

# La Trobe University Victorian Election Priorities

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## Addressing critical skills needs and research priorities in Victoria

### ENQUIRIES

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## The La Trobe Story

The lands on which La Trobe's campuses are located belong to Traditional Owners across multiple language groups who have observed a rich array of cultural traditions over many tens of thousands of years. We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Traditional Owners and their elders, past and present.

La Trobe's vision and global position today is deeply connected to the strength of our past.

Established with the mission of serving Victoria's growing community in Melbourne's North, and expanding more deeply into the regions over ensuing years, La Trobe is Victoria's only genuinely state-wide university. Our campus network plays a vital role in the future of local communities, increasing access to higher education and research and facilitating strong partnerships with schools, TAFE, local government and industry.

Through its history, our university has always had a strong sense of social justice and public engagement, undertaking teaching and research that is highly relevant to our community, and to the Asia-pacific region.

The global impact of our teaching, research and resource use has been internationally recognised. We are ranked in the top 20 globally for our contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and top five for gender equity.

Domestically, we enrol more Australian students from equity groups than the national average, alongside international students from 120 countries around the world. A quarter of our students have a regional, rural or remote background and almost half of our students are the first in their family to study at university.

This makes us one of the most accessible and diverse universities in Australia. At the same time, we are ranked in the top 300 of universities globally. No other Australian university combines equity and social impact with globally recognised excellence as well as La Trobe.

Whilst our history is strong, our vision and ambition for the future is clear. We are currently undertaking the most comprehensive redevelopment of a university campus ever attempted in Australia. Our goal is to throw our Bundoora campus open to the community and to create a thriving 'city' in which the community can live, work, play and learn. We aim to attract industry to co-locate with us for mutual benefit, so that we can find solutions together and expand opportunities for our students and researchers. This is our University City of the Future.



We have focused our research investment on our strengths in sustainable food and agriculture; resilient environments and communities; social change and equity; healthy people, family and communities; and understanding and preventing disease. We use our campuses, especially at Bundoora, to attract industry partners to work with us, especially in food and agriculture, digital technologies and health, sport, and wellbeing.

In our teaching and curriculum, we offer an education that is relevant and grounded in real world learning and codesigned to meet industry and community needs. La Trobe boasts one of the largest proportions of health students of any university in Australia. We offer our students maximum flexibility of how and where they learn, the opportunity to design their programs of study around their interests and talents and provide tailored support to ensure their success. We partner with employers to provide our students with the opportunity to apply their learning in a work setting so that they are better prepared to enter the workforce. More than 90 per cent of our undergraduates find employment within four months of graduating and we are 7<sup>th</sup> in Australia for employer satisfaction with our graduates.

We will continue to partner with universities globally that share our commitments to making a difference through the real-world impact of education and research.

The benefits our university will bring well into the future are real.

## **Our plan to address skills shortages in Victoria**

As a leading state-wide higher education provider in Victoria, La Trobe plays an important role in providing the education and skills needed to meet workforce challenges of today and into the future.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken the world, and its profound impacts have extended to Australia's higher education system, including La Trobe. Its effects have also exacerbated skills and workforce shortages in critical areas of the State's economy, such as teaching and health.

La Trobe has been planning how we assist efforts to build economic and social recovery and support society to emerge from the pandemic stronger and more resilient.

Our proposals are part of a long-term plan and vision to expand our impact. Not only will they provide more higher education and research opportunities for aspiring Australians, they will deliver local, regional, and economic benefits across and beyond the communities we serve:

1. Australian Food Innovation Centre, Bundoora,
2. La Trobe's five-point plan to address critical skills shortages in health,
3. Supporting our communities and regions, and
4. Investing in higher education infrastructure.

## 1. Australian Food Innovation Centre, Bundoora

Our vision is for La Trobe's Bundoora campus to be the home of agri-food and fibre research innovation in Australia. The Australian Food Innovation Centre (AFIC) will bring together the combined expertise of La Trobe and CSIRO to enable onsite collaboration with the food industry to meet industry challenges and unlock the growing economic potential of the sector. This significant project will enable end to end food research and manufacturing capability across the supply chain, from production, manufacturing to export, research and education. It will connect directly with food producers, food manufacturers and food businesses across Melbourne's North and regional Victoria and enable the agri-food sector to access new research and technology, test new products and upskill.

The vision for AFIC is the result of consultation with industry, research partners and the community to create a dedicated facility that encapsulates the research to commercialisation value chain. La Trobe is uniquely placed to deliver a dedicated centre and we know from successful bio-medical precincts, such as Parkville, that successful coordination occurs when co-location is achieved.

This significant project will grow jobs and economic activity in Victoria's food and agriculture sector, generating \$60 million of economic activity to Victoria in the first year and creating a minimum of 2000 to 3000 jobs in the sector over its first decade. The Victorian Government committed \$1.5 million in its 2022-23 Budget to develop the business case for AFIC with La Trobe and CSIRO.

**AFIC is a major project of national significance. Business planning is underway and yet to be complete, but we know that a major financial commitment from each of the State and Federal governments and La Trobe will be needed to make AFIC a reality.**



Initial concept drawing – The Australian Food Innovation Centre, La Trobe University, Bundoora

## 2. La Trobe's Five-Point Plan to Address Critical Skills Shortages in Health

La Trobe graduates more than 2000 health care students each year. While we enjoy strong demand from prospective students, there is an opportunity to attract and train even more students through additional government incentives, including former or retired health care professionals who wish to return to the workforce.

La Trobe's five-point plan to address health sector skills shortages includes:

1. New, state of the art nursing simulation labs in metro and regional Victoria which will allow us to train additional nursing graduates,
2. Fast-tracking the return of former nurses and allied health workers to the workforce,
3. Attracting career-changers to the Nursing profession through a new 'Master of Nursing Practice Nexus',
4. Establishing the Rural Clinical Health School in Shepparton with La Trobe, Goulburn Valley Health and GoTAFE, and
5. Introducing a new biomedical science degree in the Mallee region and supporting the expansion of La Trobe's successful Rural Medical Pathway.

### **Expanded nursing labs in metro and regional Victoria to enable 200 additional nursing graduates per year from 2025**

New nursing simulation labs at La Trobe's campuses in Bundoora, Albury-Wodonga, Mildura and Bendigo will help to meet the critical need for more nursing graduates in metro and regional Victoria.

Expanded nursing simulation capacity, featuring leading edge technology, will mean that more nursing students can be provided with additional hands-on experiences to build skills before commencing hospital placements.

An investment in new state-of-the art facilities will also facilitate greater benefit from the State Government's recently announced \$270 million nursing and midwifery training package, and enable La Trobe to support around 200 additional nursing graduates from 2025. This investment will provide:

- A new 10 bed nursing simulation laboratory and five-bed midwifery simulation laboratory and treatment room at the Bendigo campus;
- Two new nursing simulation labs at the Albury Wodonga campus; including an eight-bed and four-bed ward and treatment room;
- Two new four-bed nursing simulation labs and an observation room at the Mildura campus; and
- Two nursing simulation labs including a 24-bed nursing ward at the Bundoora campus.

**La Trobe is seeking an investment of \$12 million from the Victorian Government to support La Trobe's capital contribution of \$5 million to construct new nursing simulation labs at our Bundoora, Bendigo, Mildura and Albury-Wodonga campuses (Mildura \$2.9 million, Albury-Wodonga \$1.86 million, Bendigo \$4.8 million and Bundoora \$7.44 million). This will support an additional 200 nursing graduates per year from 2025.**

## **Fast-tracking the return of former nurses and allied health workers to the workforce**

### **Enabling former nurses to return to the workforce within 4 months**

La Trobe offers a 16-week short course 'Re-entry to Practice', which provides students with the necessary requirements to apply to the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia for re-entry to the workforce as a Division One Registered Nurse (12 weeks online coursework followed by a four-week clinical placement).

Course fees and the costs associated with the clinical placement component (per student currently \$8,250 for the course and \$1,353.60 for the placement) are currently a barrier inhibiting many former nurses from taking advantage of this opportunity. Dedicated funding would remove this barrier to participation and fast-track the return of nurses to the profession.

La Trobe has the capacity to train 240 former nurses annually, which would provide an immediate fast-tracked solution to dire workforce shortages across Victoria especially in regional hospitals.

**La Trobe is seeking an investment of \$2.4 million to cover the costs associated with returning 240 former nurses to the workforce.**

### **Returning Allied Health Professionals to practice within 3-6 months**

When an Allied Health Practitioner (AHPs) has been absent from professional practice for a number of years, there is typically a requirement for a detailed plan to return to practice ensuring the professional is safe and competent to re-enter the health workforce. While this is crucial to manage public risk, this process is difficult for currently unregistered practitioners to navigate.

La Trobe's proposal is to manage a safe and rapid return to practice of unregistered AHPs via a detailed programme including an initial assessment of existing skills, provision of coursework and professional development to cover skills gaps, supervised placements and bursaries for living costs.

We believe this is the fastest and most cost-effective way to address existing AHP workforce shortfalls in Victoria. Disciplines that have the highest shortfall, alongside the highest growth projections in coming years could be prioritised (as determined by the National Skills Commission estimates, May 2022). Practitioners could be returned to the workforce within 3-6 months, which is considerably faster than if they were to undertake this process under their own steam.

**La Trobe's program to return 120 AHPs each year would require an annual investment of \$4.2 million to support returning practitioners across the Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Social Work, Podiatry, Speech Pathology, Audiology and Orthoptics disciplines.**

## **Master of Nursing Practice Nexus - attracting career-changers to the nursing profession**

A new regionally based postgraduate entry Master of Nursing Practice Nexus would provide career changers with an appealing opportunity to enter the nursing profession, enabling participants to be eligible for nursing registration in just two years.

Building on [La Trobe's successful Nexus model](#) to address teacher workforce shortages in regional Victoria, La Trobe believes the model could be equally applicable to and successful in helping to attract career changers to the nursing profession.

The Master of Nursing Practice Nexus would be delivered with a blend of online and face to face modules, with the latter mode entailing intensives on rural campuses and placements in regional,

rural and remote health services, enabling people to work while they study. In line with the Nexus teaching model, students would receive a payment equivalent to a part time nursing assistant in year one and a sponsored position as a Registered Undergraduate Student of Nursing in year two.

The cost, including financial support in the first and second years, clinical placements with local regional health services (800 hours), and a bursary to support students with living costs would be in the order of \$48,000 per student. These graduates would then be bonded to the sponsoring regional health service for a period of two years including a place in the local graduate program.

**To attract career changers to the nursing profession, La Trobe is seeking \$10 million over for four years to train 200 students across regional Victoria in a Master of Nursing Practice.**

### **Establishing the Rural Clinical Health School in Shepparton**

La Trobe, Goulburn Valley Health and GOTAFE have been collaborating towards the establishment of a purpose-built Clinical Health School in Shepparton. Building a rural health training pipeline in Shepparton will help alleviate long-term workforce shortages and support the provision of sustainable health and wellbeing services for Shepparton and the Goulburn Valley. There is currently no dedicated nursing and allied clinical school co-located within the Goulburn Valley Health hospital.

The Goulburn Valley Health and La Trobe Clinical Health School is expected to:

- increase the number of nursing and midwifery undergraduate students by more than 40 per cent,
- increase postgraduate nursing students by more than 20 per cent,
- increase the number of allied health undergraduate students by 30 per cent,
- create career opportunities for the future health workforce, and
- provide additional clinical support for new graduates.

**An investment of \$25 million from the State Government would unlock financial contributions from La Trobe and GV Health to deliver a new \$30.7 million Rural Clinical Health School in Shepparton.**

### **Introducing a new biomedical science degree in the Mallee region and supporting the expansion of La Trobe's successful Rural Medical Pathway.**

Our dedicated rural medical training program with the University of Melbourne's Shepparton campus lifts the aspiration of rural students to pursue and practice medicine in regional Australia. We know that doctors who train local remain local. Since the program has been established, demand from rural students has grown each year, with applications far exceeding the small number of places available.

For the last two years, La Trobe has been working on an exciting proposal to introduce a new rural medical training pathway to Mildura. The construction and fit out of a new biomedical science laboratory in Mildura would help pave the way for La Trobe to deliver a new biomedical science degree from Mildura in 2024, and position us competitively to access additional regional medical CSP from the Commonwealth Government.

A biomedical wet lab including state of the art technology will support a new biomedical science degree and introduce science teaching in Mildura that is currently not available.

**An investment of \$3.6 million for a new biomedical science laboratory in Mildura will support La Trobe to introduce a new biomedical science degree in Mildura, and take us a step closer to realising our aspirations to expand our rural medical pathway.**

### 3. Supporting our Communities and Regions

We are a university known for making a positive difference in the lives of our students, partners, and communities. We are working to align and expand our pathways programs with schools and other training providers as well as support and enhance access to significant cultural collections.

#### **Expanding La Trobe's Regional Pathways Program**

For over 6 years, La Trobe's Regional Pathway place-based program has proven our capacity to motivate students to finish Year 12 and boost participation in higher education. It inspires and prepares local school leavers in their final two years of high school for university entry. The Pathway Program is currently delivered in partnership with regional and rural schools, community and industry leaders in Albury-Wodonga and Shepparton. The Shepparton program is made possible only with philanthropic support from the Gillespie Family Foundation.

In the regional communities served by La Trobe, only 30 per cent of students typically enrol in further education. In areas such as Shepparton, the rate is even lower at just 13 per cent. Our Pathways participants are engaging in further education at more than twice that rate – as high as 78 per cent.

**A \$10 million funding commitment from an incoming Government would leverage philanthropic funding and expand the Regional Pathways program to all La Trobe regional campuses.**

#### **Dardalis Archives of the Hellenic Diaspora at La Trobe University**

La Trobe University is the proud custodian of the Dardalis Archives of the Hellenic diaspora, documenting the migration of Hellenic communities to Australia. It is one of the largest collections of its kind with over 180,000 items covering a wide variety of subjects on Greek Australian migration, history, religion and culture. The archives have recently moved to a new location on the Bundoora campus.

To enable more members of our community to access this vast collection, La Trobe proposes to digitise priority audio, video, film and costume collections, making this significant collection available to both our local and global community.

**La Trobe seeks \$200,000 to digitise priority items in the collection and would welcome working with an incoming Government on further plans to increase community access to this significant collection.**

#### **Northern Victorian Education Partnership**

La Trobe University has worked closely with TAFEs in regional Victoria over many years. Recognising the potential for a collegial, collaborative and seamless approach to regional education, La Trobe initiated the Northern Victorian Education Partnership, a partnership between the University and SuniTAFE, GOTAFE, Bendigo TAFE and Wodonga Institute of TAFE.

La Trobe has submitted a funding proposal for a pilot program for the Northern Victorian Education Partnership, a combined approach for delivering education and skills training, that will align education, employment outcomes and industry needs across Central and Northern Victoria.

The NVEP pilot program will deliver an evidence-based suite of clear pathways that align education and training opportunities to community and industry priorities for Northern Victoria, boosting participation in education and work, growing regional industry and supporting skills and innovation.

**La Trobe seeks \$400,000 from an incoming Government to establish the Northern Victorian Education Partnership to align education, employment outcomes and industry needs across Central and Northern Victoria.**

## **Centre for Cultural Collections, Bendigo**

The La Trobe University Art Collection was established in 1965, and today is valued in the order of \$27 million. The University has formed a unique three-way partnership with Bendigo Art Gallery and Djaara (Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation) with the aim of preserving the cultural heritage of Bendigo in state-of-the-art collection storage built on principles of environmental sustainability.

Currently all of the partners' collections are held in overcrowded and substandard facilities. Purpose-built storage facilities will enable cultural learnings, education and exceptional exhibitions that attract people to the city. The University is ready to mobilise our education and research resources and partnerships to enable opportunities focused on regional development and reconciliation. The partnership is in the process of commissioning a feasibility study and business case for development.

There is currently no regional service or repository available and collections throughout Victoria are beholden to expensive metropolitan based facilities to achieve extra adequate museum storage and services such as conservation and preparation.

**La Trobe and its partners Bendigo Art Gallery and Djaara, would welcome working with an incoming Government on a plan to establish purpose-built, open-access storage facilities in Bendigo to promote the conservation and public accessibility of these significant Victorian cultural heritage collections.**

## **Support for the diagnosis and early intervention of Autism in Australian children**

La Trobe University's Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC) is Australia's first centre dedicated to autism research. The Centre has a strong focus on knowledge creation and translation, serving to shape policy and practice that improves the lives of autistic people and their families. Researchers at OTARC conduct internationally recognised autism research across the lifespan, including early detection and diagnosis, intervention and supports, and employment and wellbeing programs.

In March 2022, La Trobe was the beneficiary of one of Australia's largest single donations to a tertiary education provider, receiving \$45 million for life-changing research into autism from the late Olga Tennison. The gift is endowed and will be held in perpetuity to support the work of OTARC.

**La Trobe would welcome discussions with an incoming Government about the opportunities associated with the gift to increase evidence-based service provision for autistic individuals and their families.**

## 4. Investing in Higher Education Infrastructure

### Continued Investment in the Victorian Higher Education State Investment Fund

Higher education and research plays a key role in the economic development of regional communities. To drive economic activity and productivity in the regions, co-investment from government is needed to support our shared goals for regional higher education.

La Trobe encourages an incoming Government to consider further rounds and support under the Victorian Higher Education State Investment Fund (VHESIF).

La Trobe has been the beneficiary of funding from VHESIF for key infrastructure projects on our campuses that have furthered our research and teaching in health, agriculture, biotech and digital innovation, delivering ongoing value to the university and its communities. Renewal of this significant funding stream to the university sector will enable the delivery of vital infrastructure projects across universities that may otherwise remain unfunded.

**A dedicated funding stream such as the Victorian Higher Education State Investment Fund for higher education infrastructure will support universities to further leverage social and economic growth and contribute to the national COVID economic recovery. A series of projects to expand La Trobe's facilities at our metropolitan and regional campuses across northern Victoria could benefit from co-investment from an incoming Government and provide direct benefits to local communities.**