

La Trobe University's strategy for regional Victoria

Indigenous Acknowledgement

La Trobe University acknowledges that our regional campuses are located on the lands of many traditional custodians in Victoria. We recognise their ongoing connection to the land and value their unique contribution to the University and wider Australian society. La Trobe University is committed to providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, both as individuals and communities, through teaching and learning, research and community partnerships across all our campuses.

About this strategy

This plan should be read in conjunction with the *La Trobe University Strategic Plan 2020-2030*, which provides the overall strategic direction for the University and for the way we will operate as a multi campus university. These renewed strategies are necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent effects on our community, the way we work and the finances of the University. This strategy is written in the context of becoming a smaller, more sharply focussed institution.

Summary

The University is committed to being Victoria's only state-wide university by maintaining our network of physical campuses in, Albury-Wodonga, Bendigo, Melbourne, Mildura and Shepparton.

Regional campuses are central to La Trobe's identity, mission and purpose and have a vital role in the future of their regional and surrounding rural communities, increasing access to higher education and research and facilitating strong partnerships with schools, TAFE, local government and industry.

Our objectives are to:

- increase participation in higher education in our regional and surrounding rural communities
- increase the number of students enrolled at or supported by our regional campuses
- support the ongoing development of regional and rural communities

A COVID-19 affected world will create new opportunities for the University, as those who once sought higher education beyond their communities may now seek to study locally. In addition, more mobile and digitally enhanced work practices are opening possibilities for population to relocate from metropolitan areas to regional cities. State and Federal government policy supporting regional economic development, growth in student places at regional campuses through the Job Ready Graduates Package, and easing of drought in these areas, will contribute to the vibrance and opportunities in our communities and help to address the pre-existing economic and social inequalities. We will harness our strengths in teaching and research, and our proven capacity to make a difference to things people care about, to meet the needs of diverse students and partners.

La Trobe's unique offering in regional Victoria includes our location in thriving communities, strong industry connections, smaller study cohorts and excellent graduate employment outcomes. We will extend our promotion of this attractive combination to students from across Australia and internationally and encourage them to come to university in regional Victoria, and benefit from these opportunities.

Building on the University's founding mission "*to serve the community of Victoria for the purposes of higher education¹*", we will increase the number of students studying at, or supported by, our regional campuses. We will do this by providing a wide "front door" that allows more people to access a university education - from students just completing Year 12, to those with work and life experience who are seeking to retrain or upskill, and students who want to work while studying.

Our TAFE and school partners are central to this plan. We will continue to work closely with TAFE to provide seamless pathways between vocational and higher education. Deep partnerships with schools will become even more important as they navigate the impact of COVID-19 on the education of a generation of primary and secondary students.

We will focus on campus delivery in areas of strength and where there is good student demand and workforce need. We will also offer a wide range of high-quality online courses enhanced by on-campus facilities, student support, and employability pathways to local industry. Online offerings will expand choice and increase access for students in rural and remote areas. We will provide a vibrant campus experience, with relevant learning support for all students enriched with connections to local industry and community partners.

We will support La Trobe researchers to partner with industry, government and our regional communities to undertake research to address issues of local, national and global significance.

Our campuses in Albury-Wodonga, Bendigo, Mildura and Shepparton will continue to be places where our presence makes a real difference to regional and rural communities. Our talented workforce remains our most valuable asset. Our staff are embedded in their communities and create the nurturing, collegiate environment that welcomes students and community alike.

Regional Context

Regional campuses are central to La Trobe's identity, mission and purpose and to the communities we serve. Our goal to promote economic and social transformation finds its strongest expression in regional and rural communities, where we have the highest proportion of first in family students, and participation in higher education is less than half that of Melbourne. Our regional campuses have a significant role to play in addressing education and health inequalities. La Trobe's reputation for advancing the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals rests heavily on the work we do in the regions towards gender equity, good health and well-being, and decent work and economic growth. These campuses are also important points of access to higher education and research for rural and remote communities. Our regional campuses are also well placed to collaborate with Indigenous communities to lift rates of Indigenous student participation and success and to increase the number of Indigenous staff.

In recent years, student numbers at regional campuses have faltered. Our market research shows the Year 12 market has declined and that regional students value choice and flexibility, with the market increasingly captured by other universities offering courses online. These changing dynamics have resulted in a loss in market share for La Trobe and a subsequent financial loss that is unsustainable.

Meanwhile, the COVID-19 disruption has changed the way we understand digital and face to face engagement and the way we view spaces around us. This disruption offers us opportunities for new market segments, as the appeal of living and working in regional communities increases in a COVID-affected world. We must adjust to these changing circumstances and become accessible to wider cohorts of students. There are many TAFE

¹ "*La Trobe's founding mission was, and remains, to serve the community of Victoria for the purposes of higher education, for the education, economic, social and cultural benefit of Victorians and for wider Australian and international communities.*" Preamble, La Trobe University Act

graduates who seek progression to university, a large mature age cohort seeking to upskill, and professionals who require short courses and postgraduate qualifications.

The educational requirements of rural and regional communities demand flexible and innovative models and cooperation with other education providers. We need to cater for diverse student needs and expectations and deliver outcomes for rural and regional communities that contribute to workforce demands, economic growth and social transformation.

Importantly, our campuses in Albury-Wodonga, Bendigo, Mildura and Shepparton are located in unique communities, each with a particular configuration of population, geography, industry, opportunity and aspiration. Building on our embedded position in the community, each campus will continue to be shaped distinctively to deliver outcomes that are relevant and enabling in a COVID-affected world. However, we cannot do this alone, we rely on the support and advice of our communities.

To that end, each campus is supported by a strong Regional Advisory Board (RAB) comprised of community and industry leaders who are appointed by the Vice-Chancellor. The RAB is an important source of advice to the University on local priorities.

We also have almost 25,000 La Trobe graduates living within 50kms of one of our regional campuses,² many of whom are influential community members. Together with the Alumni and Advancement Office, we will deepen our engagement with our contactable alumni and seek imaginative ways to reach those who are currently uncontactable. We will harness their loyalty and expertise to enrich the student experience with opportunities such as mentoring, guest lecturing, work integrated learning, graduate employment or donating funds to support our students.

What we will do

To strengthen our commitment to our campuses and communities in Albury-Wodonga, Bendigo, Mildura and Shepparton, our objectives are to:

- utilise the opportunity provided by the Job Ready Graduates Package to increase enrolments through close partnerships with schools, non-ATAR pathways, new pathways using the Tertiary Preparation Program and deep collaboration with TAFEs (Bendigo TAFE, GOTAFE, SuniTAFE and Wodonga TAFE)
- provide students studying on campus, mixed mode or online access to campus facilities, learning hubs and wellbeing services, together with campus-based, industry-based and virtual activities focussed on employability and connection with local industry
- provide a vibrant and enabling campus experience supporting students to achieve their goals
- add global and multicultural learning experiences through international exchange or internationalisation@home programs
- support research activity that is aligned to La Trobe's areas of research focus and capability, and activate opportunities for industry engagement in research, connecting local industries and communities with expertise across the broader university
- strengthen and develop mutually beneficial partnerships in our communities that enrich student experience and support learning and graduate outcomes, utilise the campus facilities, and enable research and innovation.

² Alumni located within 50km of a regional campus, including non-contactable, as at 17 Sept 2020

A wide front door

We will provide many pathways to the University and welcome students from all backgrounds through our wide “front door”. Our regional campuses offer a local experience that opens global opportunities. Graduates from our regional campuses have better employment outcomes than their metropolitan counterparts³. Our campuses provide an enabling and welcoming environment with excellent learning support and smaller cohorts, which facilitate learning and social connection. We will continue to support students to develop the skills, experience and connections so, when they graduate, they are ready for their chosen profession.

Year 11 Pathway Program

The Year 11 Pathway Program in Albury-Wodonga and the Bradford Shepparton Pathway Program have succeeded in increasing higher education participation and enrolments at La Trobe. Learning from the success of these programs, and the modifications introduced in response to COVID-19 restrictions, a school pathways program will be extended to Mildura and Bendigo.

Partnerships with Schools

Partnerships with schools will remain vital and we will seek to deepen and extend these partnerships, and expand pathways to our campuses through promoting Achieve at La Trobe, Prepare For La Trobe, and Aspire to optimise opportunities for students completing either VCE/HSC or VCAL/TVET. We will continue to work collaboratively with our partner schools to seek innovative ways to engage with their students and improve accessibility of higher education.

Non-school leavers

For non-school leavers we will develop stronger and innovative pathways using elements of the online and modular Tertiary Preparation Program (TPP), diplomas, single subject enrolments, Indigenous pathways and pathways in partnership with TAFEs. We recognise many of our students will require flexible options to enable them to meet work and other life commitments.

Strategic Partnerships with TAFE

Our TAFE partnerships, built on parity of esteem, are central to our plan. Although we acknowledge TAFE and university have different missions, we can work together to improve pathways for students into higher education and develop educational plans that address the workforce needs of our communities.

Students will be placed at the centre of our TAFE partnerships. We will build on our experience with the dual enrolment program, which increased transition from our partner TAFEs to La Trobe degrees four-fold. Our objective will be to provide innovative and seamless learning pathways for students between TAFE and La Trobe. We will minimise administrative complexity and equip students to progress readily along these pathways and formalise agreements to deliver integrated post-secondary education across the qualification framework from Certificate 1 to PhD. Students will be the focus throughout.

With our TAFE partners we will:

- collaborate to ensure accessibility of post-secondary education
- work together to develop *TAFE to Uni* and *Uni to TAFE* pathways that are simple to navigate
- ensure students make informed choices about the right course of study for them, the study pathways available, and the employment outcomes to which they lead
- ensure wherever possible the most efficient use of resources and public assets.

³ GOS 2019

Course Portfolio

As we focus our resources strategically, the University must bring to regional communities a course portfolio that is attractive to prospective students, supports workforce needs for undergraduate, postgraduate and short courses, facilitates pathways from schools and TAFE, and is delivered to suit full time and part time students, including students combining study with work.

In consultation with Provosts and Schools, the course portfolio of each campus will be revised. The Colleges and Schools will be responsible for developing and delivering an attractive course portfolio and ensuring consistent quality. We will focus on on-campus and mixed mode delivery in areas of strength and where there is good student demand and workforce need. We will offer high-quality online courses to replace unsustainable face-to-face offerings and to expand access to other disciplines, enhanced by access to campus facilities, student support, and employability pathways to local industry.

Student experience and support

La Trobe University fosters a culture that is safe, inclusive and high performing, in which all individuals are valued, respected and enabled to succeed. The smaller scale of regional campuses and their close links with local community foster a unique student experience that is friendly, caring, and student-centred, providing a campus experience that enables students to thrive. This strength will be developed further and extended to regional students studying online who wish to access facilities, services and social activities on campus.

Retention, Employability and wellbeing

- Intensive advising presence at each campus to ensure all students are supported to connect to the services they require (on campus or virtually) and to provide case management support
- Campus-based specialist that provides face to face counselling and coordinates wellbeing and prevention programs connected to the local community
- Tailored program of employability workshops and industry engagement activities to support students to build their skills and transition into employment
- Advocacy and engagement provided in partnership with our Student Association that supports community building on the campus.

Learning support

- A Learning Hub will provide study support and English language assistance at each campus
- Support to students with disabilities
- Connection to wider network of learning support specialists that provide discipline aligned workshops (on campus, mixed mode or online) that support and enhance learning experience including building on existing mathematics, statistics, chemistry, biology, coding hubs to expand into new disciplines
- A new model will leverage the existing Subject Support Tutor program and connect with relevant academic staff expertise.

Regional Connect – to enhance student experience & employability

Regional Connect will deliver unique set of on campus and virtual activities for students relevant to the local context and linked to place, designed to enrich their experience, enhance their employability and connect them with local industry. *Regional Connect* is available for students studying online, mixed mode or on campus, and living within travelling distance of one of our regional campuses. *Regional Connect* activities will be contributed to by all parts of the University and curated and delivered at campus level. We will introduce our students to each other, to local business and industry partners and enhance academic engagement, social connection and employability.

Regional Connect will offer students:

- access to a vibrant campus, its services, facilities and social life
- connections with fellow students and the student association
- links them to local leaders, industry sectors, businesses, and alumni, including through industry connector events, panel discussions and site visits
- enhanced graduate employability by supporting students with local offerings including work-integrated learning, internships, student placements, volunteering, mentoring and Industry PhDs
- facilitated workshops with local professionals focussed on application of theory, concepts and skills in practice
- public events and lectures that provide thought leadership to provoke conversation and ideas, encourage our communities on campus to meet our students, and add to the cultural enrichment of the region.

Indigenous education

Working with the Office of Indigenous Strategy and Education, we are committed to improving education, health and wellbeing outcomes for Indigenous Australians in the regional communities in which we work. Regional campuses will connect more closely with Indigenous communities to improve enrolment, retention and graduate employment outcomes, and to seek opportunities for research collaborations.

- At each campus we will seek to further develop our collaboration with local Indigenous organisations and communities, to progress the role of Elders and community advisory groups and ensure that our campuses are welcoming, inclusive and culturally safe
- Learning from work at our Shepparton campus with Indigenous groups, local schools and TAFE partners, we will develop and support innovative pathways to post-school education for Indigenous students.

International education and engagement

We will be deeply connected to our local communities while attracting students from all over Australia and around the world. We seek to mobilise our regional campus network to deliver unique and rewarding experiences for our international students and international engagement opportunities for our students as well as regional business and community partners.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we had secured the greatest number of Destination Australia scholarships of any university and policy changed to extend Post Study Work Rights in regional areas by an additional year. These Federal government initiatives set the context in which we began implementing a comprehensive strategy to grow and fully support international enrolments in regional Victoria. This strategy for international education and engagement, and supporting regional economic development, remains a priority.

Regional research – building on the strength of our regional footprint

La Trobe’s research strategy will concentrate our research effort and investment in a way that directs support towards research that has meaningful impact with reduced resources – to shape La Trobe as a smaller but stronger institution dedicated to serving the public good.

Building on the strength of our regional footprint, our model for regional research will be based upon:

- maintaining and growing established and productive campus-based research that is aligned to La Trobe’s new areas of research focus and capability; and
- activating opportunities for industry engagement in research, teaching and learning through our campuses as Collaboration Hubs, by recognising the key role regional campuses play in bringing local industries and their communities in contact with expertise across the broader university.

Through this approach our regional campuses will:

- foster research innovation across the University’s areas of research focus with the potential to draw on regional experience and impact regional communities
- enable connections between researchers based at all of our campuses to enrich their experience of La Trobe and facilitate access to the people and infrastructure that can support their strategic research endeavours
- provide campus co-location opportunities for local businesses
- connect a network of regional industry partners to specialised hubs in the Bundoora-based Research and Innovation Precinct
- connect with strategic partnerships (corporate, health, education, global) to deliver solutions and a positive impact in regional Victoria and neighbouring communities
- facilitate effective engagement between research teams across our multi-campus network and with our strategic global research partners
- continue to support and develop regional start-ups and entrepreneurship by establishing focused innovation eco-systems
- encourage metropolitan industry to access regional competencies and establish regional partners that could test and validate new product offerings

Established and productive campus-based areas of research focus and capability

<i>Albury-Wodonga</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food, agriculture and environment • Health and wellbeing
<i>Bendigo</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biomedical and health sciences • Health and Wellbeing

Key industry/community partnerships

<i>Albury-Wodonga</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and wellbeing – <i>Aged care</i> • Food, agriculture and environment – <i>Environment and water</i> • Society, education and social change – <i>Traditional Owner Organisations, Schools, Arts, Government and Community</i>
<i>Bendigo</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biomedical and health sciences • Health and wellbeing – <i>Rural health</i> • Digital innovation and transformation – <i>Engineering, Industry 4.0, AI and IoT</i> • Society, education and social change – <i>Traditional Owner Organisations, Schools, Arts, Government and Community</i>
<i>Mildura</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food, agriculture and environment – <i>Mallee Regional Innovation Centre</i> • Health and wellbeing – <i>Community and Indigenous health</i> • Society, education and social change – <i>Traditional Owner Organisations, Schools, Arts, Government and Community</i>
<i>Shepparton</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food, agriculture and environment – <i>Agriculture and food engineering</i> • Health and wellbeing - <i>including indigenous health</i> • Society, education and social change – <i>Traditional Owner Organisations, Schools, Arts, Government and Community</i>

Collaboration Hubs – to link community and industry and the University

La Trobe's goal is to be known as a pre-eminent university for innovation and industry collaboration. Our regional campuses already play a significant role in connecting our communities and the University for mutual benefit. Our regional partnerships are one of the University's greatest and most unique strengths. In recognition of these strengths, we will formalise our regional collaboration activities through an agreed framework that clearly articulates points of connection and accountability across the University.

Collaboration Hubs will connect staff and students to local communities, employers, industry and alumni. In turn, the hubs will connect local industries and community with the campus and the wider University to facilitate mutually beneficial opportunities for learning and research. *Collaboration Hubs* will play a key role in identifying opportunities for *Regional Connect* activities as well as Research and Industry Engagement.

We will be mindful of our limitations as a smaller institution and respectful of our partners. We will only take up opportunities that are aligned to our strategy and can be appropriately resourced and serviced. We will be realistic and clear about what we can and cannot do. We will draw on key industry partners and alumni to inform their development.

Collaboration Hubs will identify:

- opportunities to enrich students' learning and cohort experience with activities such as industry engagement, guest lectures and encourage Schools to use the regional campuses for place-based subjects
- student offerings including work-integrated learning, internships, student placements, volunteering and mentoring opportunities and Industry PhDs, ensuring our students become highly employable graduates
- local employers to support post study work rights for International students
- research expertise, innovation, consultation services and research infrastructure platforms to regional industry across our multi-campus network
- partners to develop their staff with postgraduate and relevant short courses (award and non-award)
- co-location opportunities for regional business, which in turn add to campus vibrancy
- regional industry partners to connect to specialised hubs in the Bundoora-based Research and Innovation Precinct
- facilitate philanthropic activity that supports students and research

How we will work

The University strategy for regional activity aligns with regional markets and communities. Every component of our university system is involved in delivering this strategy. Coordination and accountability across the university, and management of interdependencies with functional strategies and operations, are essential to achieve the goal of growth at regional campuses.

- The course portfolio of each campus will be developed by the Colleges and Schools and endorsed by University processes that ensure the portfolio is aligned with this strategy and the University's overall learning and teaching strategy Course architecture to enable TAFE pathways DVC (Education)
- Outreach will be managed in collaboration with DVC (Students)
- Promoting regional campuses and reaching the distinctive segments of the regional market will be managed in collaboration Marketing and Recruitment and La Trobe International. Market segments

that we must attract include: school leaver, international students, TAFE pathway, students with work and life experience, for on campus, mixed mode and online courses

- Selection, admission and timetabling to meet load and cater to both fulltime and part time students, including students combining work and study, in a competitive market will be managed in collaboration with DVC (Students)
- Student experience, support and employability programs will be managed in collaboration with DVC (Students) DVC (Education) and CFOO (Information Services) to ensure access to facilities and services extends beyond business hours to accommodate students who combine work and study
- Social connection across the student cohort and advocacy will be managed in collaboration with DVC (Students) and the Student Association
- Engagement will be managed in partnership with Office of the Vice-Chancellor, DVC (Research & Engagement), DVC (Students), DVCI/PVCI, Provosts, Schools, and Alumni & Advancement
- Research and Industry engagement will be managed in collaboration with DVC (Research & Engagement), Provosts and Schools.

The successful implementation of the *University Strategy for Regional Activity* and regional campus plans is a whole of University responsibility. In recognition of the complex interdependencies upon which success depends, the Strategy will be monitored through Regional Committee, University Admission and Selection Group, Course Portfolio and Scholarships Committee, Coursework Committee and Research Strategy Committee. We will also follow up with Provosts and Heads of Schools regularly and closely monitor all relevant student experience MPIs, including NPS, SFS, SES, to ensure they are comparable to performance at Bundoora.

Cultural Qualities

La Trobe's culture is our most enduring and valued asset. We offer students and staff a place that is safe, inclusive, values all its members equally, welcomes people from around the world, and is academically high performing. We are an exemplar in our sector for gender equality and inclusivity. People are proud to be associated with La Trobe because it is a university that knows its communities and makes a genuine difference to them.

We take our Cultural Qualities seriously:



Connected

Connecting the students and communities we serve to the world outside.



Innovative

Tackling the big issues of our time to transform the lives of our students and society.



Accountable

Striving for excellence in everything we do, holding each other to account, and working to the highest standards.



Care

We care about what we do and why we do it, because we believe in the power of education and research to transform lives and global society.