

DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR, RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND INDUSTRY
OPENING STATEMENT
CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY
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It is a privilege to appear before this inquiry to provide insight and knowledge about the role of universities in preparing current, and future students for the requirements of the workforce in the new economy.

Amongst Australia's rural and regional universities, CSU is unique. We are Australia's largest regional university, with more than 39,000 students, and a reach that spreads from the Mid-North coast in Port Macquarie, down into Victoria, with a concentration in the Central and Central Western regions of New South Wales.

CSU has always had a focus on the needs of industry in our communities, the ability to attract industry to our communities and how our graduates can continue to contribute to the rich and diverse culture that is regional Australia.

As a multi-campus institution, CSU has always made such judgments, and formed the relationships to inform our offerings and courses, with a view to the importance of local impact and benefit pursued at international standards.

The needs of our partners in the Orange or Bathurst communities are often different to the needs of our partners in Wagga Wagga or Albury. The same is again true of our newest campus in Port Macquarie.

Underpinned by work-integrated learning, as well as other designs and structures to ensure employability and preparation for the labour market, CSU has successfully navigated such different employment markets across our communities.

CSU has a strong history of producing graduates who achieve success in their chosen industries with a current graduate employment rate that is 10% above the national average. Our success is demonstrated by our consistent ranking amongst the very top of Australia's universities in terms of both graduate employment outcomes and salaries. For example, 80% domestic graduates of CSU found employment within four months of completing their bachelor degree (2014 Australian Graduate Survey) and CSU has one of the best graduate employment rates in Australia (www.qilt.edu.au).

This experience; negotiating and planning within an environment of different industry and workforce needs, has a strong parallel to the very focus of this inquiry: the skills needed by an economy in transition, undergoing a change in employment patterns, and the skills expected by employers into the future.

As outlined in our submission to this inquiry, CSU strongly supports a focus on how to ensure graduates leave university with the skills and experiences needed for the workforce, both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. More than 60% of CSU's undergraduate courses

provide students with access to work based experience and placements, ensuring they are job ready. 70% of CSU's courses target skills shortage areas, delivering on the Australian government's national skills priority.

The needs of metropolitan Sydney or Melbourne are different to Central-Western New South Wales, which differ from other rural and regional areas. Similarly, when considering any barriers to universities offering the qualifications needed to meet such changes, we cannot risk a one-size-fits-all approach.

As recommended in our submission and in the submissions of some of my colleagues here today, CSU has identified significant barriers to funding PhD qualifications which act to prevent prospective candidates from an industry background pursuing further education.

These range from monetary issues regarding funding, eligibility for funding and stipends, to the needs of such candidates for flexibility. Such barriers prevent the value-add for both industry and the university being fully realised.

Further barriers take the form of continued equity of access issues for prospective regional students and other minority groups. Particularly in medicine and health, this places artificial limits to ensuring graduates are prepared for the changing economy and workforce. Our proposed Murray Darling Medical School has been designed to address this.

Such barriers, as well as curtailing our ability to offer the qualifications and upskilling needed, also contribute to potentially discouraging closer relationships with industry. However, this is only one aspect of this issue.

Continued cultural differences in approaches to research, such as measures of success and incentives, are a significant issue. While universities traditionally approach research as a matter of prestige and rankings first, industry traditionally comes from a commercial and profit-driven perspective.

Bringing about a more holistic approach from universities, industry and government requires a policy framework and suite of funding models more advanced than those we currently have. This is key to further integrating the work of industry within higher education institutions. For example, the relationship between tertiary education entrepreneurship programs and private incubator and accelerators could be particularly important regionally if sustainably resourced. Similarly, programs that foster industry collaborative funding in the regions would support regional infrastructure such as online learning as well as support Australia's digital innovation agenda as a whole.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to present to this inquiry.