has found that the option to merge UWA, Murdoch and Curtin will deliver the greatest social and economic benefit to WA. Such a merger would be transformational, creating the potential for a nationally and globally significant public institution.

The Committee also found that there would be considerable social and economic benefits from merging UWA and Murdoch. This merger combination would provide positive benefits with opportunities to bring complementary areas together.

A large, well-funded public university could have the resources to provide true equity of access, delivering the investment and support needed to increase domestic students' levels of university attainment.

WA public universities continue to have a lower proportion of regional and remote domestic students than the Australian average, with 21% of WA residents residing in regional and remote areas but only 12% of domestic university students coming from these areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2025). A new public university of greater scale could have a clear mandate and Government direction to uplift university education for WA's regional and remote residents. WA's universities could capitalise on the opportunities offered by the Regional University Study Hubs (Regional Hubs) and establish more offerings to these centres. A well-resourced university could also provide a more comprehensive and integral presence in regional campuses.

A merger would provide the WA Government with an opportunity to undertake statewide research planning and structural reform to address workforce needs. WA currently has skills

shortages in fields such as health and education. Universities have a role in alleviating such skills shortages by designing and delivering courses to meet the needs of the State. There is an opportunity that a merger, and greater State oversight of a new university, would allow for improved alignment of course offerings to meet State workforce needs.

The Committee does not underestimate the challenge of a merger and the resistance to change. Any merger option will require clear leadership and support from the WA Government. Timely decision-making will be necessary to minimise the inevitable, but temporary, instability that arises from the prospect of change. But this Committee is of the opinion that the opportunity for WA to have a globally significant public university with the potential to transform this State for decades to come outweighs the challenges.

Below is a list of the 14 Feasibility Study findings, which are discussed in more detail in the body of this report.

Finding 1 (p.25)

Changes in the regulatory and funding environment and improvements in the financial position of WA public universities since the 2023 Review have not altered the case for structural reform of WA's public university sector.

Finding 2 (p.29)

Without structural reform by way of a merger, WA's research endeavour will continue to struggle to compete with larger interstate universities that can leverage the benefits of scale to produce more complex and impactful research proposals, and opportunities for WA knowledge creation and innovation will continue to decline.

Finding 3 (p.32)

Given the size of the State's population and the funding model for universities, WA public universities would benefit by pivoting from competing with each other to combining to compete more successfully with interstate and international universities.

Finding 4 (p.32)

Without structural reform by way of a merger, WA public universities will necessarily continue to compete with each other for domestic and international students, with little incentive to focus on an allocation of resources that maximises the benefit to WA.

Finding 5 (p.33)

Equity demands that all WA students have access to excellence in education: the pursuit of supplementary funding should not undermine the quality of education available to disadvantaged cohorts.

Finding 6 (p.34)

Without structural reform by way of a merger, WA public universities will continue to be challenged in their ability to offer excellence in teaching and research, to attract a fair share of national research funding and to attract high-value, high-performing international students and staff.

Finding 7 (p.34)

The creation of a new, large, merged university in South Australia will challenge WA's position even further.

Finding 8 (p.34)

The Rapid CBA shows that all 3 merger options studied show a positive economic benefit for the State.

Finding 9 (p.35)

The greatest benefit results from a merger of Curtin, UWA and Murdoch, as this would create a university of a scale that could profoundly rebalance WA's capability and funding and act as a major counterweight to the disadvantage arising from the State's relative isolation and small population.

Finding 10 (p.36)

A UWA and Murdoch merger would be less complex while still delivering considerable benefits of scale and enhancement of complementary capabilities. It would be worthwhile in itself or as a first step in a larger reform.

Finding 11 (p.36)

Notwithstanding Murdoch's improved financial performance, the case made in the 2023 Review that any merger must involve Murdoch still stands: noting an ongoing marked reduction in attraction rates for new domestic applications, poor completion rates and a reliance on high volumes of low-paying international students.

Consequently, a Curtin and UWA merger would not be a preferred option, as it offers the lowest benefit-cost-ratio while leaving the challenge of Murdoch unaddressed.

Finding 12 (p.39)

Regional communities could be better served by WA universities. These universities could improve their participation in WA's Regional University Study Hubs and strengthen their modest and piecemeal regional campus offerings. The creation of a large-scale university with a clear mandate and direction for regional delivery could transform the reach of tertiary education into the regions. As a leader in dual-sector offerings, Edith Cowan University should be included in any plan to better deliver to the regions.

Finding 13 (p.36)

A great multi-campus university could develop a culture that provides a wide range of options for students with diverse capabilities and on different developmental pathways.

Finding 14 (p.40)

Any merger should be structured in such a way that readily allows other universities to join the new university at a later stage.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to Review of Western Australia's public university sector

WA's universities play a vital role in strengthening the State's social fabric and economic diversity. They contribute significantly to culture, business, industry and Government, while also shaping opportunities that extend well beyond the State's borders. The WA university sector currently has 5 universities, 4 of which are public: Curtin University (Curtin), Edith Cowan University (ECU), Murdoch University (Murdoch) and The University of Western Australia (UWA). The University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA) is the only private WA university, and the WA Government plays a limited role in its governance. The 4 public universities were the focus of the 2023 Review and this Feasibility Study, and UNDA is therefore not within the scope of this Feasibility Study.

The WA public university sector should be structured in a such a way to optimise its ability to meet the future needs of the State, and foster excellence in education and research. The 2023 Review was an independent review commissioned by the WA Government to consider ongoing challenges in the public university sector and ensure its performance and financial sustainability. The 2023 Review acknowledged that WA's universities are critical to:

- allowing students to pursue their educational interests and passions
- training and growing a skilled labour force for a diversified State economy
- conducting research that catalyses new knowledge and its application while supporting and driving innovation, prosperity and economic growth
- serving and responding to the interests of the WA community
- instilling a sense of active citizenship in students
- fostering economic, cultural and social connections between WA and the rest of the world.

The 2023 Review provided an opportunity to take a fresh look at how the sector was performing and consider how things could be done differently to meet the needs of a changing world. It included consideration of structural models that could deliver improvements that:

- meet the State's current and future knowledge and skills needs
- increase student enrolments, both domestically and internationally
- give students equitable access to high-quality university education
- enhance the student experience of attending university in WA
- support the financial sustainability of the sector
- increase WA's share of Australian competitive research funding
- assist the sector to undertake and commercialise high-quality research that drives economic growth, including increasing intellectual property creation, impact, publication, citations and awards
- attract and retain high-calibre academic staff
- strengthen relationships with business, industry and the vocational education and training (VET) and school sectors.

The University Sector Review: Western Australian public universities – Final Report (2023 Report) was delivered to the then Minister for Education on 2 October 2023. The 2023 Report found that the WA public university sector's performance lagged most other Australian jurisdictions in research, research training, and domestic and international student enrolments (2023 Report Finding 1). It highlighted the lack of delivery to regional areas and poor engagement across the university sector. In addition, it found that the potential for the 4 WA public universities to contribute to the WA Government's economic growth and diversification ambitions was not being fully realised (2023 Report Finding 2), and that the State's university sector was not working as a strategic partner for government or delivering on policy priorities, including Diversify WA (Government of Western Australia, 2023). The 2023 Report found that

incremental change would not deliver significant or sustained improvement to the sector's performance (2023 Report Finding 3).

In exploring potential models for structural change, the 2023 Report articulated that a focus on the development of further collaboration and consortia would add positively to the other recommendations of the 2023 Report but not substitute for them (2023 Report Finding 4). It recommended against a University of California-style federated structure – an affiliation of universities involving independent institutions sharing governance, brand and back-office functions – as administratively burdensome and adding complexity and cost to university governance arrangements, without producing significant or sustained improvement to their performance (2023 Report Finding 5).

Recommendations 1 to 6 of the 2023 Report proposed further work to assess the feasibility of potential mergers between UWA and Murdoch, or UWA, Murdoch and Curtin. While Recommendation 1 explicitly called for a detailed analysis of policy design, cost-benefit analysis, business case, change management and legislative pathways to fully evaluate merger options, it did not recommend a particular merger pathway or approach.

The 2023 Review was conducted in parallel with a significant national review of Australian higher education – the Accord. The Accord Final Report (Accord Report) was released in February 2024 (Australian Government Department of Education, 2024). The Australian Government has partly or fully actioned many of its recommendations and made significant reforms in areas such as international higher education, tertiary harmonisation, and research and development (R and D). These recommendations are outlined in Appendix A. The Accord Report includes recommendations relating to enrolments, funding and research, all of which have implications for how a merger of WA public universities would proceed.

While the Accord had a different and broader aim than the 2023 Review, it was prudent for the WA Government to consider the 2 reports simultaneously, particularly in light of announcements around potential funding and structural reforms. This decision provided sufficient time to assess the impact of implementing Accord reforms and ensure a cohesive, well-aligned approach. Consequently, a response to the 2023 Report has been deferred to allow for informed and co-ordinated action.

Some of the recommendations of the 2023 Report have in part been addressed through the changes introduced under WA Government and Accord reforms. This includes reducing barriers to participation by regional and remote communities by expanding Regional Hubs as part of a more integrated tertiary sector. There are now 9 Regional Hubs in WA across 14 locations. Nationally there are 56 Regional Hubs.

The WA Government also established the Tertiary and International Education portfolio as part of the 2025 Cabinet and initiated major reforms regarding the State's economic diversification. As national and State reform agendas have become clearer, it is timely that the 2023 Report's major recommendation – the exploration of a merger of 2 or more of WA's public universities – is now considered.

1.2 University Feasibility Study Terms of Reference

The Feasibility Study includes a Rapid CBA of possible university mergers in WA, building on, and not repeating, the work undertaken in the 2023 Review. The Terms of Reference for the Feasibility Study were approved by the Minister for Tertiary and International Education.

While the 2023 Report recommended 2 possible merger scenarios, the Feasibility Study considers a third possibility. Its purpose is to assess the implications of the following mergers:

- a) UWA, Murdoch and Curtin

- b) UWA and Murdoch
- c) UWA and Curtin (*not proposed in the 2023 Report*).

ECU, as recommended in the 2023 Report, was not considered as part of a possible merger. The 2023 Report's findings noted that ECU is a clearly differentiated university with unique offerings and opportunities for further growth, independent of any merger. While a merged institution involving other universities would have implications for ECU, the 2023 Review Panel was satisfied it could further consolidate its distinctive position and remain viable in a reinvigorated market. ECU is undergoing a major transformation with its recently completed city campus, and it will be important to understand the full significance of this development before recommending structural change for ECU.

The Feasibility Study's Terms of Reference establish the purpose and scope of the study, and are included in full in Appendix B. They outline that the Feasibility Study will explore possible reforms through strategic stakeholder engagement and analytical investigations, and provide findings to the Minister for Tertiary and International Education on the risks and benefits of the status quo versus the merger options.

The Terms of Reference establish that the Feasibility Study is led by a Committee with a lead investigator and 2 deputy investigators. They also provide for secretariat support from the Department of Education, and resourcing and support from the Department of Education and the Department of Energy and Economic Diversification (DEED). The Terms of Reference state that an external consultant will be engaged to provide data and analysis for a Rapid CBA, considering economic, social and educational impacts. They also outline the level of stakeholder engagement to be undertaken and the timeframes for reporting to the Minister for Tertiary and International Education.

As outlined in the Terms of Reference, the scope of the Feasibility Study extends to examining:

- strategic rationale
- academic and research impacts
- financial and operational viability
- stakeholder impacts
- legal and regulatory review
- regional and community impacts
- non-merger university impacts
- infrastructure integration.

The Feasibility Study does not identify preferred courses, units, departments or institutions in the event of a merger, nor does it examine future staffing models, including retention or redundancies.

Furthermore, it is not the role of the Committee to recommend how a merger might be implemented.

1.3 Investigation Committee's approach

Initial stages

The Committee was appointed and commenced its work at the end of July 2025. The Committee consisted of a lead and 2 deputy investigators:

- Hon Alannah MacTiernan (Chair)
- Ms Lisa Rodgers PSM (Deputy)
- Professor Bruce Walker AM (Deputy).

The Feasibility Study involved the following work:

- document and data review – review of institutional strategic plans, financial reports, publicly available university data, academic offerings, governance structures and relevant policy documents
- benchmarking – comparative analysis of similar university mergers in Australia and internationally
- stakeholder consultation – detailed targeted consultation with internal and external stakeholders, including students, academic staff, industry partners, unions, Government and other identified organisations
- scenario and risk analysis – to evaluate the long-term feasibility of the merger and the mitigation of identified risks.

DEED undertook a procurement process to identify suitable consultancy services to support the Committee. Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu (the Consultant) was selected to undertake a Rapid CBA along with an update of 2023 Review data and commenced work in late August 2025.

Targeted stakeholder consultation and data analysis

The Committee undertook comprehensive engagement with targeted stakeholders. Consultation meetings held from July to November 2025 provided the Committee with the opportunity to hear from stakeholders and consider their feedback on the proposed structural reform. A complete list of stakeholders is provided in Appendix D.

With support from the Consultant, the Committee conducted an initial environmental scan and quantitative data analysis to update the data reported in the 2023 Report. The Consultant also engaged with stakeholders to assist with data collection and analysis and policy analysis. This analysis considered the sector's relative performance over time and across a range of metrics relevant to students, research, staff and various ranking schemes. Data was drawn from a range of public sources, including:

- university annual reports
- Australian Government Department of Education Higher Education Statistics
- Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings and the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings
- Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Australian Research Council (ARC)
- Tertiary Institutions Service Centre (TISC)
- Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS)
- Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT).

The most recent publicly available, full-year report data was used.

Final stages

As required by its Terms of Reference, the Committee delivered a Draft Report, followed by its Final Report, to the Minister for Tertiary and International Education, marking the completion of the Feasibility Study.

2. Policy and performance changes since 2023

2.1 National context and policy developments

On 16 November 2022, the Accord was announced by the Australian Minister for Education and since then the Australian Government has proceeded with large-scale tertiary reforms, particularly to universities. The 2023 Review therefore took place at a time of considerable national reform in the university sector within states and territories. This included the merger of 2 universities in South Australia to establish Adelaide University. Accord reforms centred on ensuring good governance within universities and regulating and increasing transparency in the sector. Many of the changes will be rolled out from 2026 or have already commenced.

To understand potential impacts of these reforms on any potential WA university merger, the Committee met with the Accord Panel Chair and key Australian Government stakeholders to ensure an understanding of the implications, trajectory and pending actions at the national level. Based on the Accord's reforms, and other reforms made by the Australian Government since 2023 (Appendix A), the following are identified as areas for consideration in line with the findings in this Feasibility Study Report. Timelines for these reforms are outlined in Table 1, followed by an outline of the reforms and their potential implications for WA.

Table 1: Timeline of national reforms

Areas of national reform	Timeline (at the time of writing)
Establishment of an overarching system steward, the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC)	Interim ATEC commenced 1 July 2025 On 27 November 2025, the Australian Government's Senate referred the following bills for inquiry and report: <i>Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Bill 2025</i> <i>Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2025.</i> Permanent ATEC expected to be established from 2026
Changes to funding models for Australian Universities	Mission-based Compacts between Australian Government and universities negotiated in 2025 Needs-based Funding from 1 January 2026 Managed Growth Funding transition year in 2026 and full commencement in 2027
Strategic Examination of Research and Development (SERD)	Report delivered to Australian Government in December 2025
Regulations relating to international student numbers	The Commonwealth Government's migration strategy has introduced several measures to constrain onshore student enrolment (e.g. increase in visa costs, stricter visa approval

	processes and higher English language requirements).
Reforms to Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Act 2011	Consultation closed 31 October 2025 Reforms ongoing since Accord Report
Education and Employment Legislation Committee inquiry into Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers, and related governance reforms	Expert Council on University Governance Final Report and Principles released October 2025 (Education and Employment Legislation Committee, 2025) Senate Inquiry into the Quality of Governance at Higher Education Providers final report published 11 December 2025

Australian Tertiary Education Commission

On 1 July 2025, the interim ATEC was established, headed by 3 interim Commissioners (Australian Government Department of Education, 2025). The ATEC is an independent steward for the tertiary education system and aims to deliver on national economic and social objectives. At the time of writing, the interim ATEC is focused on:

- driving a joined-up tertiary system (with an initial emphasis on higher education)
- determining allocations for the new Managed Growth Funding system
- implementing Needs-based Funding as part of the core funding model
- negotiating Mission-based Compacts to support a diverse, responsive and high-performing sector.

On 27 November 2025, the Australian Government's Senate referred 2 Bills associated with the ATEC for inquiry and report – after these Bills were read in the House of Representatives on 26 November 2025. The explanatory memorandum for the *Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Bill 2025* stated that compacts:

[E]nable diversity of delivery and mission within the higher education system. Compacts will enable providers to demonstrate how their unique mission – the institution's core purpose, values, and goals – aligns with national, state and local priorities, planning, and strategy, as well as industry engagement and innovations in learning and teaching [...] This approach will ensure national priorities and outcomes are met, while enabling each provider to pursue its distinct mission.

(Australian Government, 2025)

This federal legislation could have implications for WA's capacity to influence universities' missions.

The introduction of new Mission-based Compacts that 'support a diverse, responsive, and high-performing sector' signals that, under the ATEC, universities could become more specialised and responsive to national, state and territory priorities. Committee consultation with Australian and WA Government representatives also identified the potential for universities to have specialised degree offerings and research foci, which would align to Government priorities. This focus on benefits to the State – and the nation – aligns with the objectives of the 2023 Review, particularly where State and national priorities intersect.

Changes to funding models for Australian universities

The Managed Growth Funding system is a new funding model for Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) for domestic students, commencing in 2027 with a transition year in 2026. In the current system, annual growth in Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) funding, which finances CSPs, is based on fixed growth rates depending on the location of university campuses.

In the Managed Growth Funding system, growth targets will be partly based on 'student demand', as well as on 'national objectives' to be set by the Australian Government. The new system will allocate each provider a set number of equivalent full-time student load (EFTSL), within a certain range, with numbers of places for domestic EFTSL.

The Needs-based Funding system seeks to ensure more students from under-represented backgrounds are supported to participate and succeed in higher education. These are listed as:

- First Nations students
- low socio-economic status (SES) students
- regional, rural and remote students
- students with disability.

(Australian Government Department of Education, 2024, July)

WA remains the state with the lowest proportion of commencing students from regional or remote locations (Deloitte 2025, p. xiii). Under the new system, individual students from regional and remote areas will not have Needs-based Funding associated with them unless enrolled at a regional campus, or if they are from 1 or more of the other equity cohorts identified. Currently, WA's public universities have 3 small regional campuses in Kalgoorlie, Albany and Bunbury, with a modest range of courses offered (Australian Government Department of Education, 2025). This limits WA's ability to effectively utilise the Needs-based Funding.

At the time of writing, full details on the above funding reforms – and the form of the Mission-based Compacts – have not yet been finalised. The full rollout of these reforms is subject to the passing of the *Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Bill 2025* and an associated bill. However, WA universities have received their 2026 domestic and international student allocations based on these models. WA's 5 universities were allocated an additional 1,300 CSPs for 2026 (Clare, 2025).

Based on the Committee's consultation with stakeholders from the Australian Government and universities, it is anticipated that the reforms will advantage universities with larger equity cohorts. While this new funding system may result in more domestic student places (and therefore funding) for WA universities (as the 2026 increase in CSPs suggests), universities will need to ensure that available places are filled to prevent under-enrolment and meet tertiary attainment targets. Furthermore, given WA has no regional universities and relatively few regional campuses, and while universities' Mission-based Compacts are not currently public, the State may potentially receive less Needs-based Funding than other states and territories unless regional options are strengthened. This is an area that needs to be urgently considered by WA's public universities.

Strategic Examination of Research and Development

The Australian Government is undertaking a strategic examination of the nation's R and D system, as part of its Future Made in Australia package. The SERD Expert Panel delivered its report to the Australian Government in December 2025, and recommendations relating to research funding, infrastructure and the overall structure of the higher education system may have implications for the findings of this Feasibility Study.

As part of its consultations, the Committee interviewed a SERD Expert Panel member. This discussion reflected what the Committee had heard from a broad range of stakeholders who repeatedly outlined the current lack of support for research and collaboration in WA, including

support for ARC, National Health and Medical Research Council, and Medical Research Future Fund grant applications. Many stakeholders spoke about the need for more effort and support to develop research projects that are of scale, excellence and priority concern.

Restrictions on international student numbers

Following a series of highly effective incentives to increase international student enrolments after the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Government introduced measures to reduce international student enrolments nationwide.

These changing national settings have made the international student market unpredictable, and universities now less able to rely on stable international student numbers. Australian universities have received their New Overseas Student Allocations (NOSC) for 2026, with WA public universities receiving a slight increase to their previous student allocations.

The 2023 Review found WA's performance in attracting international students lagged other states and territories. There have been improvements since, with the WA public universities' share of Australia's international students, continuing and commencing, increasing from 8.6% in 2018 to 10.7% in 2024. Limits on international student numbers were acknowledged as an issue across many of the stakeholder groups that the Committee engaged with. Given the Australian Government's policies regulating student numbers, this Feasibility Study acknowledges that increasing international student numbers alone is no longer a viable approach, and attention needs to be paid to attracting high-performing students, focusing on their ability to contribute to research efforts, contribute fees and provide for a skilled workforce.

Reforms to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Act 2011

In September 2025, the Australian Government released a consultation paper to invite views on potential amendments to the TEQSA Act (Australian Government Department of Education, 2025). These included potential changes to modernise and strengthen TEQSA's powers, regulate Australian higher education and change the TEQSA Act to align with Government and community expectations.

This legislation is expected to be a major mechanism through which the Australian Government implements Accord reforms (as well as through the introduction of new legislation), and the implications of this for the Feasibility Study are discussed below.

Education and Employment Legislation Committee inquiry into Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers, and related governance reforms

The Australian Government is also undertaking a series of reforms relating to universities' governance. This includes the work of the Expert Council on University Governance, which handed down its Final Report and Principles in October 2025 (Australian Government Department of Education, 2025, October), and the Australian Government Senate Inquiry into the Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers, which handed down its findings in December 2025 (Education and Employment Legislation Committee, 2025)

The reforms relate to governance concerns regarding universities' governing bodies (senates and councils); universities' staff entitlements, executive remuneration; and the handling of staff and student complaints. For example, Murdoch was granted re-registration as an Australian university in 2021, but for 4 years rather than the full 7 years possible under this legislation, following TEQSA's 2020 compliance assessment of the university, which concluded that Murdoch was at risk of failing to continue meeting the requirements. The risks identified were:

- governance and the extent to which:
 - Murdoch's governing body has sufficiently managed and mitigated material risks identified in its operations
 - the Academic Council adequately identifies, mitigates and maintains oversight of material risks that impact teaching and learning quality at Murdoch

- course review and improvement activities and the extent to which Murdoch has established systematic benchmarking of student performance data across comparable courses (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2025).

While Murdoch subsequently had its registration extended for a further 3 years, Australian Government stakeholders consulted for this Feasibility Study expressed concern about Murdoch's performance.

Stakeholder engagement with the Committee highlighted similar issues to those explored by the Expert Council and the Inquiry. Although there were different views on what good governance looked like, a range of stakeholders – including the staff union, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU); student representatives; industry stakeholders; and university management – emphasised the need for good governance and leadership. This may have implications regarding any legislation that would need to be passed to establish a new university, and could require consideration of the 'Principles' developed by the Expert Council on board.

Adelaide University

As noted in the 2023 Report, the merger of 2 universities (the University of South Australia and The University of Adelaide) in South Australia to establish Adelaide University seeks to address issues common to those that drove the establishment of the 2023 Review.

When the new university commences operation in 2026, it will have the largest cohort of domestic students of any university in Australia (Government of South Australia, 2023). This merger may have implications for WA because, aside from The Australian National University (ANU), UWA will become the smallest research-intensive Go8 university. Adelaide University's success will likely further erode UWA's standing as it moves closer to the top of the Go8 universities.

The Committee met with those involved in the Adelaide University merger, who were optimistic about the university's initial and future rankings. The Committee noted some disquiet from some stakeholders regarding the South Australian merger, but advice given in interviews suggests that this will be short lived as the merger proceeds.

Australian Government representatives and the Chair of the Accord Panel – who made similar public comments about Adelaide University (Government of South Australia, House of Assembly, 2023) – highlighted during stakeholder engagement that there was nothing in the Accord to prevent or discourage a merger of WA public universities.

2.2 WA context and policy developments

WA's universities have the capacity to strengthen and diversify the State's economy. Universities are essential to developing a workforce with enhanced skills and capabilities, driving research productivity, commercialisation and facilitating knowledge exports.

WA has Government initiatives that interact with and may enhance a merger of WA's public universities. Among these is Diversify WA, the WA Government's economic development framework, and its updates since 2019 (Government of Western Australia, 2019):

- Future State (Government of Western Australia, 2023)
- Diversify WA: 2024 Update (Government of Western Australia, 2024).

The Diversify WA framework forms a key element of *Jobs Health Housing*, which outlines the WA Government priorities for 2025–2029 (Government of Western Australia, 2025). One of these priorities – Jobs – focuses on diversifying the WA economy to create secure, quality jobs for all Western Australians.

In its current form, Diversify WA identifies 9 priority sectors for economic development to diversify the economy and create high-quality jobs.

Diversify WA is significant in relation to research funding and international students, both of which were identified as concerns in the 2023 Report. In particular, it prioritises STEM research and growth in international student enrolments. A potential merger of WA public universities would need to consider and work alongside Diversify WA initiatives.

The diversification of WA's economy requires the involvement of WA's universities and related stakeholders in their teaching and learning activities, research output, contributions to innovation and productivity, provision of international and transnational education, and mobilisation of alumni to engage with WA. This Feasibility Study provides an opportunity to examine how WA's public universities might approach Diversify WA. Through the work of a merger, the WA Government could consider how to optimise the role of public universities in economic diversification and transformation, and better focus research efforts.

This aligns with the 2023 Report findings that, while higher education has not been an area of major focus for successive WA Governments (2023 Report Finding 10), focus on WA Government leadership, engagement, support and advisory capacity will help deliver a more strategic and collaborative approach to higher education in WA (2023 Report Finding 11). The 2023 Report therefore recommended establishing a cohesive research, innovation and commercialisation program to support emerging priorities (2023 Report Recommendation 11).

2.3 Updated data on universities' performance

The 2023 Report identified areas of concern that had been evident in WA's public university sector for some years (Harding et al. 2023a, p.12). These included relatively low enrolment growth for domestic and international students, declines in competitive research funding and a lack of services to regional areas of the State.

This section of the Feasibility Study compares trends and findings identified in the 2023 Report with currently available data, drawing on the Rapid CBA to examine how these trends have changed or remained the same.

Finding 1

Changes in the regulatory and funding environment and improvements in the financial position of WA public universities since the 2023 Review have not altered the case for structural reform of WA's university sector.

Domestic students

The 2023 Report raised concerns that, although domestic student load had risen in the years leading up to 2021, EFTSL at WA's 4 public universities represented 'a declining share of the Australian total, from 9.5% in 2011 to 8.9% in 2021' (Harding et al., 2023a, p.12). This declining share has worsened in 2024. Since 2021, total domestic student load at WA's 4 public universities has further declined from 66,357 in 2021 to 62,214 in 2024 – a decrease of 6.2%. This represents 8.8% of the Australian total, a decrease of 0.1% since 2021. This decline speaks to 2023 Report Finding 1, which found that the WA public university sector's performance lags most other Australian jurisdictions in domestic enrolments (Harding et al., 2023a, p. 21).

In the 2023 Report's analysis of domestic student enrolments at WA public universities, different equity groups were also considered, including the proportions of Aboriginal students, regional and remote students, students from low SES areas and students with disability. In an analysis of 2021 Australian Department of Education data, it was observed that:

- equity group students represented a smaller proportion of domestic enrolments at UWA than at the other 3 public WA universities in each of the above categories except for students with disability
- Aboriginal and low SES students represented a higher proportion of Murdoch's domestic enrolments
- regional and remote students were most strongly represented at ECU but were under-represented at all of WA's public universities in comparison with the Australian university average
- Curtin showed relatively high proportions of equity group students across all categories.

These trends have largely continued to 2024, but with the following changes:

- Murdoch's proportion of Aboriginal students has decreased since 2021, no longer representing a higher proportion of Murdoch's domestic enrolments, while Curtin's proportion of Aboriginal students has increased
- ECU's proportion of regional and remote student enrolments has decreased, while Curtin's proportion has increased. However, it is noted that regional and remote students remain under-represented at WA public universities, with each university still enrolling a lower percentage of regional and remote students than the Australian average.

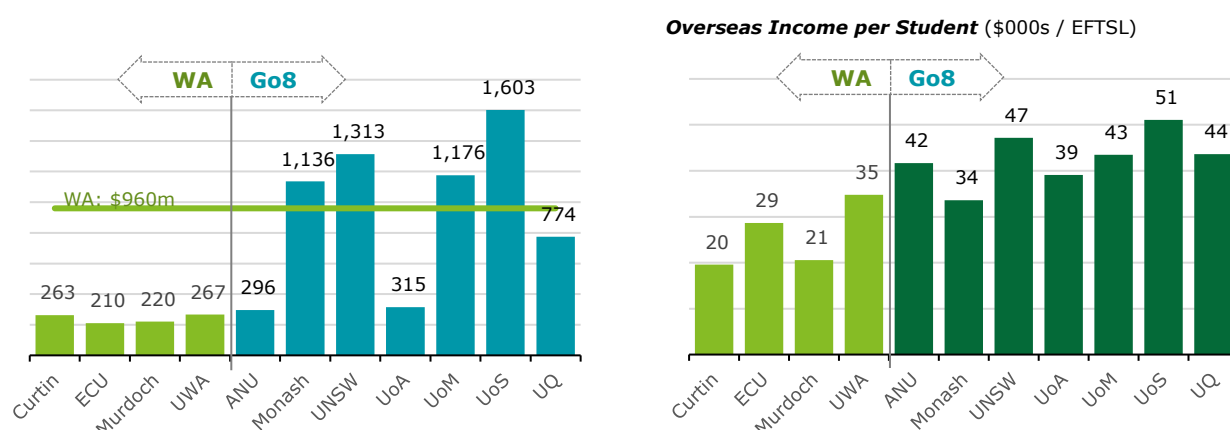
The 2023 Report acknowledged WA's highly urbanised population, with approximately 78% based in the capital city. As of 2025, this figure has increased to 79%, further highlighting the geographical challenges in serving the higher education needs of those in regional and remote WA (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2025). Noting the continuation of these performance trends, the basis for the 2023 Report Finding 13 remains that "regional and remote communities in the State are underserved by the 4 WA public universities" (Harding et al., 2023a, p. 43).

International students

The 2023 Report identified that although the COVID-19 pandemic had affected international student enrolments nationally in 2021, across Australia, "overseas higher education student numbers were still 31.5% higher in 2021 than they were in 2011. In contrast, in WA higher education institutions there were 10.2% fewer overseas students enrolled in 2021 than in 2011" (Harding et al., 2023a, p. 18). It should be noted that the 2023 Report references 8.4%, which includes UNDA.

Since hitting a low in 2021, overseas student load (onshore and offshore) has increased from 22,875 in 2021, to 39,143 in 2024 – an increase of 71.1%. However, these figures do not consider differences in the fees charged to international students or international students' areas of enrolment and course types (e.g. in areas of workforce need). The Rapid CBA explores this as part of the analysis of international students, considering the value of overseas student income in both absolute and per-student terms (Figure 1). WA's total overseas income of \$960 million in 2024 was less than the income of each of the top 4 Go8 universities, and the revenue per overseas student was significantly less than that of 6 of the Go8 universities. Notably, Curtin and Murdoch's income per overseas student (EFTSL) is less than half that of 5 of the Go8 universities.

Figure 1: Rapid CBA Chart i – Overseas student income and overseas income per overseas student



To assess the student experience across WA public universities, the 2023 Report drew on the 2022 Student Experience Survey data in the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT). It is important to acknowledge, as stated in the 2023 Report, the fragility of QILT data, due to low response rates and long lead times, with performance across the sector at a national level sitting within a narrow band.

The 2022 and 2024 student experience data showed similar results, with undergraduates at ECU reporting higher levels of satisfaction across their entire educational experience than their counterparts at Curtin, Murdoch and UWA (Table 2 – see also Appendix E).

Table 2: Percentages of undergraduates reporting a positive overall experience in 2022 and 2024

	2022 (%)	2024 (%)	Change
ECU	81.8%	79.7%	-2.1%
UWA	77.8%	75.6%	-2.2%
Curtin	75.1%	74.1%	-1%
Murdoch	75.1%	76.9%	+1.8%

While ECU continues to have the largest percentage of undergraduates reporting a positive overall experience in WA, it reported a 2.1% decrease from 2022, with all other universities reporting a drop except Murdoch, with an increase of 1.8%.

Research – income

The 2023 Report considered WA's public universities' research performance and competitive research funding as a driver for change. While acknowledging each public university's research income had increased over the decade of 2011–2021, the growth had been slower than other jurisdictions. Further, the combined share of research income achieved by the State's 4 public universities fell from 9.5% in 2011 to 7.7% in 2021 (Harding et al., 2023a).

In 2022, the combined share of research income achieved by the State's 4 public universities increased to 7.9%, before falling below the 2021 level to 7.6% in 2023 (the latest available data as of December 2025). The observation was made in the 2023 Report that, in 2021, the combined research income for all 4 of WA's public universities was lower than several individual interstate universities (Harding et al., 2023a). This remains the case, with Monash University, The University of Melbourne, UNSW, The University of Sydney and The University of

Queensland each reporting greater research income than the combined total of WA's 4 public universities.

Figure 2: Rapid CBA Chart iii – Research income and research income per academic staff

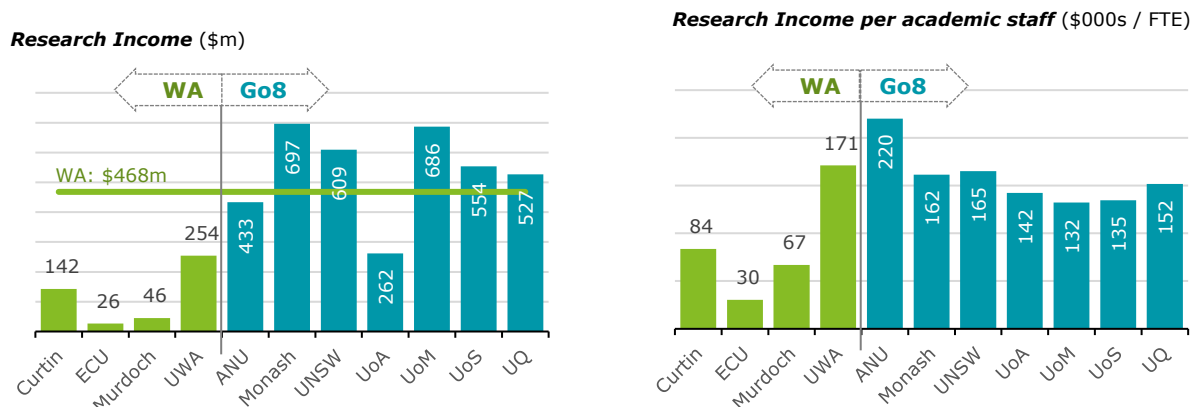


Figure 2 provides a national context for WA's performance in terms of total research income (Higher Education Research Data Collection (HERDC) Category 1–4 excluding HDR student income) for all 4 WA public universities in 2023, and per academic staff (EFTSL). As Figure 2 illustrates, the total 2023 research income of WA's 4 public universities is less than that of 5 of the Go8 universities. Curtin, ECU and Murdoch achieved significantly lower than the Go8 in terms of research income per academic (i.e. based on staff full-time equivalent [FTE] categorised as research only, and research and teaching) staff. In contrast, UWA's performance as a Go8 was relatively strong compared to its Go8 counterparts.

Research – Australian Research Council schemes

The 2023 Report considered the performance of WA's 4 public universities in terms of the number of applications and the share of income for the state of WA received for the Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery Projects and Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) schemes.

An update to the trends identified in the 2023 Report is provided below.

ARC Discovery Projects

For grants commencing from 2016 to 2023, Curtin and UWA were responsible for approximately 91% of the Discovery Projects applications considered from WA and received approximately 96% of the funding. In this same period, the number of applications from WA's 4 public universities fell from 306 to 132, compared with the national totals of 3,584 and 2,588. WA's share of total funding for Discovery Projects decreased from \$20.4 million to \$10.7 million in the same period, a reduction of 47.6%, compared with a 9.6% decline nationally. Consequently, WA's share of the funding pool fell from 8.3% to 4.8% (Harding et al., 2023a, p.19).

In the latest period of grants commencing from 2023 to 2025, the total number of ARC Discovery applications considered from WA's 4 public universities continued to decline, from 132 to 54. In this same period, WA's share of the total funds approved for ARC Discovery Projects declined further to 4.5% in 2025 (from 4.8% in 2023).

ARC DECRA schemes

For grants commencing from 2016 to 2024, the number of applications considered nationally fell from 1,220 to 1,023, with some fluctuations. Of those, the total applications considered from WA's 4 public universities fell from 97 to 52, with a peak of 100 in 2018. While DECRA funding

has increased from \$70.7 million in 2016 to \$86.3 million in 2024, WA's public universities' share has stayed relatively unchanged over this time (Harding et al., 2023a, p.19).

In the latest period of grants commencing in 2025, the number of DECRA applications considered increased slightly, from 56 to 66. Despite an increase in applications, WA's share of funds from approved DECRA projects declined further, from 5.9% in 2024 to 5.4% in 2025.

Finding 2

Without structural reform by way of a merger, WA's research endeavour will continue to struggle to compete with larger interstate universities that can leverage the benefits of scale to produce more complex and impactful research proposals, and opportunities for WA knowledge creation and innovation will continue to decline.

Research – Higher Degree by Research student load

When measuring the performance of WA's public universities, the 2023 Report identified that in 2021, UWA had an Higher Degree by Research – doctorate by research plus master's by research – (HDR) "student load of 1,798 EFTSL, which was seventh out of the Go8 members" (Harding et al., 2023, p.20). As of 2024, this has decreased with UWA reporting a HDR student load of 1,530 EFTSL, making UWA eighth out of the Go8 universities.

In 2021 (Table 3 – see Appendix E), the average proportion of HDR student load for WA's 4 public universities was 4.6%, lower than each of the Go8 universities individually (Harding et al., 2023a). In 2024, the average proportion of HDR load for WA's 4 public universities decreased to 3.8%. Although UWA's proportion of HDR load has decreased, they still performed well compared to other Go8 universities, reporting a higher HDR student load than UNSW, University of Sydney and Monash University.

Table 3: Proportion of HDR student load

University	2021 – Proportion of HDR load	2024 – Proportion of HDR load
UWA	9.0%	↓ 6.7%
Murdoch	3.7%	↓ 3.1%
Curtin	3.5%	↓ 2.8%
ECU	2.8%	↓ 2.6%
WA average*	4.6%	↓ 3.8%

*Due to rounding to 1 decimal place, percentages as they are listed above may not combine to equal the WA average.

Rankings

The 2023 Report reviewed rankings data for WA's 4 public universities across 3 of the main ranking systems: the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), QS World University Rankings and the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings.

Table 4 compares the rankings identified in the 2023 Report with the latest available data. Since the 2023 Review, WA public university rankings have largely remained the same or decreased, except for Murdoch and ECU rising slightly in their 2026 QS rankings from 2024 (see Appendix E).

Table 4: 2023 data update – change in rankings for WA universities

University	2023 ARWU	2025 ARWU	2024 THE	2026 THE	2024 QS	2026 QS
UWA	101–150	101–150	143	↓ 153	72	↓ 77
Curtin	201–300	201–300	201–250	↓ 251–300	183	183
Murdoch	401–500	↓ 501–600	351–400	↓ 401–500	431	↑ 423
ECU	601–700	↓ 801–900	351–400	351–400	529	↑ 487

Table 5 illustrates the disruption occurring within the higher education sector, with international competitiveness being reshaped by the rise in scale and quality of universities, particularly in Asia (see Appendix E).

Table 5: Rapid CBA Table 2.7 – Change in Times Higher Education (THE) Top 400 rankings by country from 2020 to 2026

Most universities entering Top 400		Most universities exiting Top 400	
China	↑ 19	United States	↓ 23
Italy	↑ 5	United Kingdom	↓ 8
Saudi Arabia	↑ 4	France	↓ 6
Hong Kong, Malaysia, Turkey	↑ 3	Australia, Germany, Iceland, New Zealand	↓ 2
Iran, Japan, South Korea, United Arab Emirates	↑ 2		

University rankings’ methodologies have often been criticised, particularly for their reliance on measures like ‘reputation’ that do not objectively evaluate the quality of teaching or research. Nonetheless, they are shown to attract international students and to strengthen the research profiles of developing institutions, and remain a key measure of success within the sector (Katsumoto et al., 2024).

Summary

As identified in Insight 7 of the Rapid CBA, the financial position of WA’s public universities has improved since the 2023 Review, reducing the short-term risk of financial exposure (Deloitte 2025, p. 15). Nevertheless, the Rapid CBA notes that consideration should be given to the longer-term financial sustainability and resilience of WA’s public universities, and how these could support greater performance and benefits for the State.

Overall, an updated analysis of the data and trends identified in the 2023 Report signals a continued decline in the performance and competitiveness of WA’s 4 public universities.

In line with the findings made in the Rapid CBA, this Feasibility Study finds that there have been limited improvements, and notable declines, in the non-financial performance of WA public universities.

In summary, these changes do not alter the underlying findings nor the case for change outlined in the 2023 Report.

3. Merger options – costs and benefits

3.1 Rapid cost-benefit analysis

The 2023 Report Finding 11 states that ‘Additional focused State Government leadership, engagement, support and advisory capacity will help deliver a more strategic and collaborative approach to higher education in Western Australia’ (Harding et al., 2023a, p. 36). This finding should be considered alongside 2023 Report Finding 3, which identifies, based on the history of the WA public university sector and international experience, that ‘incremental change will not deliver significant or sustained improvement to universities’ performance’ (Harding et al., 2023a, p.24).

The 2023 Report was the first step towards considering structural change to the WA public university sector, recognising that further detailed work would be required for any proposed reform to be adopted. Recommendation 1 of the 2023 Report called on the WA Government to undertake a cost-benefit analysis (alongside other work) to assess the case for a merger of either 2 or 3 universities.

As outlined in the Terms of Reference, this Feasibility Study aims to deliver findings on the costs and benefits of maintaining the status quo versus pursuing a merger, recognising that WA’s economic, educational, social and cultural future depends on a university sector structured to maximise performance across these areas.

The Consultant applied a Rapid CBA framework, underpinned by:

- a Theory of Change that establishes how a merger could lead to improved educational, research and economic outcomes
- financial analysis that estimated merger implementation costs and potential cost savings
- economic modelling that quantifies the market benefits from public and private returns to education (via earnings and economic spillovers), productivity enhancements through R and D, and revenue surpluses from international tuition and non-tuition spending.
- breakeven analysis detailing the uplift in benefits required to offset merger costs
- scenario modelling outcomes for a merged university based on 3 drivers – undergraduate and postgraduate completions, research expenditure and international student tuition.

For the purposes of the Rapid CBA, the Consultant defined mergers as the joining of 2 or more legacy universities to establish a new merged university with a distinct name and brand; a single leadership and executive; a shared network of infrastructure, systems and operations; and a unified student body, experience and curriculum. It also notes that there is a range of alternative merger or integration structures that could be considered.

3.2 Trajectory of status quo

This section investigates the trajectory of WA’s public higher education sector should the status quo be maintained, considering the impact of changes in national policy settings discussed in section 2.1, while drawing on the performance data discussed in section 2.3 and the research and analysis contained in the Rapid CBA.

The Rapid CBA considers whether the current arrangement of WA’s public university sector, in which competition for market share drives decision-making, produces the best outcomes for the State. In the feedback received through the Committee’s stakeholder consultation, and reinforced by the Rapid CBA’s case studies and insights, a strong argument was put forward that WA’s public universities should compete against external competition rather than among themselves for students and funding (Deloitte, 2025).

The Committee is of the view that there is little evidence to suggest that the status quo will not involve a continued gradual decline in metrics for the WA public universities. The Committee also noted that the Consultant took a conservative stance by not modelling a continued decline that the Committee contends is likely to occur.

Finding 3

Given the size of the State's population and the funding model for universities, WA public universities would benefit by pivoting from competing with each other to combining to compete more successfully with interstate and international universities.

Finding 4

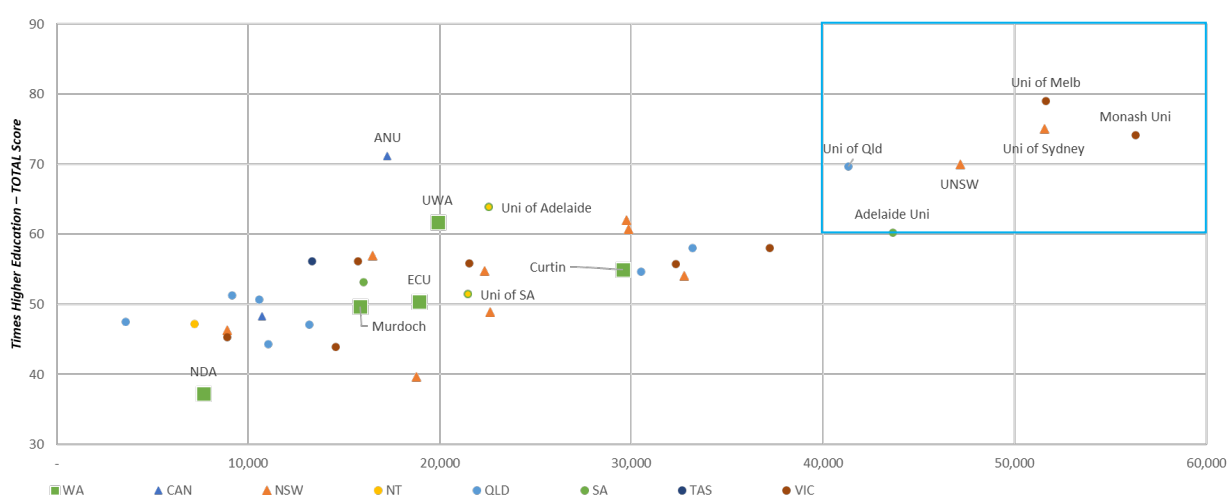
Without structural reform by way of a merger, WA public universities will necessarily continue to compete with each other for domestic and international students, with little incentive to focus on an allocation of resources that maximises the benefit to WA.

The benefits to be gained from moving away from a competitive environment towards a more unified approach among WA's public universities should be considered alongside the potential impacts and opportunities that an increase in scale and size may have on students, teaching, research and rankings.

The Rapid CBA identifies a potential positive reinforcement loop between the scale of a university, its ability to gain recognition (i.e. rankings) and its ability to attract students, academics and researchers – in turn, supporting more recognition. Although this relationship was not identified in global data, when focusing on the Australian context, a strong relationship was identified between the student load and the top-performing Australian universities in overall, teaching and research scores.

Increased scale was correlated with increased performance, with a correlation between 0.7 and 0.8 spanning across the previous 6 years of THE data. This evidence supports Insight 10 of the Rapid CBA, which identifies that THE scores for Australian universities demonstrate a clear relationship between size and ranking, teaching and research scores (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Extract from Rapid CBA Chart vii – 2026 THE scores versus reported EFTSL (Australian universities)

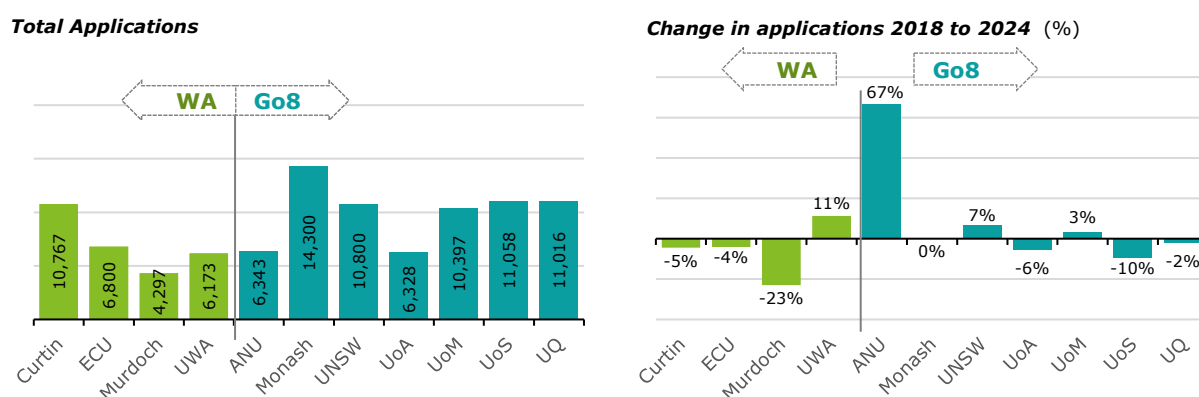


While noting the limitations of rankings data as a measure of university performance, Insight 9 in the Rapid CBA identifies that 'the global environment for international students has become more competitive – attracting target cohorts is becoming more challenging, with evidence showing higher ranking universities do better'. WA public universities, on average, report lower

overseas income per student compared with the remaining Go8 universities (Deloitte, 2025, p. xiii). Moreover, the increasingly competitive global environment for international students highlights a concern that WA public universities, in their current form, will decline further in their rankings, making them less competitive and attractive to students – particularly at the international level.

Changes in public university domestic applications also provide an insight into the choices that potential domestic students are making. Since 2018, UWA has experienced an 11% increase, while other WA public universities have experienced declines, with Murdoch recording the largest decrease at 23% (Figure 4). While the Go8 universities' performance was mixed, with a 67% increase in ANU applications and 10% decrease in University of Sydney applications, the comparison signals that fewer domestic students are choosing to attend WA's public universities. Analysis of performance trends in section 2.3 provides further evidence of this trend, which identified that total domestic student load at WA's 4 public universities had further declined from 66,357 in 2021 to 62,214 in 2024, now representing 8.8% of the Australian total (a decrease of 0.1% since 2021).

Figure 4: Rapid CBA Chart ix: Domestic Applications (2024) and change in applications from 2018 to 2024



WA's public universities are largely generalists, offering similar courses, governed by the same compliance requirements, and requiring broadly similar entry Australian Tertiary Admission Ranks (ATARs). The Rapid CBA identifies that a merger of institutions provides the opportunity to refine curriculum for equivalent courses and that there is potential to make more strategic and targeted investments in course offerings. By adopting specialised foci and leveraging the strongest academic expertise and teaching methodologies from across the institutions, the university has greater potential to deliver higher-quality education that strengthens its competitive position both domestically and internationally.

As the Rapid CBA identifies, maintaining the status quo is not without risk, with recent trends and comparisons to other Australian universities showing that the WA public higher education sector is struggling and operating at scales and performing at levels far below what the public's aspirations for its public institutions is, or should be. In this context, a merger provides the opportunity for a transformational change with the potential for transformational returns which can better serve the economic, social, cultural and regional needs of the State.

Finding 5

Equity demands that all WA students have access to excellence in education: the pursuit of supplementary funding should not undermine the quality of education available to disadvantaged cohorts.

Finding 6

Without structural reform by way of a merger, WA public universities will continue to be challenged in their ability to offer excellence in teaching and research, to attract a fair share of national research funding and to attract high-value, high-performing international students and staff.

The presence of the new Adelaide University poses increased interstate competition for WA's public universities. Upon opening in 2026, the university is projected to enrol the largest domestic student cohort of any Australian university, with the Government of South Australia projecting significant economic and social benefits. By 2034, the university is forecast to deliver approximately \$500 million in additional annual economic activity for South Australia and is expected to educate more than 70,000 students and support the creation of about 1,200 new jobs across the state. While the newly merged university in South Australia could potentially challenge WA's position further, it also serves as evidence of the potential for higher education mergers in Australia to provide transformational benefits to a state or territory.

Finding 7

The creation of a new, large, merged university in South Australia will challenge WA's position even further.

3.3 Rapid CBA merger scenarios

The 2023 Report found that 'any merger proposal must include both The University of Western Australia and Murdoch University', with analysis showing that Murdoch did not have the scale or scope to compete with a merged institution. Any amalgamation that did not involve Murdoch would put the long-term viability of that university at significant risk. Similarly, given its scale and research ambitions, leaving UWA out of any merger arrangement would put it at risk, leaving the State with the smallest state-based Go8 university and without the scale and capacity to compete against a larger, merged institution. The Rapid CBA reinforces the 2023 Report's findings, noting that a merger with a higher performing university offers greater scope for growth, as lessons learned and best practices can be transferred across the merged institution. Across the outcomes assessed in this report, UWA generally performs at a higher level, followed by Curtin and then Murdoch, requiring its inclusion in any potential merger scenario.

All 3 merger case scenarios modelled in the Rapid CBA delivered positive net benefits outcomes (Deloitte, 2025, p. 78). The benefits for a merger identified gains in educational outcomes with higher completion rates, research expenditure and international student tuition fees. Further analysis demonstrated the positive impact greater scale could have on collaboration and improved research performance. Economic and regional economic benefits could also be realised, alongside operational efficiency gains achieved through cost savings from shared services and streamlined governance. However, there are considerations that are specific to each scenario, which are outlined and discussed in the options below.

Finding 8

The Rapid CBA shows that all 3 merger options studied show a positive economic benefit for the State.

Option 1 – UWA, Murdoch and Curtin

In the scenario where UWA, Murdoch and Curtin merged to form a single university, the Rapid CBA noted the potential for strong uplift in rankings, research and international student attraction, attracting world-class staff and creating a globally competitive WA public institution. Based on the Rapid CBA modelling, estimated net benefits were detailed to be between \$2.248 billion and \$7.582 billion over a 20-year period. Estimated costs were \$522 million (NPV), with a BCR of between 5.3 to 15.5.

This option is the most transformative with the highest potential benefits.

This option also presents the highest complexity and execution risk, however. Given the complexity involved, the Rapid CBA assumed a 2-stage process whereby Murdoch and UWA are merged, then a more transformational integration occurs to incorporate Curtin.

While complex, it is worth noting that a university of this size is not without precedent and from a city of similar scale. The University of Toronto is currently one of the largest and most prestigious universities in Canada, known for its academic excellence, diverse student body and research output, and is consistently ranked among the top 30 universities in the world. It has 3 campuses with a total enrolment of 102,431 students as of the Fall 2024–25 academic year. This figure includes 69,976 students at the St. George campus, 17,281 at the Mississauga campus, and 15,174 at the Scarborough campus (University of Toronto, 2025). It employs more than 20,000 faculty and staff, contributing to its diverse academic environment and research activities.

In this context, it is worth considering that for Australia only WA universities will be based in the rapidly growing Indian Ocean Rim. A strong university in WA would position the State well to develop the opportunity for growth from this region.

This merger option is more ambitious and carries transformational gains for the State, but also has increased risks, costs and implementation challenges. This is a model worth pursuing – WA has been bold in the past, and if the Government did this, it could build a university that would be nationally and internationally competitive and provide the workforce and skills for the future.

Finding 9

The greatest benefit results from a merger of Curtin, UWA and Murdoch, as this would create a university of a scale that could profoundly rebalance WA's capability and funding and act as a major counterweight to the disadvantage arising from the State's relative isolation and small population.

Option 2 – UWA and Murdoch

A UWA and Murdoch merger centres on building on complementary strengths by combining UWA's Go8 university status with Murdoch's inclusive, teaching-led approach. Stronger research and teaching benefits are realised, especially as fragmented course offerings are consolidated and strategically aligned, consistent with Government and State priorities.

This option is a more traditional merger with lower complexity compared with other options. It is less challenging than Option 1 in terms of governance and integration, with potential benefits to be gained through improved domestic student completions and a more modest uplift in research income. Based on the Rapid CBA modelling, estimated net benefits were \$1.555 billion to \$4.533 billion, with estimated costs \$175 million (NPV). The BCR was between 9.9 to 27 across scenarios.

As with all mergers, there would be considerable cultural alignment challenges. However, these would not be markedly different to those experienced in the recent South Australia universities merger. Critical to the success of this integration was the decision of the constituent universities to work collaboratively to achieve the merger.

While the resulting scale of this merger would result in an institution still considerably smaller than the most successful eastern states universities, it would be roughly equivalent in student numbers to the new Adelaide University.

With adequate Government support, a merger of UWA and Murdoch could provide the opportunity to address Murdoch's quality issues in terms of low completion rates and rankings. This option is less complex and could be more quickly implemented to deliver significant benefits overall.

Finding 10

A UWA and Murdoch merger would be less complex while still delivering considerable benefits of scale and enhancement of complementary capabilities. It would be worthwhile in itself or as a first step in a larger reform.

Option 3 – UWA and Curtin

This option builds on UWA's research strength with Curtin's industry-integrated model. This is larger in scale to a merger of UWA and Murdoch and, because of Curtin's operational scale, introduces governance and integration challenges.

Based on the Rapid CBA modelling, estimated net benefits were \$1.515 billion to \$5.074 billion, with estimated costs \$450 million (NPV). The BCR is between 4.4 and 12.3.

However, the 2023 Review found any merger must include Murdoch, as leaving it unmerged would increase its vulnerability. Although Murdoch's immediate financial position has improved, the underlying concern of the 2023 Review remains.

While there is a case for this merger, the Committee did not support this option given its relatively modest BCR and the impact on Murdoch. This option does not address Murdoch's quality issues (low completions, rankings, research income), leaving Murdoch vulnerable and reducing overall sector competitiveness.

Finding 11

Notwithstanding Murdoch's improved financial performance, the case made in the 2023 Review that any merger must involve Murdoch still stands: noting an ongoing marked reduction in attraction rates for new domestic applications, poor completion rates and a reliance on high volumes of low-paying international students.

Consequently, a Curtin and UWA merger would not be a preferred option, as it offers the lowest benefit-cost-ratio while leaving the challenge of Murdoch unaddressed.

3.4 Summary

The position of each of the merger options is compared with the Go8 universities for total revenue and total student load in Figure 5.

The 3-way merger of UWA, Murdoch and Curtin creates scale to compete nationally and globally. It provides the largest potential economic benefits and the strongest potential for

rankings uplift. It consolidates research and teaching experience and, if harnessed through State engagement, could support WA’s strategic objectives and Diversify WA priorities. It will be a complex integration and there could be financial exposure if costs escalate.

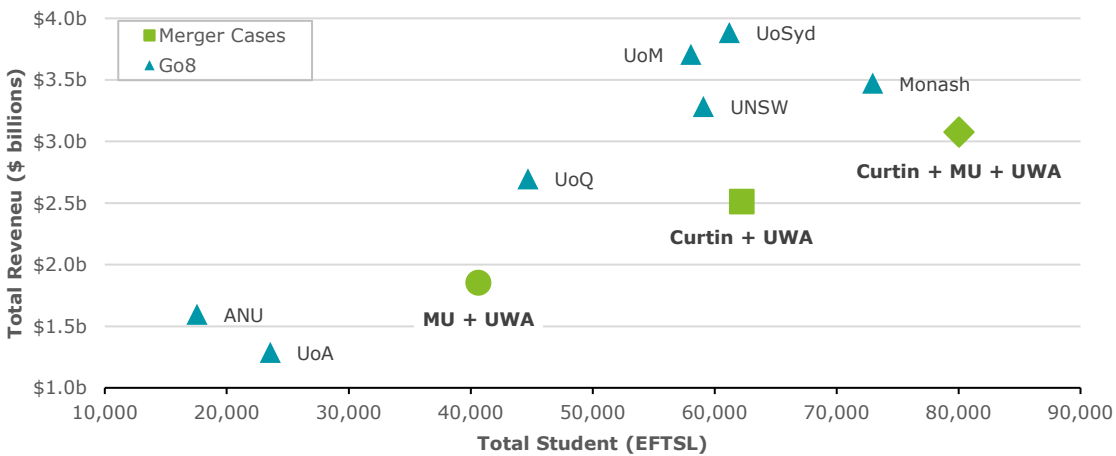
The option of a merger between UWA and Murdoch would be less complex and less costly, but there would be fewer gains. This merger would provide a university of sufficient scale to compete reasonably at a national level. It could also provide a foundation for further structural reform. However, it would not fully galvanise or optimise the talent and capability across WA’s university sector that would be necessary to deliver a nationally and globally significant university.

A merger of UWA and Curtin would leave WA with a fragmented public university sector with ongoing challenges and is not recommended.

Should the WA Government decide to proceed with a merger, a business case and change management planning will be required.

The Committee noted that the Kent-Greenwich model (referring to the merger of Kent and Greenwich universities in the UK) may be useful to consider as a rapid pathway to full integration. The Kent-Greenwich model creates a single leadership governing body and back-office administration while initially retaining separate brands. In the WA situation, this would be an interim step to deliver clear alignment and collaboration as early as possible prior to full transformative changes being made.

Figure 5: Rapid CBA Chart xiii: 2024 merger cases equivalent full-time student load (EFTSL) to total revenue under the scenarios (\$ billions)



4. Considerations for success

This section outlines the work that would need to be undertaken to action the Feasibility Study findings. It seeks to maximise the benefits and address the risks identified in the Rapid CBA.

The 2023 Report identified the following conditions required to increase the likelihood of a successful university merger, based on international literature on the topic:

- the facts behind the case for a merger must be authoritative, clear and compelling
- the extent to which institutions are compatible is understood to be an important variable
- a clear understanding of the financial position of participating institutions
- a strong and experienced leadership team (Harding et al, 2023a, pp. 47-49).

Additional considerations included clear communication (with public university and other stakeholders). The 2023 Report refers to a study by Harman and Harman (2003, pp. 48-49) identifying 6 factors:

- appreciation of cultural differences between merging parties
- achieving compromises and 'wins' for all parties
- transparency in information and process
- ensuring broadly based staff, student and community support across all parties
- moving quickly and to agreed time scales
- funding and incentivising the change.

These considerations are addressed below in relation to the WA Government's involvement in a merger.

4.1 WA Government leadership

Strategic vision

The articulation of a clear strategic vision, one that is compelling to stakeholders, is key to a successful merger. The Rapid CBA demonstrates clearly that an opportunity exists to make a transformative change to the public higher education sector in WA, aligning with the broader objectives of the State.

The WA Government's vision for WA is to remain the strongest economy in the nation, diversify our economy for the future, become a renewable energy powerhouse and ensure that, no matter where we live, all Western Australians have access to the infrastructure and services we need. Achieving this vision will require our public universities to be at the forefront of developing new ideas for the future while supporting a skilled and productive workforce for the State. This will require a clear and well-articulated 'Team WA' approach. As was witnessed in South Australia, clear direction by the State Government will bring universities to the negotiating table and drive structural reform.

An important element of this strategic vision is acknowledging the needs of regional and remote WA. In line with stakeholder feedback, the Rapid CBA's case study of the University of Manchester (Deloitte, 2025, p. 26) cited research claiming the merging of overlapping disciplines allowed resources to be channelled into excellence rather than duplication, shifting competition from local to global (Davis, 2021). The case study highlighted similar motivations for the University of Manchester merger to those in WA, noting the explicit goal of addressing regional challenges and contributing to regional economic renewal through a deliberate transformation of the previous entities, i.e. Victoria University of Manchester and the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology.

Rather than having separate institutions independently managing regional campuses, the Rapid CBA identifies that a unified approach could enable effective strategic planning and resource sharing across regions, addressing the historic under-service of these areas in higher education. This goal should be clearly articulated and communicated to stakeholders.

In addition, the introduction of the Australian Government's Needs-based Funding system, and its emphasis on growth through equity, will advantage universities with an equity focus. A large-scale university focused on regional delivery could work to achieve this vision, noting that ECU should play a role in regional delivery and tertiary harmonisation.

Finding 12

Regional communities could be better served by WA universities. These universities could improve their participation in WA's Regional University Study Hubs and strengthen their modest and piecemeal regional campus offerings. The creation of a large-scale university with a clear mandate and direction for regional delivery could transform the reach of tertiary education into the regions. As a leader in dual-sector offerings, ECU should be included in any plan to better deliver to the regions.

As the case studies considered in the Rapid CBA demonstrate, how resource sharing and infrastructure integration is managed would significantly impact the maximising of benefits and the mitigating of risks in a merger. A detailed business case, change management and financial integration plan is outside the scope of the Feasibility Study. Nevertheless, the Rapid CBA illustrates how operational cohesion could be achieved through the integration of systems, processes and workforce. This integration has the potential to streamline study, research and teaching, and improve operations that support academic functions, including capability uplift and improvements to the student experience. These benefits could assist and better facilitate more transformative improvements, such as the enhancement of our public universities' reach and offerings to regional and remote WA, and opportunities for academic transformation, including teaching and research continuity, attraction of student and staff talent and greater reputation and brand recognition.

Almost all Committee consultations with stakeholders stressed the potential for improved university performance that would result from deeper collaboration. The merging of universities would provide the strongest pathway to this deep collaboration.

With a focus on serving the needs of all Western Australians, there is the opportunity for a new merged university to develop a culture that harnesses the collective support behind 'Team WA' and delivers a wide range of options for students with diverse capabilities and on different developmental pathways.

Finally, the issue of providing opportunities for disadvantaged cohorts is prominent in the principles of the Accord. Needs-based Funding will be available for First Nations students, students from regional and remote and low SES areas, and students with disability. However, the Committee was concerned that the approach of developing a business model heavily focused on leveraging the supplementary payments risked potentially concentrating students of disadvantaged backgrounds into relatively low-performance environments, thereby amplifying disadvantage.

The Committee noted that a merged entity such as the Kent-Greenwich model, which brings together 2 institutions with divergent entry standards, aims to develop a culture where support is given to provide an uplift for those who need more assistance to thrive rather than lowering standards. Similarly, the new Adelaide University has developed mechanisms to address the need to cater for a diversity of students.

Finding 13

A great multi-campus university could develop a culture that provides a wide range of options for students with diverse capabilities and on different developmental pathways.

Merger scenarios and ECU

The decision to exclude ECU from the merger scenarios is based on the findings and recommendations contained in the 2023 Report, which notes the differentiation of ECU. As the university continues to be a leader in dual-sector offerings and engagement with the VET sector, and has a newly established city campus, the Committee holds the position put forward in the 2023 Report that ECU could further consolidate and maintain its position in the event of a merger of 2 or more other universities.

The Committee nevertheless agrees that any merger scenario should be designed such that other universities may join at a later stage. This is with the understanding that the higher education environment, and the role of the sector, will continue to evolve over time. Allowing other universities to join the new university at a later stage will ensure a greater degree of flexibility in accommodating the evolving needs of the higher education sector.

Finding 14

Any merger should be structured in such a way that readily allows other universities to join the new university at a later stage.

Funding and support

The WA Government has involvement in funding universities and supporting students, including:

- financial support for students studying in fields where there are workforce shortages, such as teaching and health
- selected funding of R and D in areas identified as State strategic priorities, or through WA-funded research bodies
- a significant financial contribution to the new ECU inner-city campus.

As outlined in section 2, this Feasibility Study has been undertaken concurrently with SERD and Diversify WA, both of which have implications for research and research funding.

The 2023 Report also presents recommendations and findings regarding research strategy, which identify the need for additional focused WA Government leadership and engagement to deliver a more strategic approach to WA's public universities and recommend the establishment of the Western Australian State Research, Innovation and Commercialisation Program, overseen by the Minister responsible for higher education and managed by a newly established Office of Higher Education (Recommendation 11).

As the Rapid CBA identifies, a transformative merger would require financial investment and buy-in from stakeholders (Deloitte, 2025, p. 72).

Stakeholder engagement and support

In creating a shared vision and purpose for a new merged public university, it will be crucial for the WA Government to gain and retain support from stakeholders, including alumni, students, staff, communities, industry, government and university management.

The 2023 Report Recommendation 4 suggested that 'The Minister responsible and the Vice-Chancellors of each participating university form a Strategic Working Group to oversee the

proposed work on key planning and operational considerations and address problems as they arise' (Harding et al., 2023a, p. 34).

Stakeholder engagement by the Committee for this Feasibility Study has highlighted that support from public university Vice-Chancellors is preferred to facilitate the transition to a merged university. However, if a merged public university is created, a new Vice-Chancellor would need to be appointed to oversee the merger process. In addition, this engagement, combined with national developments in university governance since 2023, including discussions around Vice-Chancellor remuneration and good governance, has highlighted the role of other stakeholder groups within universities – alumni, students, and staff – in the process of sectoral reform.

The success of a merger will also depend on ongoing liaison with the Australian Government regarding national reforms and their potential impacts, including around the implementation of Mission-based Compacts and how they will address State priorities. The Committee notes the strong Australian Government support for the South Australian merger.

Legislation

A merger of public universities would require legislation to create the new body and the amending and/or repealing of legislation forming each of the existing universities. There would be consequential amendments to other legislation.

The merger of the University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia to establish Adelaide University was legislated through the *Adelaide University Act 2023*, which also repealed the *University of Adelaide Act 1971* and the *University of South Australia Act 1990*, and made amendments to other related Acts (*Adelaide University Act 2023 (SA)*).

Lessons from the South Australian university merger may provide guidance and insight should similar structural reforms be undertaken in WA. To ensure the successful integration of merged public universities, legislation may mandate the appointment of a new leadership structure at the earliest stage. This new leadership would be dedicated to providing a unified vision and governance framework.

Any new university would require registration on TEQSA's national register of higher education providers, as was the case with Adelaide University.

The Australian Government is initiating national reforms to university governing bodies, which are anticipated to occur through changes to the TEQSA Act and the legislative instruments made under it (Appendix C). The composition and functions of universities' governing bodies are legislated under their universities' establishing Acts, and the WA Government may wish to implement any merger and governance-related legislative reforms concurrently.

In drafting or repealing legislation, the following will need to be addressed:

- the transfer of staff, students, land and assets to the new institution, and any issues or legal considerations likely to arise
- the timeframe of legislation
- any simultaneous changes to the university Acts required.

5. Conclusion

The Committee has found the case for structural reform of WA's public university sector is compelling. In its view there have been no material changes in circumstances or policy settings to challenge the 2023 Report findings that WA's public university sector is underperforming compared with other states and territories, and that structural reform is necessary to turn that around.

This Committee has found that reform is needed to create an environment where WA public universities can successfully compete with interstate and international universities rather than each other.

The Committee has built on the work of the 2023 Review with the Rapid CBA to establish that there is a sound economic case to proceed with a merger, notwithstanding the risks and dislocations that reshaping 2 or 3 universities into one will inevitably bring. Clearly there will be costs associated with a merger, but the Rapid CBA establishes that very clear benefits justify this expenditure.

In the long term the greater risk to WA is likely to come from persisting with the status quo. The gradual decline in standing and quality of WA's public universities will undermine opportunities for many decades. The passion witnessed from staff and students in support of their universities is a testament to the value they place on higher education and their respective institutions.

However, WA must have a clear-eyed view of the trajectory of business as usual and be prepared to support a model that gives the WA community the best chance of competing nationally and internationally and maximising the strength of our culture and economy.

While resistance to change will be fierce, clarity of decision-making and moving briskly to establish new accountability structures will be necessary for success. Western Australia has established a strong cohesive community by working together to create structures suited to the unique needs and opportunities of our State: a 'Team WA' approach.

A larger, better resourced WA public university with a clear mandate and direction for servicing all of the State will also be critical to improving the offerings available to regional and remote residents and building a stronger regional presence.

A larger, better resourced WA public university could also provide more support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds while at the same time provide them an opportunity to aspire to high achievement.

The Committee has found that any new public university that is established to give effect to a merger should allow for other universities to join at a later stage. This would allow more flexibility to restructure readily as circumstances and needs of the community change.

WA universities can drive impactful research outcomes for the State, for Australia and globally. Research bids can be high-quality and internationally collaborative. Universities can deliver the workforce WA needs, and staff and students – including those from regional and remote areas – can be engaged and connected. Universities can be efficient and financially sustainable institutions, with surplus for reinvestment, embracing technology and innovation.

WA has forged a positive and prosperous community despite the State's relatively small population and isolation. As Western Australians, we have historically come together to act for our shared good. This revisioning of our public universities for the 21st century provides a great opportunity to show we can do this once more.

Appendices

Appendix A – Accord reforms: Connection to the 2023 Report findings

The Australian Tertiary Education Commission

On 1 July 2025, the interim Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) was established, headed by 3 interim Commissioners. The ATEC is an independent steward for the tertiary education system and aims to deliver on national economic and social objectives. The establishment of the ATEC was a key recommendation of the Accord Report, and it is intended to be fully operational by 2026, subject to the passage of legislation. At the time of writing, the interim ATEC is focused on:

- driving a joined-up tertiary system (with an initial emphasis on higher education)
- determining allocations for the new Managed Growth Funding system
- implementing Needs-based Funding as part of the core funding model
- negotiating Mission-based Compacts to support a diverse, responsive and high-performing sector.

The ATEC is not a regulator; instead, it will function to monitor the sector, including by collecting and reporting on national higher education data, which states and territories currently have minimal access to. It is anticipated that state and territory governments will play an ongoing role in the ATEC and its priorities. The ATEC's focus on achieving national objectives via the higher education system will be reflected in how it negotiates with universities.

On 27 November 2025, the Australian Government's Senate referred the following bills for inquiry and report:

- *Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Bill 2025*
- *Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2025.*

Changes to funding models for Australian universities

In mid-2024, the Australian Government released consultation papers relating to funding reforms designed to expand tertiary student enrolments: the Managed Growth Funding System Implementation Consultation Paper (Australian Government Department of Education, 2024, June) and the Needs-based Funding Implementation Consultation Paper (Australian Government Department of Education, 2024, July). These papers largely mirror recommendations of the Accord's Final Report, and work is underway to implement these models from 2026, with universities negotiating allocations of domestic and international students directly with the ATEC, via their Mission-based Compacts.

The Managed Growth Funding system is a new funding model for CSPs of domestic students, which will commence from 2027, with a transition year in 2026. In the current system, annual growth in CGS funding, which finances CSPs, is based on fixed growth rates depending on the location of university campuses. In the Managed Growth Funding system, growth targets will be partly based on 'student demand', as well as on 'national objectives' to be set by the Australian Government. The current funding system allocates each provider a dollar amount that they can divide up between any number of EFTSL, rather than allocating a set number of EFTSL. The new system will allocate each provider a set number of EFTSL, within a certain range, with likely limits on the number of places for domestic student EFTSL.

The Needs-based Funding system seeks to ensure more students from under-represented backgrounds are supported to participate and succeed in higher education. The Accord Report recommended ambitious targets for increasing tertiary participation among historically under-represented groups (Recommendation 10), focusing on setting targets for 4 equity cohorts: First Nations students; low SES students; regional, rural, and remote students; and students with

disability. Different states and territories have different proportions of equity student groups. For example, WA has a relatively high proportion of remote students relative to regional students.

Recommendation 13 of the Accord Final Report proposed a new funding model that included:

- a per-student funding amount for under-represented students that recognises the cost of the additional support they need to succeed, specifically First Nations students, students from lower quartile SES backgrounds and students with disability
- a specific element based on the location of delivery in regional and remote Australia, recognising the important equity issues involved in delivering courses to students in regional Australia and the additional costs of that delivery
- a completion bonus for higher education providers who meet agreed completion targets negotiated through their Mission-based Compacts, with a focus on students who face the largest barriers to success.

WA has high levels of remote students, yet under the new system, individual students from regional and remote areas will only have Needs-based Funding associated with them if they are from 1 or more of the other equity cohorts identified. Rather, students would only have funding associated with them if they were enrolled at regional campuses. WA has no regional universities and few regional campuses. Many regional and remote students study on metropolitan campuses, where there are a greater number of degree offerings. The system will not fund these students if they were to study in metropolitan areas. This is potentially problematic for WA and, relatedly, it is unclear how this system will interact with the Regional Hubs. Given that Regional Hubs are not associated with individual higher education providers, states and territories that rely more on Regional Hubs, rather than on regional campuses or universities, would potentially be disadvantaged, if these students are enrolled as 'online' or 'external' students at other states and territories' universities.

Strategic Examination of Research and Development (SERD)

The Australian Government is undertaking a strategic examination of the nation's R and D system, as part of its Future Made in Australia package. Its terms of reference are:

- maximise the value of existing investment in R and D
- strengthen linkages between research and industry
- support the achievement of national priorities
- drive greater R and D investment by industry and boost innovation
- uplift Australia's overall R and D intensity.

In February 2025, the SERD Expert Panel released its Discussion Paper (Department of Industry, Science and Resources, 2025, July). This examines R and D in government, higher education, and industry, highlighting that universities are at the core of Australia's research effort. It showed that:

- Australian investment in R and D declined since 2009 from 2.24% to 1.66% of GDP
- the main driver of this is falling business and Government R and D expenditure
- there is little investment in basic research and experimental development
- key issues in universities include financial pressures on institutions and a lack of career opportunities for researchers.

In December 2025, the SERD Expert Panel delivered a report with its recommendations to the Australian Government.

Restrictions on international student numbers

Following a series of highly effective incentives for increasing international student enrolments after the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Government introduced measures to shift international student enrolments across the country, including:

- initially, in response to declining international student numbers emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic and skills shortages, extending post-study work rights by 2 years for international students in areas of verified skill shortages (mid-2023 to mid-2024)
- in response to post-pandemic increases in international student enrolments in VET and higher education, and ongoing concerns regarding integrity and quality in the international education sector, introducing Ministerial Direction 107, prioritising providers with low rates of visa rejections for Student Guardian visa and offshore Subclass 500 (Student) visa applications (2023)
- replacing Ministerial Direction 107 with Ministerial Direction 111, which prioritised student visas for each provider until they reached 80% allocations and, after an institution reaches this point it is placed at the end of the queue, giving priority to universities that have not yet reached 80% of their allocations (2024)
- increase to WA New Overseas Student Commencements allocations (2025).

Reforms to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Act 2011

In September 2025, the Australian Government released a consultation paper to invite views on potential amendments to the TEQSA Act to modernise and strengthen TEQSA's powers, and on the future regulation of Australian higher education and potential changes to the TEQSA Act to align with Government and community expectations.

This legislation is expected to be a major mechanism for the Australian Government to implement Accord reforms (as well as through the introduction of new legislation).

Senate Inquiry into Quality of Governance in Australian Higher Education Providers and related governance reforms

The Australian Government is also undertaking a series of reforms relating to universities' governance. This includes the work of the Expert Council on University Governance, which handed down its final report in October 2025 (Australian Government Department of Education, 2025, October), and the ongoing Australian Government Senate Inquiry into the Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers, which handed down its findings in December 2025 (Education and Employment Legislation Committee, 2025). Stakeholder engagement with the Committee highlighted similar issues to those explored by the Expert Council and the Inquiry.

The Australian Government will commence embedding the Expert Council's Principles into the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021, which sits under the TEQSA Act 2011 (Australian Government Department of Education, 2025). The Australian Government, with the Commonwealth Remuneration Tribunal, will establish a framework of remuneration classification ranges for Vice-Chancellor remuneration.

Progress of Accord Report recommendations

Below are the full recommendations of the Accord Report, and their current progress as of 19 December 2025.

Table 6: Progress status of Accord Report recommendations

	Accord recommendation	Progress	Related to 2023 Report
1	To set a clear vision for the tertiary education system – both higher education and vocational education and training – the Australian Government should specify the	National Tertiary Education Objective included in the ATEC bills introduced in November 2025	No

	objective of the national tertiary education system		
2	To meet Australia's future skills needs and drive improvements to national workforce participation and productivity, the Australian Government adopts attainment targets to set the ambition for the tertiary education system to deliver	Committed to but no further work completed in adopting attainment targets	Yes
3	Accelerate the supply of medical graduates in communities experiencing medical practitioner shortages and increase the number of medical graduates from under-represented backgrounds	Committed to; and funded in Federal Budget 2024–25	No
4	To help students accelerate the acquisition and recognition of their skills, help graduates track skills, qualifications and experience, and make it simpler for employers to verify job candidate capabilities, the Australian Government should implement a National Skills Passport, along with other core infrastructure needed for an integrated skills system	Consultation occurred in 2024; however, it appears from the Tertiary Harmonisation Roadmap report of February 2025, by Jobs and Skills Australia, that the idea of a National Skills Passport is still under consideration by the Australian Government	No
5	To help Australians quickly get the skills they need to fill jobs that are in shortage, the Australian Government should establish a comprehensive system of modular, stackable and transferable qualifications, including microcredentials, consistent with a reformed Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)	Reform of the AQF remains incomplete; the Tertiary Harmonisation agenda has defined it as a mid-horizon goal that should be led by the ATEC	No
6	To deliver new options for lifelong learning and to encourage higher education participation from new cohorts, the Australian Government should move toward funding a set of microcredentials as a new element in the system of CSPs, initially in areas of employer demand and national priority	Work commenced with the Australian Government's Microcredentials Pilot in Higher Education, running between 2023–24 and 2025–26	No
7	To ensure students develop work relevant skills for employment after their study, the Australian Government should increase opportunities for students to both earn and learn while studying	No announcement	No

8	To improve the speed of and focus on meeting high impact skills needs, the Australian Government should partner with select tertiary education providers, states and territories, industry, business and unions to rapidly provide students with innovative skills	The Australian Government has continued to commit to and fund TAFE Centres of Excellence via the National Skills Agreement	Yes
9	To ensure professional accreditation (including placement requirements) are appropriate for industry and business skill needs, tertiary education providers and the Australian Government, through the Australian Tertiary Education Commission, work with professional accreditation bodies, to agree a code of conduct for these bodies	No announcement	No
10	To ensure that all Australians regardless of background have the opportunity to go to university and no one is left behind, the Australian Government aspire to equal participation at university for under-represented groups, supported by Needs-based funding for universities, more effective learning and teaching, and improved student income support. To achieve this, attainment and participation targets should be set for 2035 and the following years with the aim of reaching equal participation by 2050	Committed to, but states and territories are yet to be consulted about jurisdictional participation targets; the interim ATEC has in its Terms of Reference a priority area of finalising the Needs-based Funding Model; the Australian Government has committed \$350 million in additional CGS funding over 4 years starting January 2025 to fully fund fee-free Uni Ready enabling courses	No
11	To encourage greater aspiration, participation and success in tertiary education among under-represented groups, the Australian Government support effective outreach programs designed to develop familiarity with tertiary education. These outreach programs should be resourced separately from the Review's recommended Needs-based Funding Model	From 1 January 2026, Needs-based Funding will be supported by a reformed Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program, which will focus on outreach and aspiration initiatives	No
12	To help more students who aspire to university qualify for entry, the Australian Government should significantly increase the availability of fee-free places, meeting the need for high-quality preparatory courses	The Australian Government has committed to increasing fee-free places in enabling programs, which was funded in the Federal Budget 2024–25	No

13	To ensure the new focus on increasing the number of higher education students from an under-represented background is matched by a focus on the success of these students, the Australian Government should adopt a Needs-based Funding model	Committed to; Interim ATEC consulting with universities during second half of 2025; roll out expected in 2026 (subject to passing of ATEC bills)	No
14	To reduce the financial hardship and placement poverty caused by mandatory unpaid placements, the Australian Government should work with tertiary education providers, state and territory governments, industry, business and unions to introduce financial support for unpaid work placements	Committed to; funded in Federal Budget 2024–25; available from 1 July 2025	
15	To reduce the cost-of-living pressures on current students and remove the financial barriers to commencing study, the Australian Government should improve access to income support for those who need it most and consider how to ensure the level of support is adequate to meet basic living standards while studying	In the Federal Budgets 2024–25 and 2025–26, the Australian Government opted not to increase the base rates of Youth Allowance or JobSeeker. However, Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) 24 noted the following changes: Changed eligibility of the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP); increased maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA); and from 1 January 2025, Austudy payments for students 25 and over without children, have increased	No
16	To reduce the long-term financial costs of studying for students, the Australian Government make student contributions fairer and better reflective of the lifetime benefits that students will gain from studying, and reduce the burden of Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) loans, by introducing fairer and simpler indexation and repayment arrangements	Committed to; funded; one-off HELP debt reduction was legislated in August 2025	No
17	Improve access to postgraduate coursework studies	No announcement on increasing CSPs for	No

		coursework postgraduate programs	
18	To improve the overall student experience and reflect domestic and international student expectations of their higher education outcomes, the Australian Government should work with national student bodies and the higher education sector	No announcement on national student charter; an NSO was committed to, funded and commenced operations in February 2025	No
19	To ensure the sustainability of student-led organisations, such as associations, unions and guilds, the Australian Government should ensure that a proportion of the Student Services and Amenities Fee received by each higher education provider be directed to these organisations to deliver agreed services and amenities	Committed to and legislated in 2024; note that this had previously been legislated in WA	No
20	To recognise the critical importance of school to higher education pathways, to ensure that students get the most out of their final year of school, and to maintain the integrity of senior secondary certificates, governments (through the Education Ministers Meeting) agree that early at-school offers for 2025 and 2026 should not be issued before September in the relevant year. Relevant stakeholders (including schools, higher education providers and tertiary admission centres) should also develop a national, cross-jurisdictional approach to at-school offers in time for 2027 offers	Committed to	No
21	To improve student learning outcomes and prepare the higher education sector for growth in student numbers (particularly of students from under-represented backgrounds who need additional support) the higher education sector, in partnership with the Australian Government, should improve the quality of learning and teaching	No announcement	No
22	The Australian Government and the Australian Tertiary Education Commission should work together to plan for a strong future for the international education system and	Committed to, with work underway	No

	recognise the contribution international students make to Australia		
23	To address issues with the integrity and quality of teaching and facilities in international tertiary education and ensure that international education providers maintain their social licence to operate	As with Recommendation 22, committed to, with work underway; the <i>Education Legislation Amendment (Integrity and Other Measures) Bill 2025</i> was passed on 28 November 2025	No
24	The Australian Government should commission a formal strategic, cross-portfolio examination of national research funding with a view to increasing Australia's capacity to maximise Australia's R and D competitiveness for economic gain, and environmental, cultural and social good	The SERD Expert Panel delivered its report to the Australian Government in December 2025	Yes
25	Ensure Australia's research capacity and capability has a high impact and is made use of as effectively as possible	SERD may make relevant recommendations	Yes
26	To improve Australia's research quality, the Australian Government should strengthen the fundamentals of the Australian research system	SERD may make relevant recommendations	Yes
27	To advance the Australian Government's focus on the importance of research into First Nations knowledges and the need to make sustained progress on closing the gap in outcomes for First Nations people, the Australian Government should elevate First Nations knowledge, knowledge systems and Closing the Gap through First Nations Leadership to the National Science and Research Priorities, implementing a framework that ensures First Nations-led research, First Nations leadership and capacity building, self-determination, and impactful, transformative outcomes	Committed to; MYEFO 2024 noted that the Australian Government has released the new National Science and Research Priorities which now includes 'Elevating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems' as 1 of the 5 national priorities; in October 2025, IP Australia released its First Nations Strategy 2025-2030, which commits the Australian Government to further empower First Nations people within the IP system	No
28	To develop a pathway to fund the full economic cost of university research:	No announcement	Yes

	universities charge, and governments and industry pay, full market rates for commissioned and contract research and consulting		
29	To demonstrate the quality of and return on investment in Australian university research, the Australian Government should commission the ARC to work with the Australian Tertiary Education Commission, TEQSA and universities to develop a fit for purpose research quality and impact evaluation system through the creation of a National Research Evaluation and Impact Framework that is data driven and uses intelligent technologies	No announcement	Yes
30	To deliver on the National Tertiary Education Objective (Recommendation 1) and establish a public sector steward for the tertiary education system, the Australian Government should establish an Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) as a statutory, national body reporting to the Minister for Education and the Minister for Skills and Training	Interim operations of ATEC commenced on 1 July 2025; legislation introduced in late November 2025	Yes
31	The Australian Government and higher education providers should improve the capability and capacity of the higher education workforce	No announcement	No
32	To build the evidence and expertise base necessary to support the Australian Tertiary Education Commission's core functions, the Australian Government should establish a Centre of Excellence in Higher Education and Research	No announcement	No
33	To contribute to making the tertiary education system as safe as possible for students and staff, the Australian Government conduct a study into the prevalence and impact of racism across the tertiary education system, on campus and online, guided by an expert committee with representation from a wide range of stakeholder groups, with the Australian Tertiary Education Commission tasked with	The Australian Human Rights Commission was instructed to conduct an inquiry into racism at Australian universities; the interim report was released in December 2024; the final report is yet to be released, and will include the results of a nationwide survey on university students and	No

	leading the response and acting on the outcomes	staff about racism on campus.	
34	To deliver on the commitment to self-determination for First Nations people, the Australian Government should commission a First Nations-led review of higher education in consultation with relevant First Nations stakeholder groups	No announcement of a First Nations-led review, though once the ATEC commences formal operations in 2025, its First Nations Commissioner may recommend such a review	No
35	As part of the work on strengthening university governance that resulted from the Interim Report, the Australian Government should examine the representation of First Nations people in university governance and leadership positions and work with state and territory governments and universities to increase the representation of suitably qualified First Nations people	Australian Government indicated in MYEFO at the end of 2024, that it would undertake consultation, but no updates have been released. However, the Interim ATEC has a dedicated First Nations Commissioner	No
36	To improve our understanding of the state of Australia's tertiary education system, and its broad economic, social and environmental importance	Committed to improving data on tertiary education; some funding in Federal Budget 2024–25; that Budget and subsequent MYEFO documents mention funding for initiatives that improve the sector's overall resilience and contribution to national priorities	Yes
37	In its role as the steward, the Australian Tertiary Education Commission address the appropriate diversity of tertiary education providers of varying size, shape, purpose and location to meet national and place-based needs	While the (finalised) ATEC is expected to steward nation-wide structural reform, it is not expected to address this recommendation in its work (as the Interim ATEC) for the latter half of 2025 ATEC bills introduced November 2025	Yes
38	The Australian Government should achieve better alignment between higher education and vocational education and training and to allow TAFEs to be more responsive to student and industry needs	Work on allowing TAFEs to become self-accrediting at certain levels of the AQF is being undertaken via Jobs and Skills Australia's tertiary harmonisation agenda, as well as inter-jurisdictional work on the	Yes

		AQF and the National Admissions Framework	
39	The Australian Government should recognise the benefits of access to tertiary education and the challenges to delivery in regional, rural and remote areas	The Australian Government has committed to opening more Regional and Suburban Study Hubs	Yes
40	To provide a framework for funding higher education that supports achievement of the National Tertiary Education Objective (Recommendation 1), the Australian Government should adopt a new funding model for higher education that is planned and managed by the Australian Tertiary Education Commission through Mission-based Compacts with publicly funded universities	Committed to; powers of ATEC relating to pricing etc., are being developed in consultation during the second half of 2025, and ATEC bills introduced in November 2025	No
41	The Australian Government should ensure the new funding model supports publicly funded universities to deliver quality learning, teaching and scholarship	The Australian Government has committed to and funded fee-free preparatory courses, and free TAFE places	No
42	To support and strengthen universities' capacity to conduct research and research training, the Australian Government should make changes to the university research funding model	SERD may make relevant recommendations. The Policy review of the ARC National Competitive Grants Program is also expected to report by the end of 2025, but has yet to be delivered to Government.	Yes
43	To provide support for the built and digital infrastructure, including student housing, that will be needed to cope with projected future enrolment growth, the Australian Government should establish a Higher Education Future Fund (HEFF) managed by the Future Fund, with co-contributions from public universities and Government with the aim of reaching \$10 billion in assets	Although no official announcement was made, the Australian Government has declined to accept this recommendation to establish a HEFF	No
44	The work to build a stewardship role in the tertiary education sector should begin immediately with the Minister for Education establishing an Implementation Advisory Committee to provide advice to him on the	The Accord Advisory Implementation Committee was established in 2024	No

	implementation of the recommendations from this Review		
45	Implementation and transition planning should include a staged and managed approach to updating legislation that governs the sector	Committed to; latest update was the Education Roadmap released by the Australian Government Minister for Education in July 2025	No
46	During the transition phase to a new funding model, universities will be supported through a 'glidepath' to full policy implementation as they transition from the current funding system based on a fixed dollar amount (i.e. Maximum Basic Grant Amount – MBGA) to the new funding model built on EFTSL, discipline-based and Needs-based Funding	While no explicit commitment has been made, it is expected that the Australian Government, especially via the ATEC, will develop a 'glidepath' in consultation with universities; extra funding in the CGS has been committed over 4 years, starting in 2025	No
47	To provide transparency and predictability for the tertiary education sector in recognition of the Review's ambition for lasting reform, the Australian Government should outline a staged approach to implementation of the Review's recommendations	Committed to	No

University Feasibility Study 2025

Background

The university sector plays an important role in the quest of the Cook Labor Government to diversify the WA economy. It is crucial for the economic, educational, social and cultural future of our State that our university sector is structured in a manner that optimises the performance of our universities across multiple areas.

In 2023, the WA Government commissioned an independent review to consider ongoing challenges in the public university sector and ensure its performance and financial sustainability. The *WA University Sector Review Final Report* (the Report) was delivered to the Minister for Education on 2 October but has not been released publicly. Stakeholders, including the media, continue to inquire about the status of that report.

Recommendations 1–6 of the Report propose further feasibility work to assess potential mergers between the University of Western Australia (UWA) and Murdoch University (MU), or UWA, MU and Curtin University (CU). Recommendation 1 explicitly calls for a detailed analysis of policy design, cost-benefit analysis, business case, change management, and legislative pathways to fully evaluate the merger option. It was recommended that this work be undertaken as quickly as possible.

It needs to be stressed that this feasibility study does not repeat work undertaken in the previous 2023 review. The feasibility study is a cost benefit analysis of possible university mergers in WA (see below).

Purpose

The purpose of the University Feasibility Study (Feasibility Study) is to conduct a Rapid Cost-Benefit Analysis to assess the implications of the following mergers:

- a). UWA, CU, MU.
- b). UWA, MU.
- c). UWA, CU.

It will explore these possible reforms through strategic stakeholder engagement and analytical investigations and provide findings to the Minister for Tertiary and International Education on the risks and benefits of the status quo versus the merger options. It is noted here that Edith Cowan University, as recommended in the Review Report, is not being considered as part of a possible merger.

An external consultant will be engaged to provide data and analysis for the Rapid CBA, considering economic, social, and educational impacts. The Rapid CBA is:

- the Government's preferred method for identifying initiatives that deliver best value for money

- a streamlined way to compare economic, social, and educational impacts over time
- designed to provide timely insights, especially when detailed data is limited
- initiated by confirming objectives and scope, then identifying key costs and benefits
- uses a framework to monetise significant impacts to assess overall value
- applies various modelling methodologies based on available data summarises results using Net Present Value (NPV) and benefit-cost ratio
- focuses on assessing the economic value of potential university mergers in WA's tertiary education sector.

It is important to reiterate that through a Rapid CBA the purpose of this feasibility study is to provide findings and conclusions on the risks and benefits of the status quo versus the merger options in relation to the economic, educational, social and cultural future of our State. The purpose is not to make recommendations but to provide analytical data, findings and conclusions on the risks and benefits of university mergers in WA.

Governance

An Investigation Committee, reporting to the Minister for Tertiary and International Education, and in collaboration with the consultant group, will lead this feasibility study, ensuring:

- **document and data review** – review of institutional strategic plans, financial reports, publicly available university data, academic offerings, governance structures, and relevant policy documents.
- **benchmarking** – comparative analysis of similar university mergers in Australia and internationally.
- **stakeholder consultation** – detailed targeted consultation with internal and external stakeholders, including students, academic staff, industry partners, unions, government and other identified organisations.
- **scenario and risk analysis** – development of scenarios and risk assessments to evaluate the long-term feasibility of the merger and the mitigation of identified risks.

Scope

The scope of the feasibility study extends to examining:

1. Strategic Rationale – the strategic, educational, and economic rationale for a potential merger between the two or more universities, with alignment to the State Government's economic, higher education and regional development goals.
2. Academic and Research Impacts – opportunities for program enhancement, research synergies, and the development of high-quality educational offerings, with assessment of the cost/benefit to students and the West Australian economy.
3. Financial and Operational Viability – the financial implications of a merger, including cost-benefit analysis, long-term sustainability, and transition costs.
4. Stakeholder Impacts – the impacts on students, staff, and stakeholders, including considerations around equity, access, employment, workload, and academic continuity.
5. Legal and Regulatory Review – any legal or regulatory changes that may be required to facilitate a merger, including the review of the university Acts and Universities Legislation Amendment Act 2021 (or relevant legislation).
6. Regional and Community Impacts – the impact on regional communities, campus operations, and access to higher education.

7. Non-merger University Impacts – the impact on Edith Cowan University and the non-merger university under any of the three models being examined.
8. Infrastructure integration – the analysis of physical and digital infrastructure integration, including campus facilities, IT systems, and administrative functions.

Out of scope

The feasibility study will not:

- identify preferred courses, units, departments, or institutions in the event of a merger
- examine future staffing models, including retention or redundancies.

Deliverables

The deliverables for the feasibility study are:

- Draft Feasibility Report – A comprehensive report, including an executive summary, findings, analysis of strategic, financial, academic, and operational implications, stakeholder consultation feedback, and risk analysis.
- Briefing to the Minister – A detailed briefing of the draft report, seeking feedback from the Minister.
- Final Feasibility Report – The final report, incorporating feedback from the Minister and stakeholders, and presenting findings on the risks and benefits of the status quo versus the merger options as it relates to the educational, economic social and cultural future of Western Australia.
- Briefing to the Minister – A detailed briefing to the Minister, summarising key findings and conclusions to provide guidance for potential next steps.

Timeframe and resourcing

The duration of the feasibility study is to be no longer than three months from the commencement of the investigation. Based on current timing, the Minister expects to receive the report by the end of October.

The Investigation Committee will be resourced and supported by the Department of Education and Department of Energy and Economic Diversification (DEED). A budget will be allocated for external consultancy to provide technical expertise for the Rapid CBA, stakeholder engagement, travel, and administrative costs.

The Investigation Committee will consist of a lead and two deputy investigators who will work part-time over the three months. The Committee will comprise:

Hon Alannah MacTiernan (Chair)

The Hon Alannah MacTiernan served in the WA Parliament for 23 years, holding numerous ministerial positions in the Gallop, Carpenter and McGowan Governments. Alannah also spent time in the Australian Parliament where she served as Deputy Chair of the Joint House Select Committee for Northern Australia and the House of Representatives standing committee for Education and Employment. In her Ministerial roles and in her Federal roles, Alannah had extensive engagement with WA universities.

Ms Lisa Rodgers PSM (Deputy)

Lisa Rodgers is a national voice in the Australian education sector. Having joined the Australian Council for Educational Research in 2024 she has held executive positions in various jurisdictions, including the UK, New Zealand and Australia.

As the former Director General of the Department of Education in Western Australia and CEO of the School Curriculum and Standards Authority, she led significant reforms across the sector. Awarded the ACEL Pre-Eminent Educational Leader Award in Western Australia in 2021 and the Australian Council for Education Leaders Fellow in 2023, Lisa's passion and focus on the impacts of education are significant.

Professor Bruce Walker AM (Deputy)

Emeritus Professor Walker has a career that spans 50 years in the areas of health science and chiropractic. He has academic experience at a number of universities, including teaching, lecturing, course coordination, doctoral supervision, and publishing. He has published 114 peer reviewed articles and has been an editor-in-chief of a scientific journal, mostly while at Murdoch University. His service to the academy has been nationally and internationally recognised and the insight he will provide will be invaluable.

Appendix C – Relevant WA and national legislation

Implementing a merger of public universities would necessitate consideration of interactions with, and the impact on, WA and Australian legislation that pertains to higher education, including any reforms legislated under the Accord. If a merger were to proceed, further work on this would be required.

WA legislation

Higher Education Act 2004

The *Higher Education Act 2004* outlines the Minister responsible for higher education's role in establishing a university, recognising overseas universities and regulating higher education courses in non-university institutions. Most of the Minister's powers were transferred to TEQSA when it was established in 2011.

Acts establishing the WA universities

Each of WA's 5 universities is established and governed through Acts:

- *Curtin University Act 1966*
- *Edith Cowan University Act 1984*
- *Murdoch University Act 1973*
- *University of Notre Dame Act 1989*
- *University of Western Australia Act 1911.*

The legislation establishing the 4 public universities also provides for the following:

- establishment and operation of the university's governing body
- procedures for creating or amending by-laws, statutes and regulations
- dealings in university land
- operations of student guilds
- power to grant degrees
- financial provisions.

University Colleges Act 1926

This long-standing legislation pertains to UWA and predates the establishment of the 4 other WA universities. It allows for residential colleges (for university students) to be established and endowed at UWA. The Colleges Act stipulates that approval of the UWA Senate, with consent of the WA State Governor, must be obtained before UWA land can be set aside as a site for a residential college. This land will be held by Trustees, and a Council must govern the residential college.

Australian legislation

Higher Education Support Act 2003

The HESA is the main piece of legislation that regulates and ensures the quality of higher education in Australia. The Act primarily provides for the Commonwealth to give financial support for higher education and certain VET providers through:

- grants and other payments made largely to a higher education provider
- financial assistance to students (usually in the form of loans).

The HESA describes a higher education provider and sets out requirements for the operations of those providers. These requirements cover the extensive areas of financial viability, quality, fairness, compliance, fees and contributions, academic freedom, and Mission-based Compacts.

Mission-based Compacts are agreements between the Commonwealth and higher education providers and are a compulsory condition of them receiving grants under the Act.

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Act 2011

The TEQSA Act establishes TEQSA as an agency (Australian Government, 2011). The objects of the TEQSA Act are to:

- provide for national consistency in the regulation of higher education
- regulate higher education using a standards-based quality framework and principles relating to regulatory necessity, risk, and proportionality
- protect and enhance Australia's reputation for – and international competitiveness in – higher education, as well as excellence, diversity, and innovation in Australian higher education
- protect and enhance academic integrity by prohibiting academic cheating services
- encourage and promote a higher education system that is appropriate to meet Australia's social and economic needs for a highly educated and skilled population
- protect students undertaking or proposing to undertake higher education, by requiring the provision of quality higher education
- ensure that students have access to information relating to higher education in Australia.

The WA Government does not play a direct role in relation to this legislation. It can become especially interested in the application of these laws, however, when TEQSA makes a compliance assessment of an education provider in WA that recommends imposing conditions on the provider's re-registration with the national regulator, or where a provider is undergoing assessment, registration, having their registration rejected/cancelled, or recategorisation as a university and it is required under section 39 of the Act that state and territory ministers responsible for higher education are notified/consulted and have an opportunity to make representations.

Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021

The Threshold Standards set out the requirements for provider entry to, and continued operations within, Australia's higher education sector (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2021). Threshold Standards cover 7 domains, which represent the minimum acceptable requirements for the provision of higher education in or from Australia by higher education providers registered under the TEQSA Act. These domains are:

- student participation and attainment
- learning environment
- teaching
- research and research training
- institutional quality reassurance
- governance and accountability
- representation, information and information management.

In 2021, the Framework was revised to update the definitions of different categories of higher education institutions. These are as follows:

- Australian universities: set up under their own legislation, accredit their own courses and degrees, and do teaching and research in a range of fields
- Australian university of specialisation: self-accrediting universities that do teaching and research in a particular field
- overseas universities: universities set up in a foreign jurisdiction that operate a branch in Australia
- other higher education providers: includes those that are not in any of the above categories – a small number accredit their own courses and awards but most are subject to course accreditation by TEQSA.

Appendix D1 – List of stakeholders engaged by Committee

Consultation by Committee
Australian Government Department of Education representatives
Australian Universities Accord Panel Chair / Interim Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) Chief Commissioner
Business and industry representatives: • CEO, Chamber of Minerals and Energy WA • Chairperson, Wesfarmers
Chairs of past WA higher education reviews: • 2013 and 2014 • 2023
Chief Scientist of Western Australia – current and former
Directors General, departments of: • Education • Energy and Economic Diversification
Minister for: • Education; Early Childhood; Preventative Health; Wheatbelt • Regional Development; Ports; Science and Innovation; Medical Research; Kimberley • Energy and Decarbonisation; Manufacturing; Skills and TAFE; Pilbara
National Tertiary Education Union WA Division representative
Research Institute representatives: • Forrest Research Foundation • The Kids Research Institute
South Australian Integration Management Office representatives: • Co Vice-Chancellors, Adelaide University • Deputy Vice-Chancellor – Academic, Adelaide University • Manager, Integration Office
Strategic Examination of Research and Development (SERD) Expert Panel Member
Universities Australia representative
University Chancellors and Vice-Chancellors: • Curtin • ECU • Murdoch • UWA

Consultation by Committee

University of Kent-Greenwich merger representative

University Student Guild Presidents:

- Curtin
- ECU
- Murdoch
- UWA

Appendix D2 – List of stakeholders engaged by Consultant

Consultation by Consultant

Curtin:

- Vice-Chancellor
- Chancellor

UWA:

- Vice-Chancellor
- Chancellor

Murdoch:

- Vice-Chancellor
- Chief Financial Officer
- Chief Experience Officer

ECU:

- Vice-Chancellor
- Vice-President Corporate Services

Australian Government Department of Education:

- Director
- Assistant Secretary, Higher Education Assurance
- Assistant Secretary, Research Commercialisation

Australian Tertiary Education Commission, Acting Assistant Secretary for Student Profiles

Universities Australia Chief Executive Officer

University of Kent-Greenwich merger representative

Chief Scientist of Western Australia

Appendix E – Deloitte 2023 Review data update

The following data was provided by Deloitte. This data is an update to the data included in the 2023 Report and is incorporated into section 2.3 of the University Feasibility Study.

Student load data

Chart E 1: Total student load 2024 (EFTSL)

Source: Department of Education – Higher Education Statistics

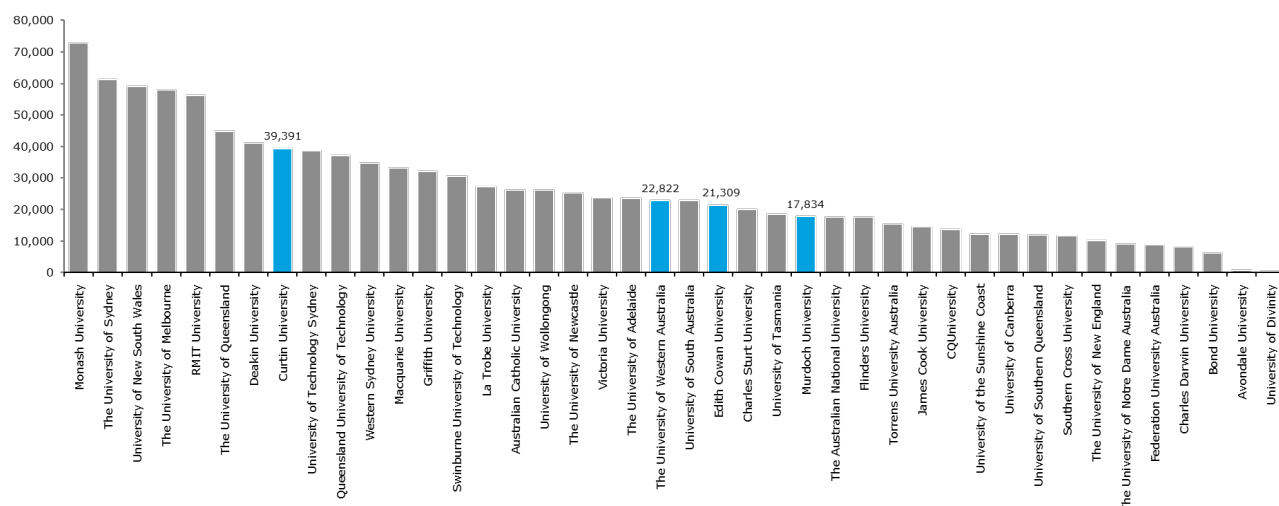


Chart E 2: Total student load combined 2024 (EFTSL) Source: Department of Education – Higher Education Statistics

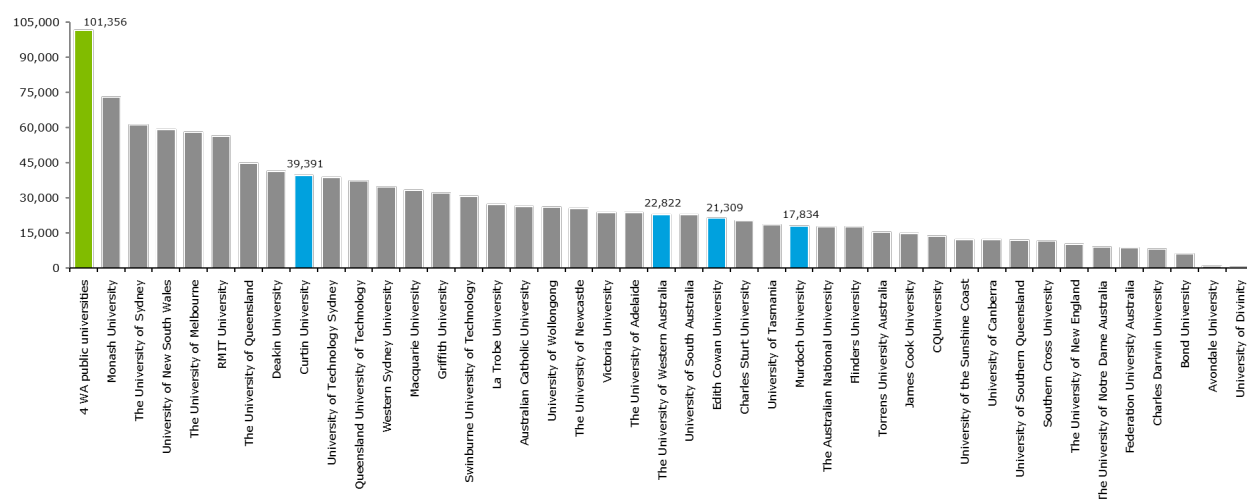


Chart E 3: Domestic student load 2024 (EFTSL)

Source: Department of Education – Higher Education Statistics

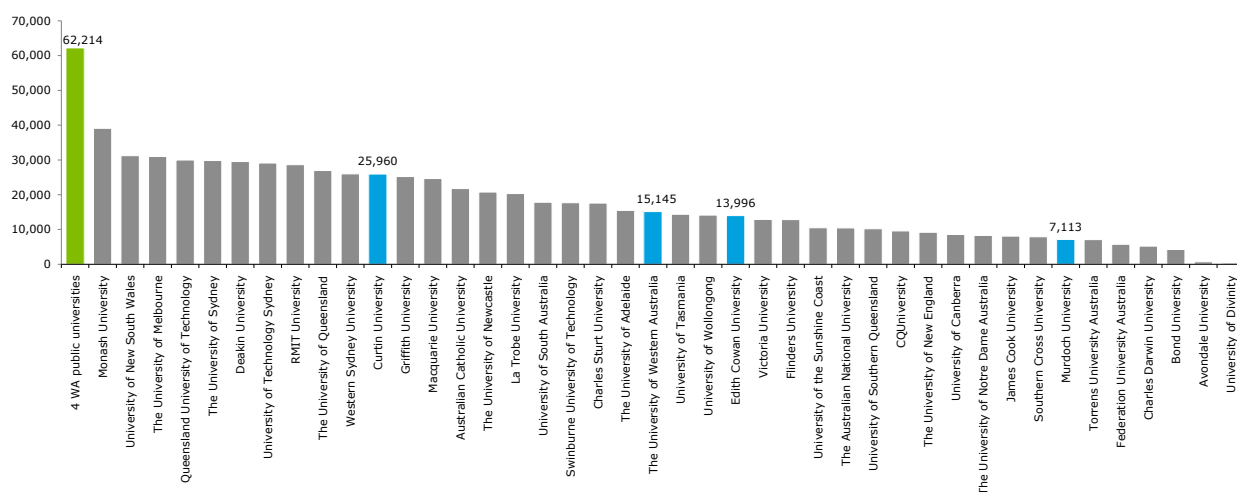


Chart E 4: Share of Australian university domestic load time series 2011 to 2024 (EFTSL)

Source: Department of Education – Higher Education Statistics

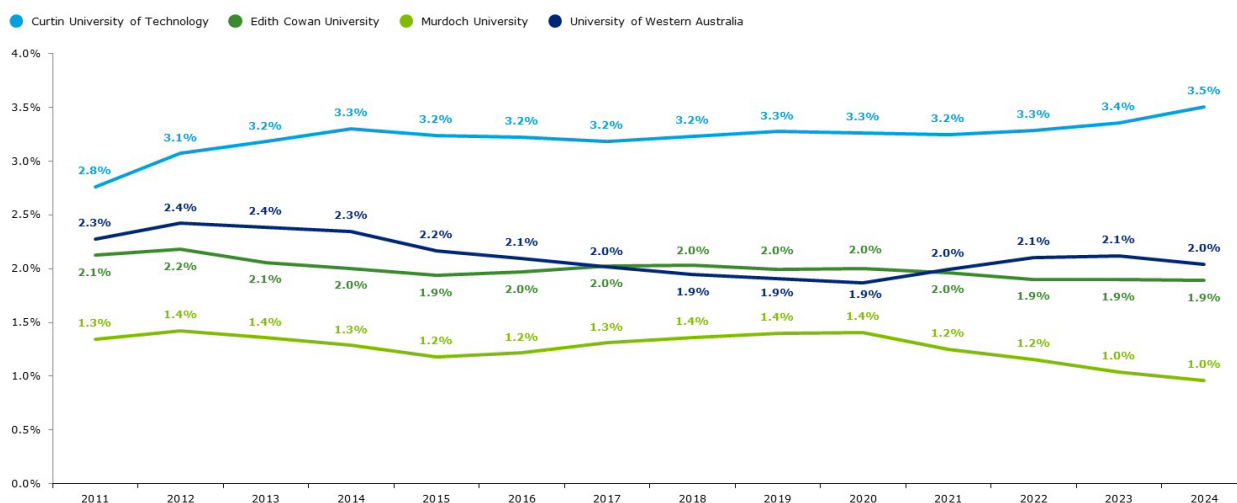


Chart E 5: Domestic student applications and offers 2018 to 2024

Source: Department of Education – Higher Education Statistics

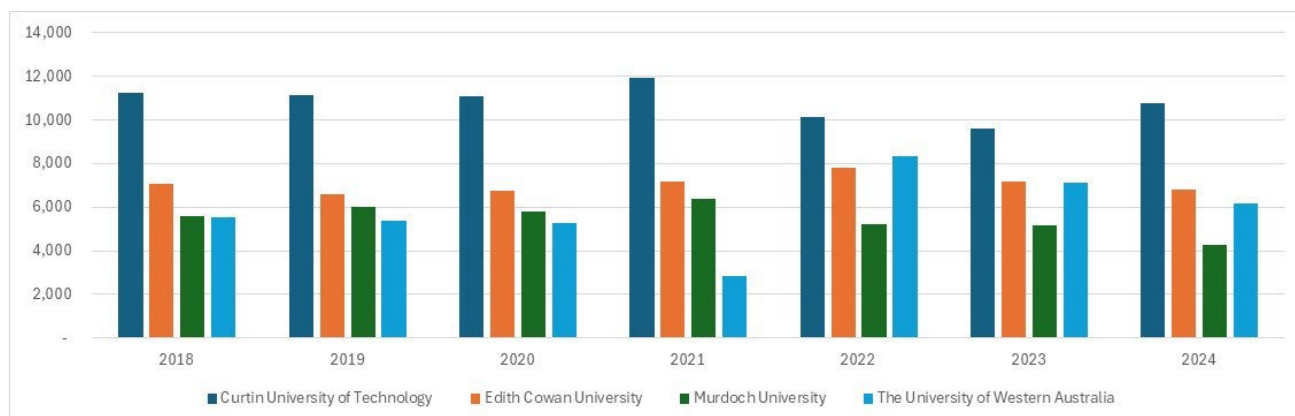


Chart E 6: Overseas student load 2024 (EFTSL)

Source: Department of Education – Higher Education Statistics

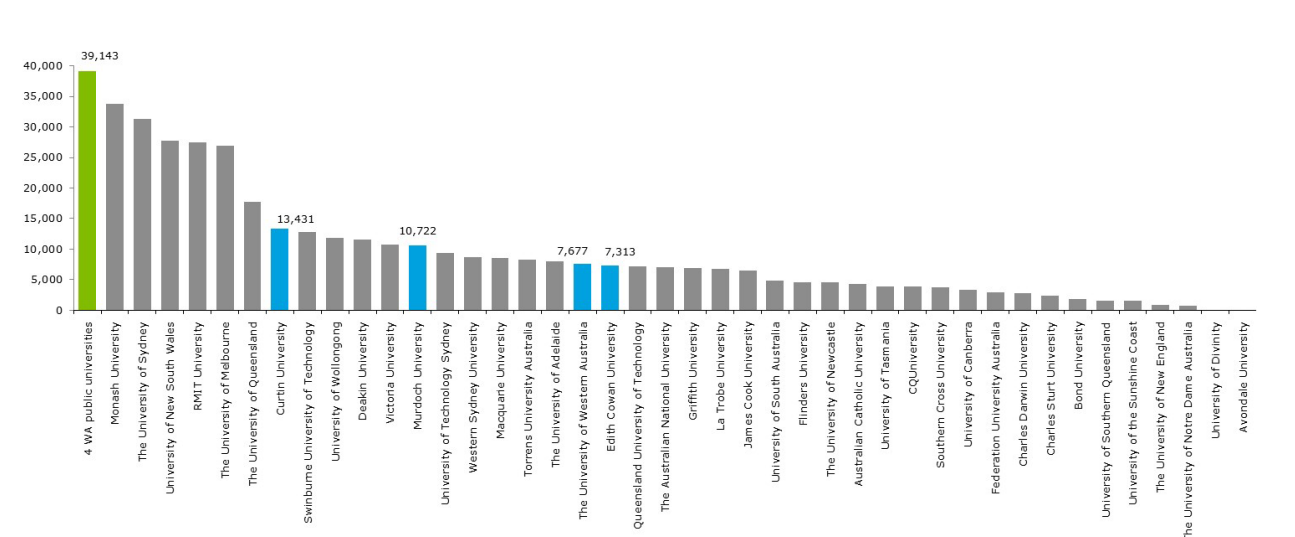


Chart E 7: Overseas students as a % of total load 2024 (EFTSL)

Source: Department of Education – Higher Education Statistics

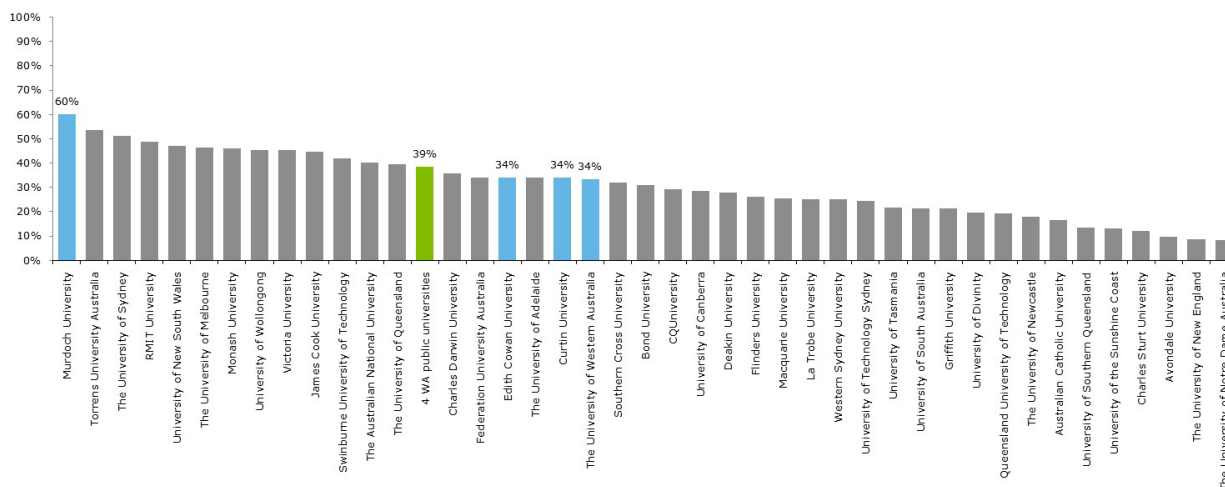


Chart E 8: Share of Australian university overseas load 2011 to 2024 time series (EFTSL)

Source: Department of Education – Higher Education Statistics

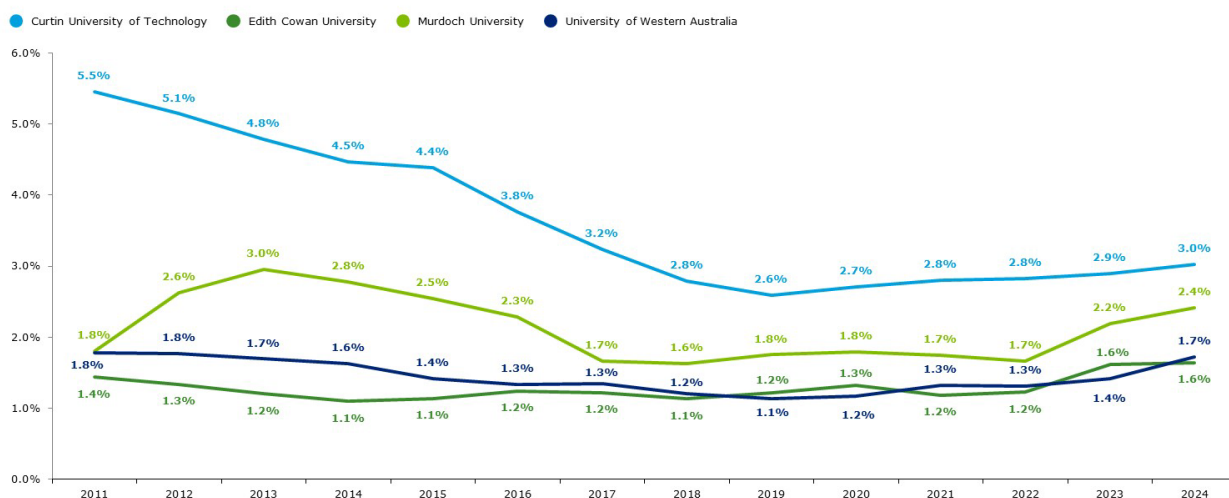


Chart E 9: All overseas students onshore and offshore, 2021 and 2022 (Headcount)

Source: Department of Education – Higher Education Statistics

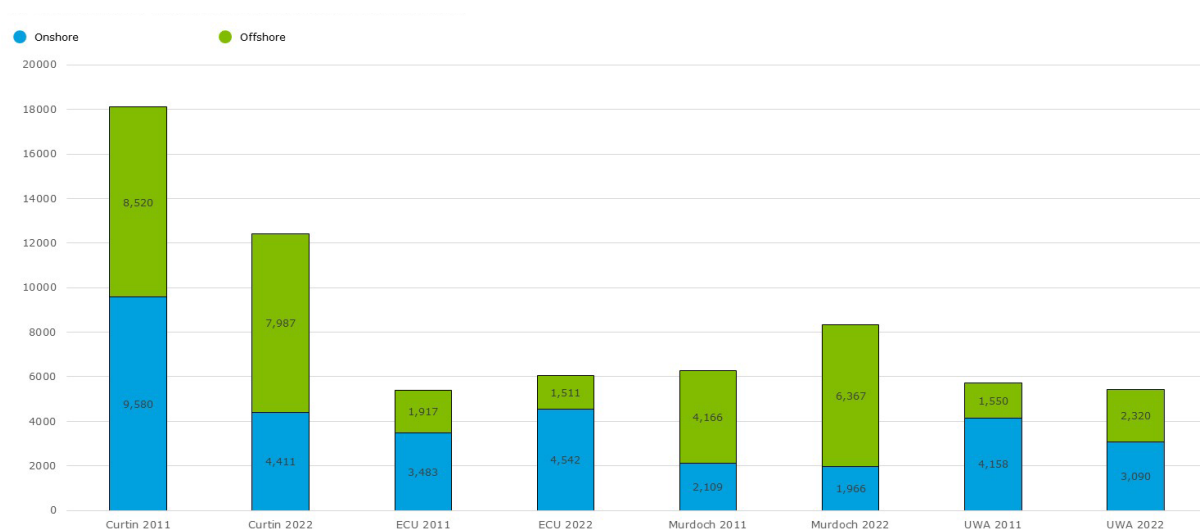
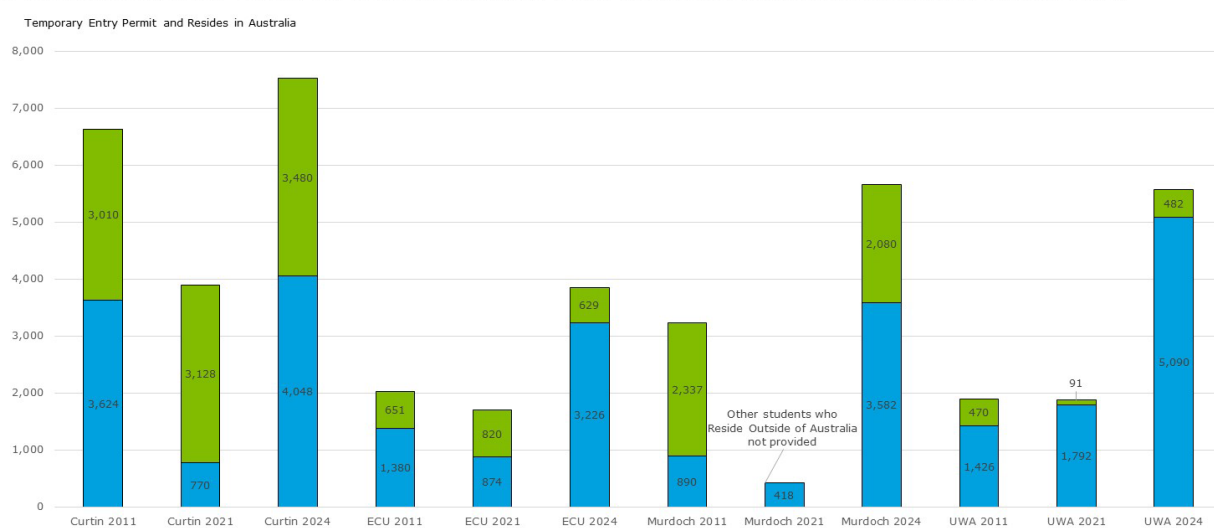


Chart E 10: All commencing overseas students – temporary entry permit and resides in Australia and other overseas students who reside outside of Australia, 2021 and 2024 (headcount)

Source: Department of Education – Higher Education Statistics



Equity groups data

Chart E 11: Equity group students as a % of domestic students at each university (2024)

Source: Department of Education – Higher Education Statistics

	Indigenous	Low SES by SA1 (2021 SEIFA)	Regional	Remote	Students with a Disability	Women in a non-Traditional Area
Curtin University of Technology	2.2%	19.3%	11.4%	1.6%	12.6%	13.8%
Edith Cowan University	1.8%	20.0%	12.1%	1.6%	10.9%	9.0%
Murdoch University	2.5%	24.8%	7.0%	1.1%	22.1%	21.1%
The University of Western Australia	1.3%	10.6%	7.0%	1.3%	17.4%	27.6%
4 WA public universities	1.9%	18.3%	10.1%	1.5%	14.3%	16.5%
All Australian universities	2.2%	14.9%	15.5%	0.8%	12.1%	15.5%

Note: 2024 dataset does not include low SES by postcode

Chart E 12: Proportion of Western Australia university equity group students enrolled by each university (2024)

Source: Department of Education – Higher Education Statistics

	Indigenous	Low SES by SA1 (2021 SEIFA)	Regional	Remote	Students with a Disability	Women in a non-Traditional Area
Curtin University of Technology	44.6%	43.5%	46.4%	43.2%	34.8%	35.1%
Edith Cowan University	19.8%	24.1%	26.2%	23.5%	16.1%	12.3%
Murdoch University	13.6%	14.8%	7.5%	8.3%	16.2%	14.2%
The University of Notre Dame Australia	9.1%	5.9%	6.1%	8.0%	9.3%	4.0%
The University of Western Australia	13.0%	11.7%	13.8%	17.0%	23.6%	34.4%

Note: 2024 dataset does not include low SES by postcode

Chart E 13: Proportions of Indigenous and low SES students compared with share of all Western Australian domestic students, 2024

Source: Department of Education – Higher Education Statistics

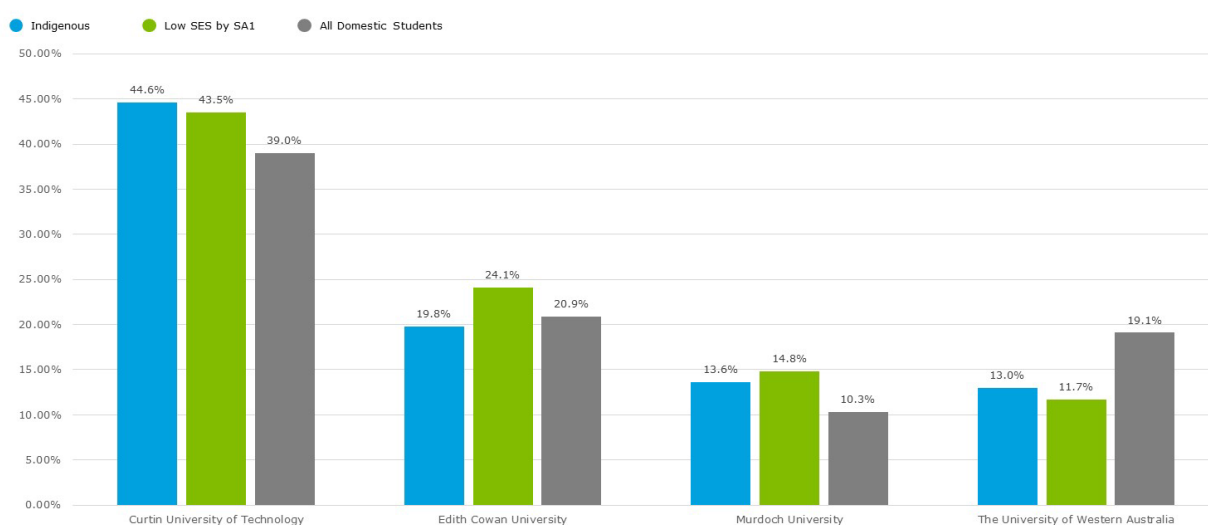


Chart E 14: Proportions of regional and remote students compared with share of all WA domestic students, 2024

Source: Department of Education – Higher Education Statistics

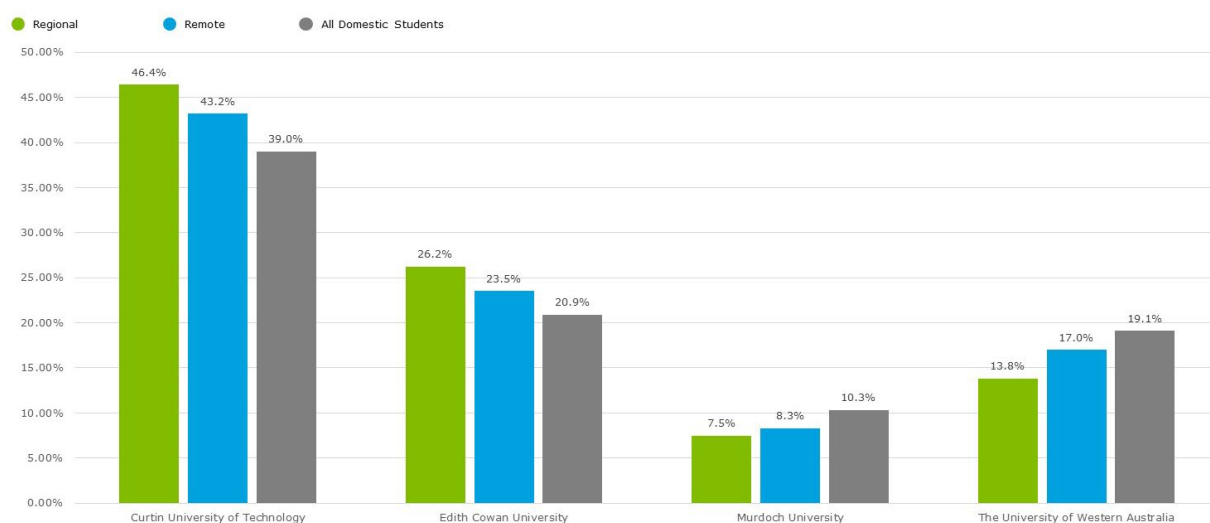
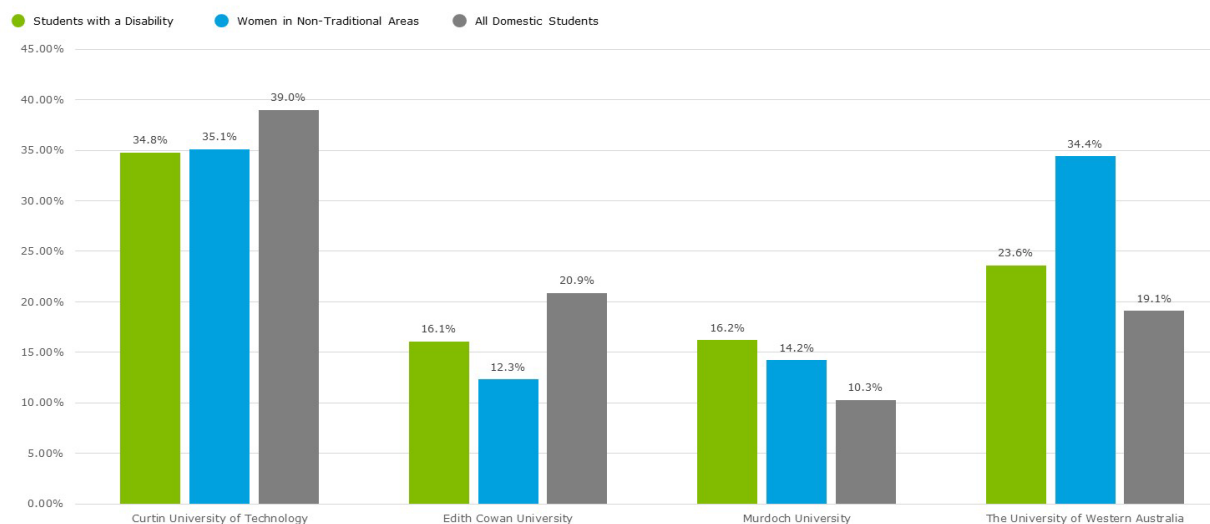


Chart E 15: Proportions of students with a disability and women in non-traditional areas compared with share of all Western Australian domestic students, 2024

Source: Department of Education – Higher Education Statistics



Student experience and outcomes data

Chart E 16: Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (2024)

Source: Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching – Graduate Outcomes Survey and Student Experience Survey (2024)

QILT Indicators	Curtin	ECU	Murdoch	UWA	National Average
Undergraduates					
Positive overall experience	74.1%	79.7%	76.9%	75.6%	76.5%
Were positive about their skills development	78.6%	86.3%	81.0%	77.9%	81.0%
Rated teaching practices positively	77.2%	82.2%	82.0%	80.3%	80.3%
Were happy with facilities and resources	82.6%	86.1%	86.4%	80.9%	82.8%
Recent Graduates					
Graduates were satisfied overall	Update data not publicly available				
Found full-time employment	80.1%	75.3%	70.1%	63.8%	Update data not publicly available
Found employment	88.9%	87.9%	86.1%	83.6%	Update data not publicly available
Continued to study full-time	Update data not publicly available				
Median graduate income one year out	\$76,800	\$77,300	\$78,000	\$72,700	Update data not publicly available

Research student data

Chart E 17: Higher Degree by Research (HDR) load 2024 (EFTSL)

Source: Department of Education – Higher Education Statistics

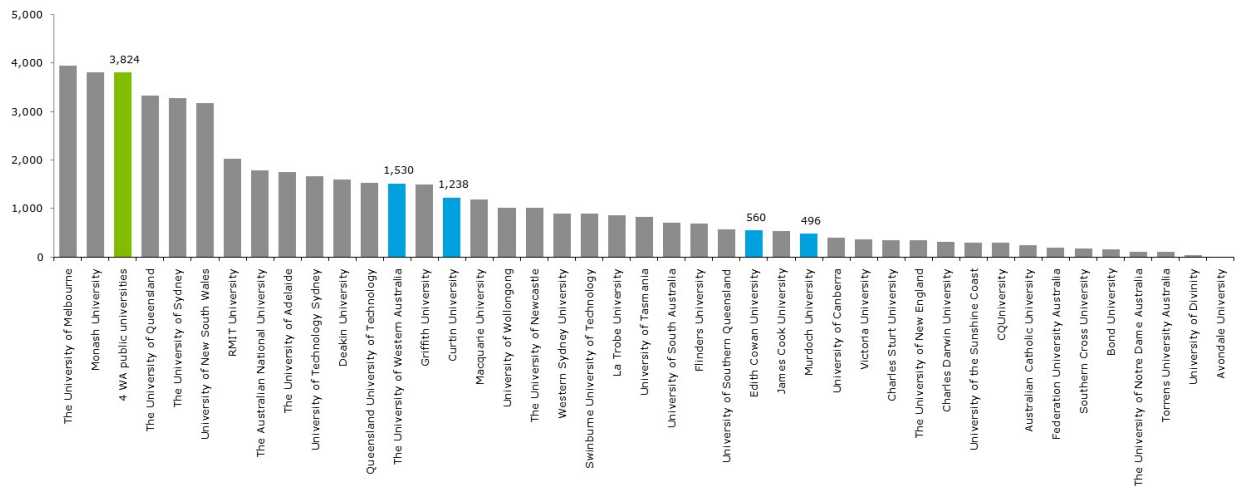
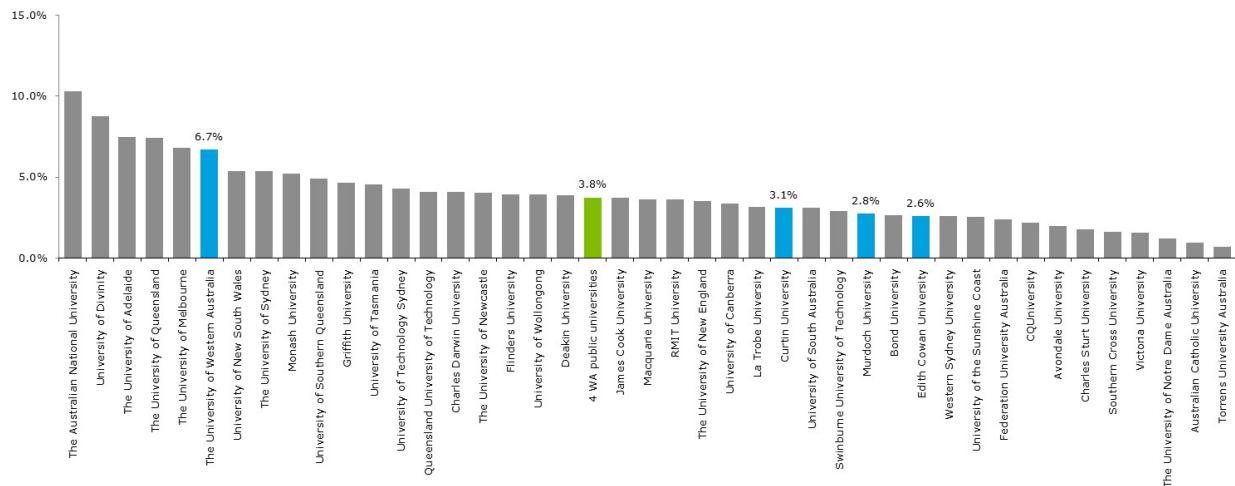


Chart E 18: HDR as a % of total load, 2024

Source: Department of Education – Higher Education Statistics



Research income data

Chart E 19: University research income 2023 (HERDC, \$m)

Source: Department of Education – Research and Development Income Time Series

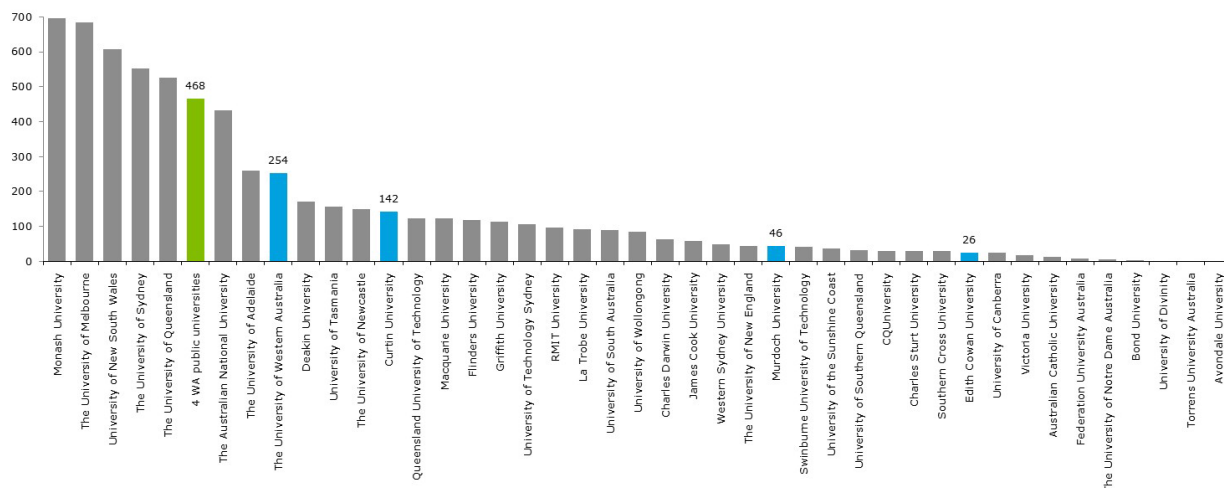
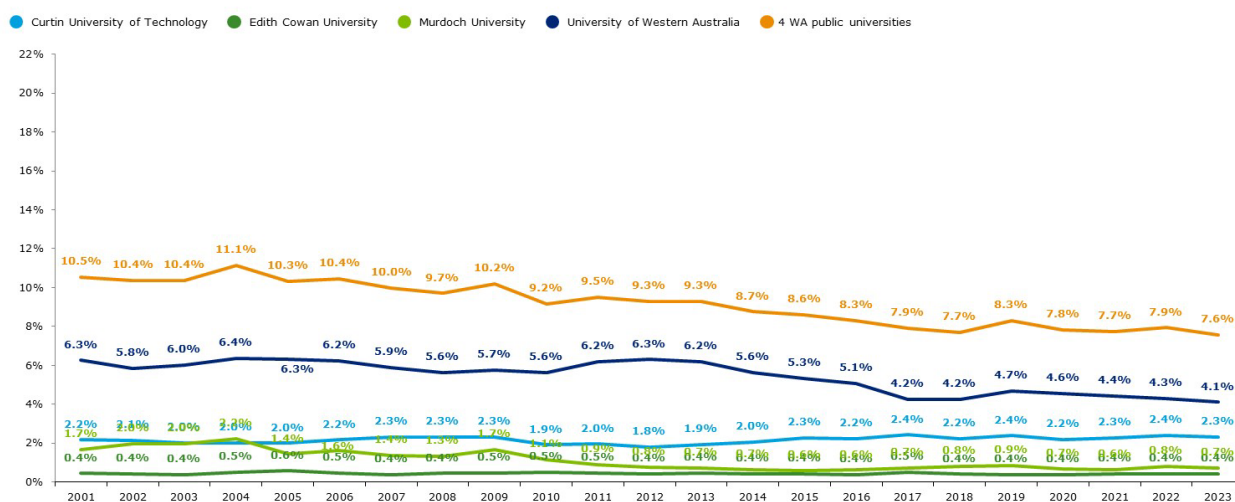


Chart E 20: Share of Australian university research income 2001 – 2023 (HERDC cat 1 – 4 excl. HDR fees, %)

Source: Department of Education – Research and Development Income Time Series



Current rankings data

Chart E 21: Australian university rankings

Sources: Shanghai Rankings (2025), Top Universities (2026) and Times Higher Education World University Rankings (2026)

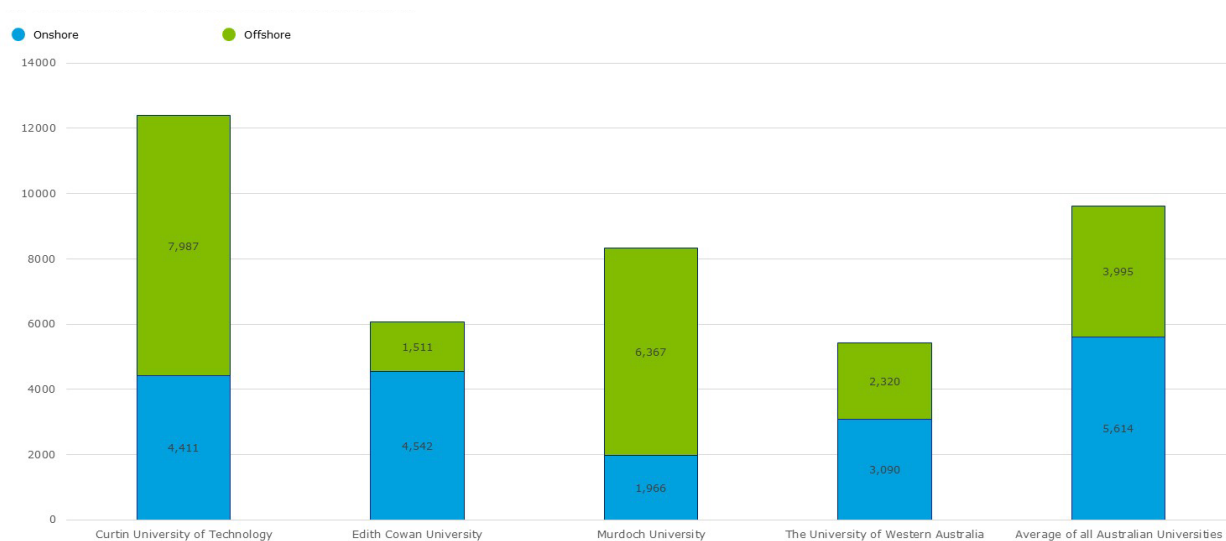
University (sorted by ARWU rank)	ARWU		QS		THES	
	2025 World Rank	Australian Rank	2026 World Rank	Australian Rank	2026 World Rank	Australian Rank
The University of Melbourne	38	1	19	1	37	1
The University of Queensland	65	2	42	6	80	6
University of Sydney	72	3	25	3	53	2
Monash University	76	4	36	5	58	3
The University of New South Wales	80	5	20	2	79	5
The Australian National University	101-150	6-7	32	4	73	4
The University of Western Australia	101-150	6-7	77	7	153	8
The University of Adelaide	151-200	8	82	8	176	10
Curtin University	201-300	9-13	183	12	251-300	14-20
Deakin University	201-300	9-13	207	14	201-250	11-13
Macquarie University	201-300	9-13	138	11	166	9
Swinburne University of Technology	201-300	9-13	294	19	251-300	14-20
University of Technology Sydney	201-300	9-13	96	9	145	7
Griffith University	301-400	14-20	268	18	251-300	14-20
Queensland University of Technology	301-400	14-20	226	15	201-250	11-13
La Trobe University	301-400	14-20	233	17	251-300	14-20
RMIT University	301-400	14-20	125	10	251-300	14-20
University of Tasmania	301-400	14-20	314	20	251-300	14-20
University of Wollongong	301-400	14-20	184	13	201-250	11-13
Western Sydney University	301-400	14-20	400	22	301-350	21-22

The University of Newcastle, Australia	401-500	21-24	227	16	251-300	14-20
University of South Australia	401-500	21-24	No rank	No rank	No rank	No rank
James Cook University	401-500	21-24	440	25	351-400	23-25
Flinders University	401-500	21-24	387	21	301-350	21-22
Murdoch University	501-600	25	423	24	401-500	26-32
Australian Catholic University	601-700	26-27	851-900	33	401-500	26-32
University of Southern Queensland	601-700	26-27	410	23	351-400	23-25
Edith Cowan University	801-900	28-29	487	26	351-400	23-25
University of the Sunshine Coast	801-900	28-29	No rank	No rank	501-600	33-35
University of Canberra	No rank	No rank	494	27	401-500	26-32
Charles Sturt University	No rank	No rank	951-1000	34	601-800	36
CQUniversity	No rank	No rank	499	28	401-500	26-32
Charles Darwin University	No rank	No rank	584	29	401-500	26-32
Bond University	No rank	No rank	591	30	401-500	26-32
Southern Cross University	No rank	No rank	638	31	401-500	26-32
University of New England	No rank	No rank	1001-1200	35	No rank	No rank
Federation University Australia	No rank	No rank	No rank	No rank	501-600	33-35
Victoria University	No rank	No rank	741-750	32	501-600	33-35
The University of Notre Dame Australia	No rank	No rank	1201-1400	36	801-1000	37

2021 comparative data

Chart E 22: All overseas students – onshore and offshore, 2022 (headcount)

Source: Department of Education – Higher Education Statistics



Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery Projects data

Chart E 23: ARC Discovery Projects: success rate (%) 2016 to 2025

Source: Australian Research Council – Selection Reports

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Australian Capital Territory	23.9%	21.1%	17.5%	28.5%	32.0%	24.0%	18.8%	26.5%	23.7%	49.3%
New South Wales	16.8%	18.4%	18.7%	23.0%	23.1%	18.8%	20.6%	17.2%	14.0%	49.7%
Northern Territory	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	10.0%	25.0%	44.4%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Queensland	18.1%	15.5%	21.3%	22.6%	22.6%	17.4%	19.4%	19.3%	15.2%	49.7%
South Australia	18.5%	18.0%	17.3%	25.1%	20.7%	14.6%	16.2%	16.4%	16.6%	41.5%
Tasmania	10.4%	13.3%	25.6%	22.4%	19.3%	15.4%	29.8%	23.5%	15.6%	50.0%
Victoria	17.7%	19.1%	18.2%	20.8%	22.6%	22.6%	17.5%	18.2%	17.9%	44.6%
Western Australia	16.3%	14.3%	18.8%	17.1%	20.1%	22.6%	17.0%	16.7%	16.5%	43.6%
Curtin University of Technology	13.5%	9.4%	17.5%	13.7%	14.5%	22.0%	16.4%	11.3%	24.4%	37.5%
Edith Cowan University	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	8.3%	10.0%	28.6%	14.3%	0.0%	8.3%	100.0%
Murdoch University	3.7%	11.8%	9.1%	0.0%	33.0%	0.0%	14.3%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%
The University of Notre Dame Australia	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%		0.0%	0.0%		0.0%	0.0%
The University of Western Australia	21.4%	20.0%	21.0%	22.1%	23.7%	24.3%	17.9%	22.2%	13.0%	45.7%
Total	17.7%	17.8%	18.9%	22.4%	23.0%	20.0%	19.0%	18.5%	16.3%	47.3%

Chart E 24: ARC Discovery Projects: difference from national success rate (percentage points) 2016 to 2025

Source: Australian Research Council – Selection Reports

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	No. of Years (out of 8) Below National Success Rate
Australian Capital Territory	6.2%	3.3%	-1.4%	6.1%	9.0%	4.0%	-0.2%	8.0%	7.4	2.0%	2
New South Wales	-0.9%	0.6%	-0.2%	0.6%	0.1%	-1.2%	1.6%	-1.3%	-2.3%	2.4%	5
Northern Territory	15.6%	-17.8%	-18.9%	-12.4%	2.0%	24.4%	1.0%	1.5%	3.7%	52.7%	3
Queensland	0.4%	-2.3%	2.4%	0.2%	-0.4%	-2.6%	0.4%	0.8%	-1.1%	2.4%	4
South Australia	0.8%	0.2%	-1.6%	2.7%	-2.3%	-5.4%	-2.8%	-2.1%	0.3%	-5.8%	6
Tasmania	-7.3%	-4.5%	6.7%	0.0%	-3.7%	-4.6%	10.8%	5.0%	-0.7%	2.7%	4
Victoria	0.0%	1.3%	-0.7%	-1.6%	-0.4%	2.6%	-1.5%	-0.3%	1.6%	-2.7%	6
Western Australia	-1.4%	-3.5%	-0.1%	-5.3%	-2.9%	2.6%	-2.0%	-1.8%	0.2%	-3.7%	8

Chart E 25: ARC Discovery Projects: applications considered 2016 to 2025

Source: Australian Research Council – Selection Reports

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Australian Capital Territory	264	227	234	207	172	150	165	155	135	71
New South Wales	1,161	1,194	1,097	997	945	1,016	1,003	824	853	362
Northern Territory	3	5	3	10	4	9	10	5	5	3
Queensland	607	579	470	447	420	461	530	482	454	193
South Australia	232	200	202	203	193	212	241	177	163	82
Tasmania	77	83	78	58	57	52	47	34	32	12
Victoria	933	959	813	771	875	929	934	779	821	354
Western Australia	307	293	239	228	209	190	165	132	127	55
Curtin University of Technology	126	127	103	95	76	59	55	53	41	16
Edith Cowan University	8	5	3	12	10	7	7	5	12	2
Murdoch University	27	17	11	6	9	7	7	2	3	1
The University of Notre Dame Australia	1	4	3	2	0	2	1	0	69	1
The University of Western Australia	145	140	119	113	114	115	95	72	2	35
Total	3,584	3,540	3,136	2,921	2,875	3,019	3,095	2,588	2,590	1,132

Chart E 26: ARC Discovery Projects: share of applications (%) considered 2016 to 2025

Source: Australian Research Council – Selection Reports

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Australian Capital Territory	7.4%	6.4%	7.5%	7.1%	6.0%	5.0%	5.3%	6.0%	5.2%	6.3%
New South Wales	32.4%	33.7%	35.0%	34.1%	32.9%	33.7%	32.4%	31.8%	32.9%	32.0%
Northern Territory	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.3%	0.1%	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%
Queensland	16.9%	16.4%	15.0%	15.3%	14.6%	15.3%	17.1%	18.6%	17.5%	17.0%
South Australia	6.5%	5.6%	6.4%	6.9%	6.7%	7.0%	7.8%	6.8%	6.3%	7.2%
Tasmania	2.1%	2.3%	2.5%	2.0%	2.0%	1.7%	1.5%	1.3%	1.2%	1.1%
Victoria	26.0%	27.1%	25.9%	26.4%	30.4%	30.8%	30.2%	30.1%	31.7%	31.3%
Western Australia	8.6%	8.3%	7.6%	7.8%	7.3%	6.3%	5.3%	5.1%	4.9%	4.9%

Chart E 27: ARC Discovery Projects: funds over project life for approved applications (\$)

Source: Australian Research Council – Selection Reports

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Australian Capital Territory	\$24,697,767	\$20,434,500	\$16,655,595	\$24,018,720	\$23,615,509	\$16,009,115	\$15,301,972	\$18,726,821	\$17,831,357	\$22,236,550
New South Wales	\$73,581,803	\$77,634,771	\$76,837,809	\$91,477,417	\$92,322,316	\$83,793,458	\$89,126,086	\$64,195,777	\$61,987,380	\$113,968,308
Northern Territory	\$397,900	-	-	\$322,500	\$348,536	\$1,624,505	\$687,381	\$313,544	\$351,000	\$3,046,359
Queensland	\$41,006,527	\$33,875,012	\$37,246,321	\$41,561,056	\$42,830,577	\$32,772,255	\$44,313,411	\$42,945,024	\$36,119,313	\$60,141,538
South Australia	\$16,475,938	\$14,166,000	\$13,142,338	\$19,981,880	\$16,628,229	\$13,178,713	\$18,758,328	\$13,266,783	\$14,040,466	\$21,845,163
Tasmania	\$2,941,431	\$4,787,451	\$8,616,807	\$5,336,757	\$4,395,063	\$3,957,269	\$5,536,642	\$3,753,489	\$2,836,038	\$4,019,860
Victoria	\$65,437,635	\$67,207,050	\$56,159,920	\$63,910,203	\$87,256,071	\$90,304,623	\$72,135,170	\$67,507,810	\$75,891,267	\$101,485,743
Western Australia	\$20,396,034	\$16,555,868	\$17,002,243	\$15,571,834	\$17,556,623	\$18,394,141	\$12,832,282	\$10,684,894	\$11,089,527	\$15,424,968
Curtin University of Technology	\$6,449,657	\$4,642,722	\$6,627,299	\$4,936,580	\$3,921,531	\$4,692,187	\$3,470,825	\$2,757,957	\$4,702,203	\$3,456,227
Edith Cowan University	-	-	\$349,700	\$375,000	\$380,000	\$637,674	\$447,500	-	\$523,602	\$823,208
Murdoch University	\$137,455	\$652,572	\$392,664	-	\$1,018,071	-	\$495,000	-	\$544,678	-
The University of Notre Dame Australia	\$439,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$5,319,044	-
The University of Western Australia	\$13,369,922	\$11,260,574	\$9,632,580	\$10,260,254	\$12,237,021	\$13,064,280	\$8,418,957	\$7,926,937	-	\$11,145,533
Total	\$244,935,035	\$234,660,652	\$225,661,033	\$262,180,367	\$284,952,924	\$260,034,079	\$258,691,272	\$221,394,142	\$220,182,441	\$342,168,489

Chart E 28: ARC Discovery Projects: share of funds approved

Source: Australian Research Council – Selection Reports

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Australian Capital Territory	10.1%	8.7%	7.4%	9.2%	8.3%	6.2%	5.9%	8.5%	8.1%	6.5%
New South Wales	30.0%	33.1%	34.1%	34.9%	32.4%	32.2%	34.5%	29.0%	28.2%	33.3%
Northern Territory	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.6%	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%	0.9%
Queensland	16.7%	14.4%	16.5%	15.9%	15.0%	12.6%	17.1%	19.4%	16.4%	17.6%
South Australia	6.7%	6.0%	5.8%	7.6%	5.8%	5.1%	7.3%	6.0%	6.4%	6.4%
Tasmania	1.2%	2.0%	3.8%	2.0%	1.5%	1.5%	2.1%	1.7%	1.3%	1.2%
Victoria	26.7%	28.6%	24.9%	24.4%	30.6%	34.7%	27.9%	30.5%	34.5%	29.7%
Western Australia	8.3%	7.1%	7.5%	5.9%	6.2%	7.1%	5.0%	4.8%	5.0%	4.5%

ARC Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) data

Chart E 29: ARC DECRA: success rate (%) 2016 to 2025

Source: Australian Research Council – Selection Reports

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Australian Capital Territory	22.6%	31.7%	17.2%	21.4%	17.1%	22.0%	18.4%	15.9%	28.6%	21.8%
New South Wales	16.5%	17.0%	15.1%	17.9%	16.6%	18.1%	23.5%	14.9%	15.0%	16.9%
Northern Territory	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%		0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%
Queensland	18.1%	16.0%	18.7%	17.0%	16.8%	20.8%	18.2%	13.1%	23.4%	19.0%
South Australia	19.2%	11.5%	12.7%	6.7%	12.9%	10.2%	16.9%	12.5%	16.0%	20.5%
Tasmania	0.0%	13.3%	13.6%	6.9%	24.0%	9.5%	20.0%	4.8%	22.2%	30.0%
Victoria	14.5%	16.6%	17.1%	18.8%	16.4%	15.6%	19.7%	17.6%	20.4%	16.3%
Western Australia	13.4%	10.1%	16.0%	17.1%	7.0%	8.3%	6.9%	14.3%	21.4%	16.7%
Curtin University of Technology	14.0%	6.1%	18.4%	14.3%	0.0%	4.8%	0.0%	12.5%	20.8%	23.5%
Edith Cowan University	0.0%	50.0%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	50.0%	25.0%	0.0%
Murdoch University	50.0%	11.1%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
The University of Notre Dame Australia		0.0%		0.0%	0.0%		0.0%	50.0%	25.0%	0.0%
The University of Western Australia	12.8%	11.3%	16.3%	21.1%	8.8%	11.4%	5.9%	12.5%	26.3%	12.5%
Total	16.4%	16.7%	16.3%	17.2%	16.0%	17.1%	19.7%	15.0%	19.6%	17.9%

Chart E 30: ARC DECRA: difference from national success rate (percentage points) 2016 to 2025

Source: Australian Research Council – Selection Reports

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	No. of Years (out of 8) Below National Success Rate
Australian Capital Territory	6.2%	25.0%	0.9%	4.2%	1.1%	4.9%	-1.3%	0.9%	9%	3.9%	1
New South Wales	0.1%	10.3%	-1.2%	0.7%	0.6%	1.0%	3.8%	-0.1%	-4.6%	-1.0%	4
Northern Territory	-16.4%	-6.7%	-16.3%	-17.2%	-16.0%	-17.1%	80.3%	-15.0%	13.7%	-17.9%	8
Queensland	1.7%	9.3%	2.4%	-0.2%	0.8%	3.7%	-1.5%	-1.9%	3.8%	1.1%	3
South Australia	2.8%	4.8%	-3.6%	-10.5%	-3.1%	-6.9%	-2.8%	-2.5%	-3.6%	2.6%	6
Tasmania	-16.4%	6.6%	-2.7%	-10.3%	8.0%	-7.6%	0.3%	-10.2%	2.6%	12.1%	5
Victoria	-1.9%	9.9%	0.8%	1.6%	0.4%	-1.5%	0.0%	2.6%	0.8%	-1.6%	3
Western Australia	-3.0%	3.4%	-0.3%	-0.1%	-9.0%	-8.8%	-12.8%	-0.7%	1.8%	-1.2%	8

Chart E 31: ARC DECRA: applications considered 2016 to 2025

Source: Australian Research Council – Selection Reports

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Australian Capital Territory	93	82	116	103	105	91	76	88	63	78
New South Wales	376	393	377	347	391	397	311	430	321	325
Northern Territory	4	2	3	3	3	0	1	4	3	6
Queensland	221	188	187	206	220	192	176	245	188	205
South Australia	78	87	79	75	62	59	59	96	75	83
Tasmania	14	15	22	29	25	21	15	21	18	20
Victoria	337	331	328	329	371	353	300	381	299	337
Western Australia	97	99	100	70	71	60	58	70	56	66
Curtin University of Technology	43	33	38	21	9	21	13	24	24	34
Edith Cowan University	5	2	6	7	3	1	5	2	4	5
Murdoch University	2	9	7	3	1	3	4	2	5	2
The University of Notre Dame Australia	0	2	0	1	1	0	2	2	4	1
The University of Western Australia	47	53	49	38	57	35	34	40	19	24
Total	1,220	1,197	1,212	1,162	1,248	1,173	996	1,335	1,023	1,120

Chart E 32: ARC DECRA: applications (%) considered 2016 to 2025

Source: Australian Research Council – Selection Reports

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Australian Capital Territory	7.6%	6.9%	9.6%	8.9%	8.4%	7.8%	7.6%	6.6%	6.2%	7.0%
New South Wales	30.8%	32.8%	31.1%	29.9%	31.3%	33.8%	31.2%	32.2%	31.4%	29.0%
Northern Territory	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%	0.3%	0.3%	0.5%
Queensland	18.1%	15.7%	15.4%	17.7%	17.6%	16.4%	17.7%	18.4%	18.4%	18.3%
South Australia	6.4%	7.3%	6.5%	6.5%	5.0%	5.0%	5.9%	7.2%	7.3%	7.4%
Tasmania	1.1%	1.3%	1.8%	2.5%	2.0%	1.8%	1.5%	1.6%	1.8%	1.8%
Victoria	27.6%	27.7%	27.1%	28.3%	29.7%	30.1%	30.1%	28.5%	29.2%	30.1%
Western Australia	8.0%	8.3%	8.3%	6.0%	5.7%	5.1%	5.8%	5.2%	5.5%	5.9%

Chart E 33: ARC DECRA: funds over project life for approved applications (\$) 2016 to 2025

Source: Australian Research Council – Discovery Early Career Researcher Selection Reports

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Australian Capital Territory	\$7,568,237	\$9,409,949	\$7,276,723	\$8,471,330	\$7,353,123	\$8,617,059	\$6,057,335	\$6,108,275	\$7,894,623	\$8,049,055
New South Wales	\$21,640,529	\$23,929,575	\$20,423,369	\$23,823,357	\$26,284,129	\$29,857,583	\$30,547,508	\$27,351,633	\$20,925,105	\$25,662,753
Northern Territory	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$455,766	-	\$433,000	-
Queensland	\$14,332,970	\$10,809,346	\$12,524,578	\$13,490,598	\$15,213,954	\$17,024,708	\$13,760,655	\$13,827,889	\$19,004,244	\$17,775,125
South Australia	\$5,504,012	\$3,562,271	\$3,694,401	\$1,990,863	\$3,283,083	\$2,527,237	\$4,268,178	\$5,097,718	\$4,897,010	\$7,912,466
Tasmania	-	\$742,159	\$1,116,616	\$770,478	\$2,483,499	\$851,128	\$1,324,711	\$426,216	\$1,773,740	\$2,866,305
Victoria	\$17,071,513	\$19,685,969	\$20,098,223	\$23,868,966	\$25,173,816	\$23,089,801	\$25,002,816	\$28,852,458	\$26,270,101	\$25,714,161
Western Australia	\$4,619,386	\$3,561,404	\$5,806,501	\$4,497,067	\$2,046,811	\$2,074,017	\$1,597,315	\$4,126,694	\$5,098,459	\$5,016,263
Curtin University of Technology	\$2,093,839	\$720,000	\$2,512,873	\$1,148,632	-	\$425,775	-	\$1,305,878	\$2,016,601	\$3,574,656
Edith Cowan University	-	\$372,000	\$384,996	-	-	-	\$413,482	\$375,573	\$477,165	-
Murdoch University	\$372,000	\$304,080	-	\$372,014	-	-	\$386,708	-	-	-
The University of Notre Dame Australia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$410,154	\$448,008	-
The University of Western Australia	\$2,153,547	\$2,165,324	\$2,908,632	\$2,976,421	\$2,046,811	\$1,648,242	\$797,125	\$2,035,089	\$2,156,685	\$1,441,607
Total	\$70,736,647	\$71,700,673	\$70,940,411	\$76,912,659	\$81,838,415	\$84,041,533	\$83,014,284	\$85,790,883	\$86,296,282	\$92,996,128

Chart E 34: ARC DECRA: share of funds (%) approved 2016 to 2025

Source: Australian Research Council – Discovery Early Career Researcher Selection Reports

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Australian Capital Territory	10.7%	13.1%	10.3%	11.0%	9.0%	10.3%	7.3%	7.1%	9.1%	8.7%
New South Wales	30.6%	33.4%	28.8%	31.0%	32.1%	35.5%	36.8%	31.9%	24.2%	27.6%
Northern Territory	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%
Queensland	20.3%	15.1%	17.7%	17.5%	18.6%	20.3%	16.6%	16.1%	22.0%	19.1%
South Australia	7.8%	5.0%	5.2%	2.6%	4.0%	3.0%	5.1%	5.9%	5.7%	8.5%
Tasmania	0.0%	1.0%	1.6%	1.0%	3.0%	1.0%	1.6%	0.5%	2.1%	3.1%
Victoria	24.1%	27.5%	28.3%	31.0%	30.8%	27.5%	30.1%	33.6%	30.4%	27.7%
Western Australia	6.5%	5.0%	8.2%	5.8%	2.5%	2.5%	1.9%	4.8%	5.9%	5.4%

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