Australia: civic engagement in higher education

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Talloires Network

Bellagio Meeting

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Australia

- Size: 7.6m km^2
  - 6th largest country
  - US: 9.8m km^2
- Population: 22m
  - 51st in the world
  - US: 308m
- Population density: 2.8/km^2
  - 233rd of 239 countries
 - US: 32/km^2
- The 'tyranny of distance'

Australian Universities

- 39 universities
- 1.1m full-time and part-time students
- 770,000 domestic students
- Almost 300,000 international students
- Less than 1% Indigenous students (2.7% of population)
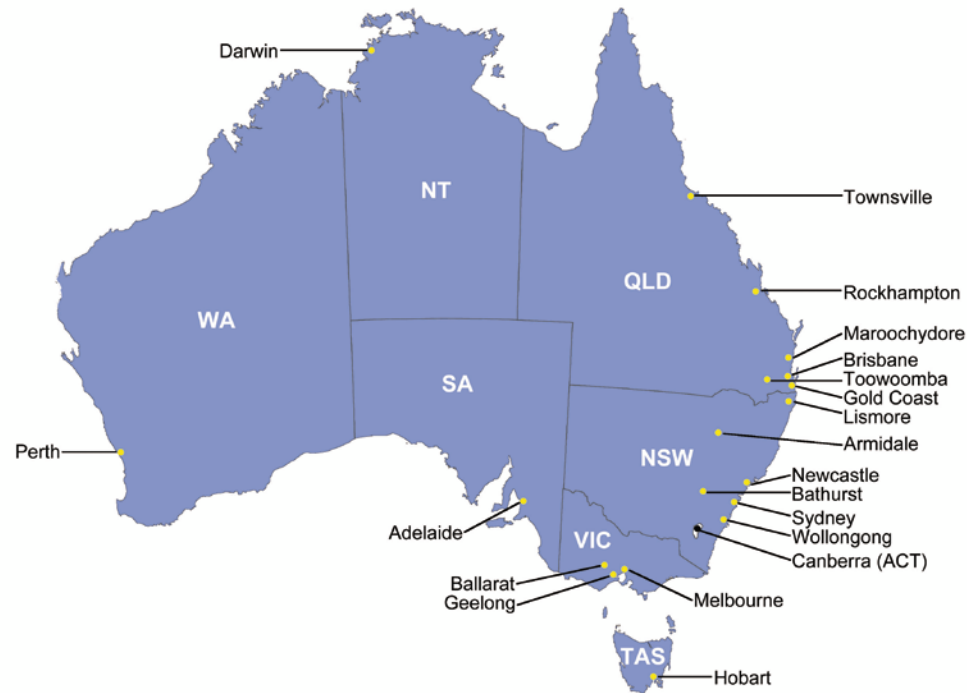
Current Policy Context

- Major national higher education review (2008-2009)
- Significant additional funding for universities
- Renewed focus on widening participation
- Incentives for engagement with disadvantaged groups, but no 3rd stream funding

Transforming
Australia's
Higher Education System
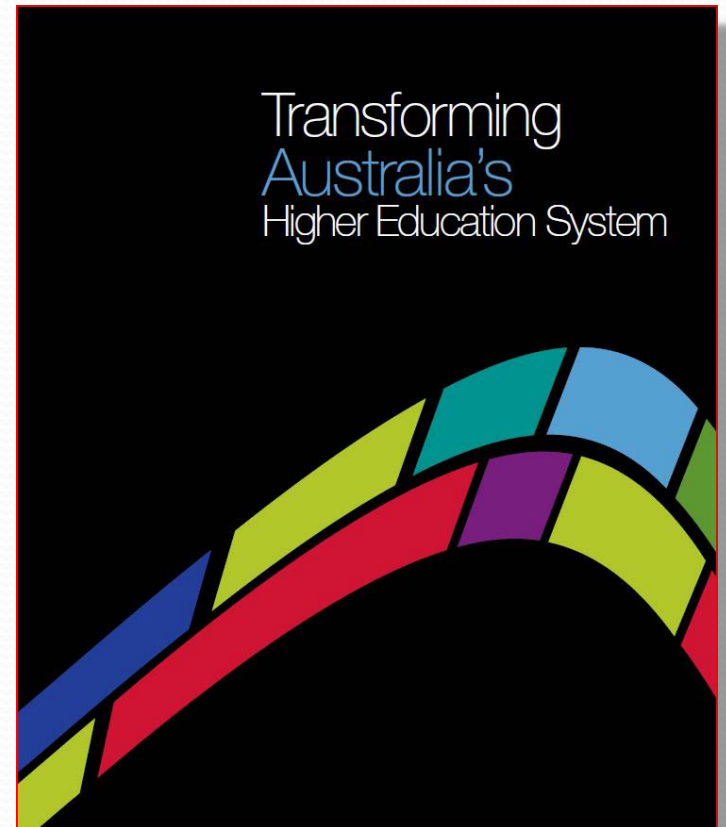
The University of Western Sydney
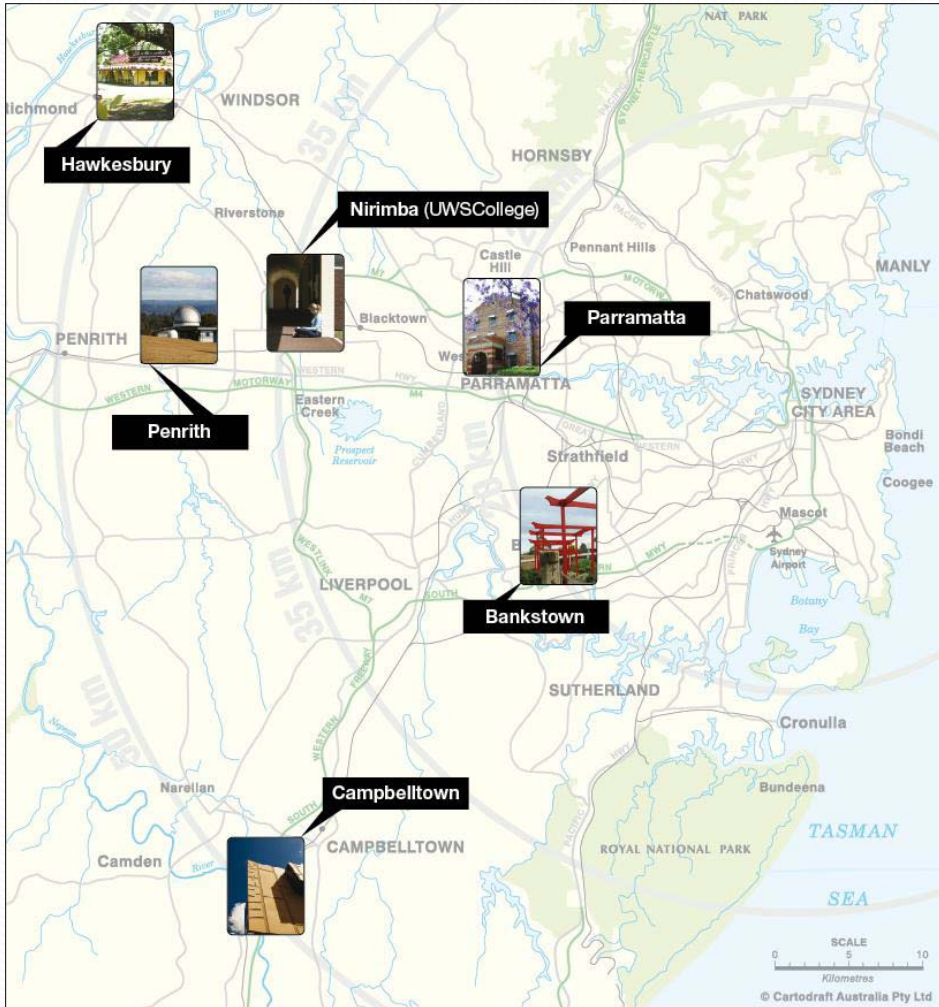
The University

- 37,000 students
  - 88% local
  - 12% international
- 2,500 staff
- 6 campuses
- $588m budget

The Region

- 1.9m people (9% of Australia)
- 170 nationalities
- 3rd largest regional economy
- 9000 km^2

Schools Engagement at UWS

- Low higher education participation rate for the region: 3.2% vs. 5.3% for the rest of Sydney
- UWS students
  - 40% are first in family to enter higher education
  - 21% come from a disadvantaged background
  - 170 nationalities (refugees and migrants)
  - 20% transition from technical and community colleges

Schools Engagement at UWS

- UWS goals: raise aspirations, build confidence and improve academic skills
- Over 500 schools as partners
- UWS students mentor Indigenous and refugee school students
- Senior high school students 'shadow' a UWS student for a day
- Recognition for high achievers at local schools in awards and competitions
- Multiple on-campus programs to introduce school students to university life

Industry Engagement at UWS

- 13% of the nation's businesses (10% of the national GDP) in the region
- More than 50% of small and medium-sized businesses fail in their first year
- Small business owners characterised by low post-secondary education
- UWS College of Business offers
  - Free online education
    - Over 800 students each year work with a local business through the training "toolkit"

Service Learning

Embedded service learning in the undergraduate program

- Over 2,500 students each year work on a business problem with a local business (event planning, marketing plan development, business plan development, market research, and consulting projects)
- IT and graphic design students design web pages and architecture
- Enthusiastically received and supported by State and Federal government agencies

Victoria University

- In western Melbourne: significant historical social and economic disadvantage
  - High unemployment, low post-secondary participation, poor infrastructure, highly multicultural
- Provides vocational training and higher education
- 20% of the students are from low income backgrounds; 41% speak a language other than English at home; 25% work full time
- The region is experiencing
  - Rapid growth and gentrification
  - Transition from low-skilled jobs to knowledge intensive jobs
- Partnership with the Western Bulldogs Football Club
  - 'Bulldogs Friendly Schools Program' where VU student teachers work with school students building leadership skills
  - VU Achievers Award: Scholarships for high achieving school students sponsored by the Club
  - Australian Community Centre for Diabetes (joint partnership with community groups for diabetes treatment and prevention in disadvantaged communities)
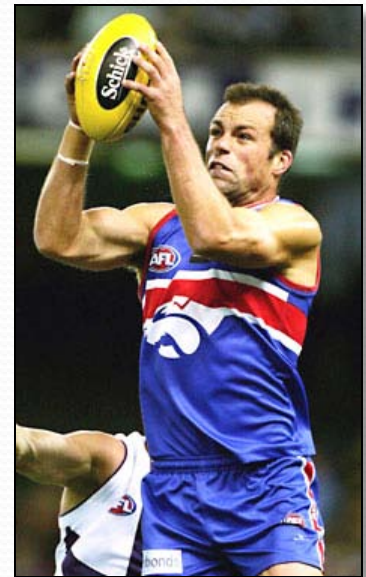
James Cook University

- In northern Queensland: large Indigenous population with very poor education and health outcomes

- **Remote Area Teacher Education Program**
  - Bachelor of Education delivered in remote locations
  - 134 Indigenous graduates to date
  - Develops qualified teachers for remote schools

- **Indigenous Health Careers Access Program**
  - Assists Indigenous students to enter and succeed in programs such as nursing, medicine, pharmacy, dental surgery and others
  - Incorporates English language component

- **Tertiary Access Course**
  - Pathway to undergraduate education for Indigenous students

JCU
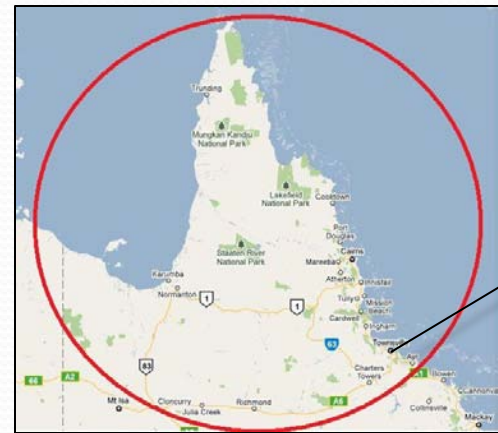
Curtin University of Technology

- **Western Australia**
  - 2.6 million km², 10 times the size of the UK
  - Less than 1 person per square kilometre
  - Nearest large city (>1m people) to capital Perth is over 2,000 km away
  - A third of the state's production is dependent on the mining and resources industry

- **The University**
  - Extensive Applied Research Partnerships (government and private sector)
    - Renewable energy; spatial information, innovative mining; deep exploration; greenhouse gas technologies; ageing, wound management innovation, remote area economic participation
  - Largest Aboriginal enrolment in Australia
    - Community partnerships, flexible tailored programs, travelling teachers: courses in school education, nursing, community development

Curtin University of Technology

- **Curtin Volunteers**
    - 1,000 self-organising student volunteers
    - Industry, school and community partners
    - Focus on remote disadvantaged communities
- **John Curtin Weekend**
    - Students travel to 37 separate communities, 40 buses at a time
    - Activities include repairing, painting, tree-planting and supporting community organisations
    - Student-led and managed; University supported
- **Go Global**
    - 100 students at a time travel to Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe
    - Work with children with disabilities

Lessons Learned

Internal

- Adopt a strategic point of view
- Take a long term perspective
- "Think globally, act locally"
- Establish a comfortable 'fit' with the University's mission
- Invest University money
- Invest staff time
- Embed engagement over time in teaching and research

External

- Develop a clear understanding of mutual benefits with community partners
- Build regional networks and alliances
- Be culturally congruent
- Be locally meaningful
- Involve political representatives and interests (nearly 40 state and federal electorates)