



2020/21 Budget Submission

University of New England



Contents

Executive Summary	2
2020-21 Budget Recommendations to Government.....	3
1. A Unique Health Initiative - NEViHN.....	3
2. A New Model of Industry Embedded Higher Education – Tamworth Campus	4
3. Supporting Science Technology Engineering and Maths.....	4
4. Support for Regional Entrepreneurship	5
About the University of New England	6
UNE’s Vision for the Future.....	9
Engagement with Industry.....	11
UNE Tamworth.....	12
Science Technology Engineering Maths	13
The SMART Regions Incubator	14
The SMART Farm Innovation Centre	14
Innovative Short Courses	15
Online Education.....	15
Supporting Creative Arts.....	16
UNE’s Support for the Local Community	16
Conclusion.....	16

Executive Summary

For more than 60 years, the University of New England has delivered educational opportunities that transform lives and build resilient communities. Through flexible online education, community-focused research and unique support for entrepreneurship in a regional context, UNE is providing a strong future for regional Australia and the nation as a whole. Investing in UNE's capability to deliver outcomes for individuals and communities will support the nation as we respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

At our core UNE is an institution that provides opportunity to people who do not fit the mould of the traditional on-campus mode of study in a city university. As such, we are the country's oldest distance education provider and have been refining our online teaching skills and knowledge for decades. Approximately 80% of UNE students' study in online mode. Our expertise in this area came to the forefront this year, with UNE seamlessly transitioning most of our domestic and international students to online study.





UNE's student experience is unrivalled by any other Australia public university – gaining the [highest rating of 5 stars, for the 15th consecutive year](#). Providing quality education, though a comprehensive course offering with industry-leading approaches to teaching, to those seeking to improve and advance their lives is what UNE was created for.

We use our regional perspective and expertise in digital technology to work with our communities and partners on innovative and life-changing projects. We recognise that building the innovation and entrepreneurship required to activate regional economies requires specific types of support – different to the capital city incubation models. Our approach includes a new digitally enabled healthcare model for the region, a Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts & Maths (STEAM) project to foster lifelong learning and help regional children reach their potential, and a successful model of supporting and growing entrepreneurs in the regions. These projects will contribute to the strong future of regional Australia and have broader ranging economic impacts for the country.

UNE is focussed on producing job-ready graduates who are prepared for the ever-evolving employment market. Despite impactful political, environmental and structural challenges, UNE has continued to achieve significant outcomes and maintain a track record of outstanding performance with steady enrolment growth and progressive development of online provision.

As a premier research university, UNE has experienced growth in research funding and impact, which has assisted us in delivering to communities locally, nationally and globally. Most notably we don't just train professionals in agriculture, a field of national interest, but we are one of the country's leading institutions for commercialisation of rural research.

UNE's blueprint for success encompasses:

-  Innovation in Health and Education delivery;
-  Engagement with industry for job-ready graduates;
-  Supporting lifelong education in STEAM development; and
-  Entrepreneurial education, creating job-ready graduates.

Accessibility is central to UNE's educational structure and program-design. We support a significant number of disabled students and recruit one of the largest cohorts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student candidates, thus allowing connection with country and family to sustain them during their studies. We are proud of the diversity of our student community and our success in addressing needs through education and engagement. Today, UNE is extending its reach through the adoption of the latest educational technologies and is recognised as an innovator in flexible online education.

UNE has a strong focus on supporting the local community. Initiatives such as the UNE Festival of Creative Arts, the Boilerhouse Discovery Space project, and specific programs to help migrant communities are cementing our connection to the community.

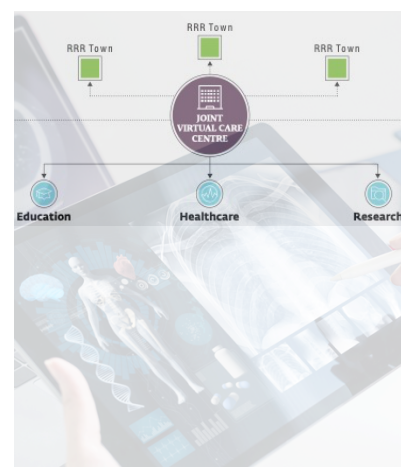
UNE welcomes the announcement of the Higher Education Relief Package but acknowledges the opportunities it affords UNE to support economic and social growth will take a number of years to be realised. In order to make this arrangement functional for UNE, we require some adjustments to our funding and to the design of the new program. We are above the allocated cap in each of the designated and non-designated elements, and thus the flexibility offered under the Relief Package does not alleviate our current situation.

2020-21 Budget Recommendations to Government

Individuals and regional communities across Australia are responding to the disruption of drought, bushfires and COVID-19 through knowledge creation and innovation. UNE is an institution whose DNA is in supporting opportunity through education. Through the accessibility of our teaching, the impact of our research, the innovation we are driving in regional service delivery, and our demonstrated capacity to build entrepreneurship in a regional context, UNE is delivering solutions for those individuals and communities seeking to adapt to our ever-changing world. The Federal Government can support these individuals and communities by investing in the unique capabilities that UNE offers, in particular the following key programs:

1. A Unique Health Initiative - NEViHN

UNE has developed a unique educational and health offering through the [New England Virtual Health Network](#). NEViHN is an innovative, digitally enabled network supporting the delivery of in-place education and healthcare, and a sustainable regional, rural and remote medicine and health workforce. By improving access to services, the NEViHN will not only enhance quality of life in regional and remote communities but, by reducing hospital admissions, also reduce the overall cost of the health care system. It is estimated that the net benefits of the NEViHN project will amount to \$18.3 million per year by year 10 of the project, equivalent to a Business Case Ratio (BCR) of 1:1.69.



NEViHN now includes a virtual care solution for responding to COVID-19 utilizing the best technology available globally and clinical solutions developed in partnership with NSW Pathology and the Hunter New England Local Health District. Nonetheless, additional funding is required to make this solution operational and sustainable.

Recommendation:

Commitment of **\$9 million in initial funding** by the Federal Government to the NEViHN program as part of the national objective to deliver improved regional health outcomes.

2. A New Model of Industry Embedded Higher Education – Tamworth Campus

The UNE Tamworth Campus is a model that will embed students within local industries, with a focus on innovation and entrepreneurship and increasing higher education participation in the region. It will involve teaching and learning spaces in industry centres around Tamworth, with only a small central campus, enabling experiential learning to produce job-ready graduates. A small investment of \$10 million of co-funding by the Commonwealth will secure \$26.4 million in NSW funding and substantial in-kind and financial support from UNE, the Tamworth local government, community and industry partners.



Recommendation:

Funding has been committed by the NSW Government, the local council and local industries. **\$10 million** is sought from the Federal Government to support this critical initiative.

3. Supporting Science Technology Engineering Arts and Maths

Opportunities for exploratory and unrestricted play for children early in life can significantly change their life-long learning journeys. UNE has embarked on a project that involves developing an innovative, multi-functional space to foster lifelong learning from an early age through high-quality play-based experiences in STEAM for children, families and communities. This vision is represented in our planned [Boilerhouse Discovery Space](#), which will reinvent the university's disused, mid-20th century coal-fired



boilerhouse as a fun, interactive learning space for young people and their families to engage with STEAM based programs and experiences.

Over \$10 million in funding has already been pledged to bring this vision to reality, with commitments from the NSW Government and an education benefactor. The project requires a further \$5 million to achieve completion and begin to make a contribution to New England and surrounding districts.

UNE has a broader vision for the development of a new precinct for tertiary STEM teaching, research and partnerships, which is in the concept stage of development, with plans to commence over future forward estimates.

Recommendation:

Funding has been committed by the NSW Government and an education benefactor. **\$5 million** is sought from the Federal Government to complete this project.

4. Support for Regional Entrepreneurship

In the Federal Government's recently-proposed adjustments to the Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) funding clusters, unless there is some further intervention, entrepreneurship related programs will be in a cluster that received the lowest portion of Commonwealth funding (along with business and law). Given the importance of entrepreneurship, and in particular the role of regional universities in promoting entrepreneurship and innovation in a regional context, consideration should be given to ensuring that entrepreneurship-related units and programs receive a high proportion of commonwealth funding.

Recommendation:

In support of its plans to foster the job-ready graduates of the future, UNE recommends that Entrepreneurship be made an area of national priority with corresponding Commonwealth support towards student fees. The Government should provide UNE with the means to support develop those programs required to educate, foster and support regional entrepreneurs.

UNE would welcome the opportunity to discuss our submission. Please contact vcadministration@une.edu.au to arrange a conversation.

About the University of New England

The University of New England (UNE) is Australia's oldest regional university, operating since 1938 from its principal Armidale campus, one of the two largest cities of the NSW New England North West (NENW) region.

In the years following World War 2, UNE's first Vice-Chancellor, Sir Robert Madgwick, founded the university on the belief that education empowers people to adapt to their rapidly changing world. Driven by this vision, UNE pioneered distance education and in so doing opened the way for people from all walks of life to build the education they need to adapt to a changing world, regardless of their location or personal circumstances. Now UNE delivers university education with the same rigour as one delivered on-campus in New England, to students living in remote parts of the nation and to those in major cities.

This innovation has continued with UNE pioneering new forms of education offerings including bespoke courses. These new courses allow students to quickly acquire new knowledge and pivot to respond to changing workplaces and practices with greater flexibility in selecting only the subjects that are relevant to their individual goals and circumstances.

Bushfires, drought, social disadvantage, and many other forces are accelerating the rate of change placing communities under increasing stress and strain. UNE research is focused on the identification and delivery of innovative solutions to complex problems throughout rural and regional Australia and globally.

UNE is aware that traditional models of university study do not meet the needs of working-age individuals who are constrained in terms of their time and place due to work, family and other commitments. Since its inception as NSW's first distance education provider, UNE has offered something unique to these students. This is reflected in the profile of our student body, which has an average age above 30 years and consists of people who are mostly already working and, because of their time constraints and distance, take the majority of their units in online mode.

Research

UNE is the leading centre of tertiary education and research in the NENW region of nearly 200,000 people and an economy worth over \$10.4 billion. Annual Research and Grant income for UNE is \$73.39 million. The cornerstones of UNE's world-class research is quality and community, as evidenced by the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) 2018 National Report. The report showed UNE excelled across a diverse range of fields, achieving the highest rating of 5 (well above world standard) in 18 disciplines, including Environmental Sciences, Agriculture, and Mathematics. This represents a doubling in the number of UNE's 5-star rated research disciplines, from the ERA 2015 assessment.

Across the biological sciences, UNE achieved 5-star ratings in Ecology, Evolutionary Biology, Genetics, and Zoology. Geology, Soil Sciences, and Macromolecular Chemistry also feature 5-star ratings. Among other areas of strength, UNE received the highest rating for a number of research disciplines within the medical and health sciences, including sport sciences and psychology.

A standout area for UNE nationally in terms of research income in is rural R&D. In 2018, UNE was ranked 27th among higher education providers for total research income by the Government's Higher Education Research Data Collection. Despite this, it was ranked 3rd for research income for rural R&D.

Equally important is our role as an anchor institution in a region where the education sector contributes over 40 per cent of the GDP. UNE provides a range of critical community resources, including over recent months, support for bushfire management, emergency drought response and the creation of Australia's first regional virtual hospital to support the community during the pandemic and beyond ([see here](#)).

FACULTIES	the Faculties comprise 10 Schools:
Faculty of Humanities, Arts, Social Sciences & Education	School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences School of Education
Faculty of Medicine & Health	School of Health School of Psychology and Behavioural Science School of Rural Medicine
Faculty of Science, Agriculture, Business & Law	School of Environmental and Rural Science School of Law School of Science and Technology UNE Business School

Students

UNE has a total of 26,146 current students and more than 120,000 active alumni. 4,743 of these current students are on-campus and the remainder study online. 1,091 of these on-campus students are from Armidale and the New England area. UNE has 1,988 international students, the majority of whom study on-campus. UNE has 1,034 Indigenous students. 82 per cent of these students study online.

UNE is the only Australian public university to be awarded five stars for Overall Experience for 15 consecutive years. 82.5% of UNE students were satisfied with their educational experience. The median graduate salary is \$64,700 and on average, 79.8% of graduates are employed full-time within four months of completing their course.

UNE Staff – Geographic Location

Total Staff	2,639
New South Wales	2,426
Armidale	1,804
Queensland	100
Victoria	58
Australian Capital Territory	15
South Australia	15
Western Australia	11
Northern Territory	7
Tasmania	6
Other	1

Annual Research and Grant Income

UNE is dedicated to identifying and delivering innovations of value to society and industry, in Australia and internationally, with a particular emphasis on inter-disciplinary research. We seek solutions to complex problems in rural and regional Australia. Our research involves interdisciplinary and cross-institutional collaborations and is underpinned by five thematic research priorities:

- Australia's future food and water security: smart science, smart technology;
- Climate change and environmental sustainability: protecting biodiversity, effective policies;
- Health and wellbeing in rural communities: social exclusion, health inequity, mental health, social policy;
- Our communities, our neighbours: regional and rural development, sustainability, prosperity and peace; and
- Our past, present and future: documentation, protection and promotion of cultural heritage, history, memory and identity in Australia and internationally.

Annual Research and Grant income for UNE is \$73.39 million.

UNE has been rated within the 2018 [ERA assessment](#) framework as being well above world standard in 15 fields of research, including:

- Agriculture, Land and Farm Management
- Environmental and Science Management
- Geology
- Animal Production
- Psychology
- Human Movement and Sports Science
- Medical and Health Sciences

This represents a doubling in number of UNE's 5-star rated research disciplines, from the ERA 2015 assessment three years ago.

Innovation in Online Learning

UNE has for many years been a leader in the provision of online learning and the development of flexible, innovative offerings.

In recent years we have commenced offering a bespoke program that allows students to gain new skills and a qualification in a short, six-month full-time period with the ability to choose from over 1,000 units. We have already taken short courses to a new level, and welcomes the opportunity to now offer these as an undergraduate certificate.

Our online courses demonstrate the value of distance education and we have adapted quickly to the demands of providing tertiary education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are the only Australian public university to be awarded five stars for Overall Experience for 15 consecutive years. 82.5% of UNE students were satisfied with their educational experience. The median graduate salary is \$64,700 and on average, 79.8% of graduates are employed full-time within four months of completing their course.

UNE is engaged with the regional university centres, with approximately 100 students in Commonwealth Supported Places studying at the centres. UNE has its own regional study centre model, where we have 8 study centres established in locations throughout the NENW region - often in shared locations with local government or TAFE.

UNE's Vision for the Future

UNE has a multi-tiered vision for the future in order to maintain our performance as a modern values-centred, outcomes-focused tertiary education institution across all domains of student support.

UNE believes it is important to engage with and support the whole education pipeline. Delivering on our commitment to provide opportunity and access to individuals in our region requires

significant engagement and support by UNE across a very wide domain and catchment. In this context, the Indigenous Student Success Program, the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program, and other resources are critical to enabling some elements of the enterprise agenda.

New England Virtual Health Network

UNE has responded immediately to address the potential impacts of COVID-19 on the regional health care system. UNE has accelerated our plans to establish the initial remote health monitoring capability of our New England Virtual Health Network (NEViHN) with the establishment of a Joint Virtual Care Centre in Armidale.

The NEViHN is a transformative education and healthcare network that supports the delivery of in-place healthcare for patients and in-place learning for all future UNE medicine and health students in the New England North West region. The NEViHN will enable medicine student placements in Regional, Rural and Remote (RRR) settings for longer periods of time. By leveraging technologies, they will continue to complete coursework and be connected to specialists and mentors in metro and regional areas.

Projected outcomes:

- ✔ Improved health outcomes and quality of life in NENW
- ✔ Improved efficiency of healthcare delivery
- ✔ Strengthen RRR healthcare workforce
- ✔ Deliver a positive student experience and improved employment outcomes

The COVID-19 response capability developed for the NEViHN involves the use of the most advanced technology for remote capture of vital signs and other data from patients and the connection of these devices to a central “flight deck” for monitoring by health care professionals. This enables the remote monitoring of patients in regional, rural and remote (RRR) communities as an immediate response to the COVID-19 crisis. It is a solution that will help to mitigate risk of virus transmission and reduce time in hospital for COVID-19 and other patients. NEViHN will provide training and research opportunities as well as health services to the region.

The Sydney Morning Herald

Australia's first 'virtual hospital' for COVID-19 patients will be established within two weeks to treat coronavirus patients from their homes.

Hundreds of coronavirus patients who present at the Armidale Hospital emergency department in the far north of NSW - and who otherwise would have needed a hospital bed - will soon be allowed to go home with sophisticated machines to monitor their vital signs.

A team of doctors, supported by an artificial intelligence program, will check up on them and bring them into hospital if their conditions worsen.



Hospitals could be overwhelmed by the pandemic. GLENN HUNT

Should the pilot go well, virtual hospitals could be rolled out across Australia.

The initiative will improve patient experience and streamline care, reducing the time patients are required to travel for specialist appointments. It will reduce unnecessary hospital admissions, saving the healthcare system more than \$35 million over 10 years. It will have a positive economic impact on the region, creating additional jobs and increase spending in the region, and enhance connectivity between dispersed communities.

While the NEViHN COVID-19 response via remote patient monitoring initiative has contributed to building capability in the recovery phase, it is only a small component of UNE's ambition. UNE's vision for NEViHN is as an innovative education and healthcare network that supports the delivery of in-place healthcare for patients and in-place learning for all future UNE medicine and health students in the New England North West region. This will improve health outcomes in RRR communities and afford the State greater resilience to future crises.

It is estimated that the net benefits of the NEViHN project will amount to \$18.3 million per year by year 10 of the project, equivalent to a Business Case Ratio (BCR) of 1:1.69. The benefits underpinning the business case include reduced potentially-preventable hospital admissions, more efficient clinical care and reduced transport time and costs as well as increased efficiency of higher education delivery.

The NEViHN will require \$9 million of initial capital funding in years 1 and 2 of the project with a total investment of \$62 million over the 10-year duration of the project (\$44 million in present value).

Engagement with Industry

The theme of entrepreneurship links all of what we are working on and brings industry, community and education together with government - a quadruple helix of opportunity for reform and recovery. Our approach recognises that promoting entrepreneurship in a regional context poses unique challenges that are not adequately resolved by the incubation models applied in the capital cities.

UNE has a strong track record in partnering with industry to improve economic outcomes through knowledge partnerships, including through hosting a large number of Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs). Following the closure of the Poultry CRC, UNE supported the establishment of, and hosts on-campus, the Poultry Hub Australia. Poultry Hub Australia among other things delivers specific industry training designed to support the needs of major poultry processing employers in the region. UNE's integration with industry is extensive and includes, but is not limited to, research, curriculum design, and industry placements.

The institution has a long history with CRCs, with eight originally located at UNE, and now it supports subsequent work of these centres on the UNE Armidale campus. CRCs are a Federal Government initiative that supports Australian industries' ability to compete and produce by helping them partner with the research sector to solve industry-identified problems.

For more than four decades, UNE's Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit (AGBU) has been improving the Australian agricultural sector through research and development focused on genetic improvement of livestock and other species. AGBU's world-renowned genetic work has been substantially enhanced by the inputs and assistance from Meat and Livestock Australia,

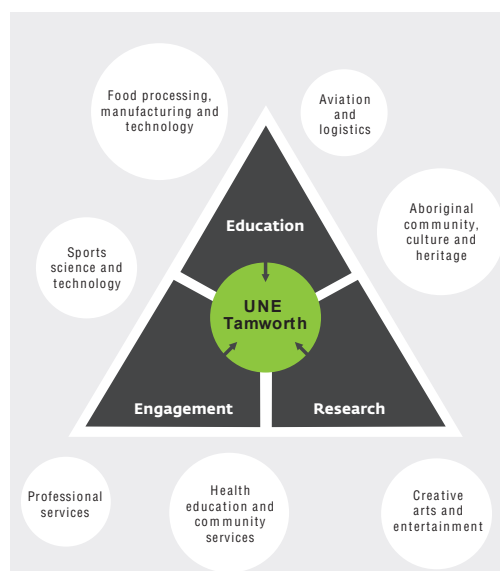
Agricultural Business Research Institute, breed societies, bull breeders and other stakeholders in Australia’s beef supply chains.

UNE also engages with industry on curriculum design across all disciplines. UNE’s Health and Education students in particular make extensive use of industry placements to ensure graduates are work ready.

UNE Tamworth

UNE’s has developed a vision for tertiary education provision in Tamworth and the wider region which focuses on partnerships, opportunity and engagement. UNE is now embarking on an innovative new campus for Tamworth which will build strongly on the authority and value of our relationships with business and the community to create new educational offerings which will see both the city and broader NENW region benefit.

Tamworth expansion plans are made possible by its commitment to co-locate and co-create the educational offerings with business, industry and community partners. UNE Tamworth will serve as the anchor for innovative industry embedded education, stimulating further the Armidale-Tamworth corridor and energising the ‘learning region’ of the New England North West. The central campus will anchor connections to several Integrated Industry and Community Centres. The Centres will be developed within the industry precincts distributed across the region to enable education, research and innovation hubs to co-exist alongside local businesses and industry clusters.



Following a July 2020 UNE Tamworth Summit, a blueprint for new courses has been developed. These courses will differ from UNE’s existing offerings in terms of structure, pedagogy, and curriculum. Each course will be designed with clear links to regional employment opportunities in industry. The courses planned to be offered in Tamworth from 2021 will access features of the Higher Education Relief Package, including the potential award of an Undergraduate Certificate

ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR THE REGION

UNE Tamworth will deliver over \$600 million in economic benefits to the region:

- Construction of the UNE Tamworth facilities will create ~120 jobs over the three-year construction period.
- By 2031, the new campus will create ~120 local jobs per year (academic and professional), representing ~\$90 million in benefits during the first 10 years.
- In the local community ~200 jobs will be created through additionality of student, staff and university expenditure. This will contribute \$30 million in benefits over 10 years.
- Tourism revenue derived from the visiting families and friends of domestic and international students will contribute ~\$40 million to the region and state over 10 years.
- Student and university expenditure will contribute ~\$220 million and ~\$290 million, respectively, to the region over 10 years.

for short course studies. This feature will create a pathway into Higher Education for youth, members of the Indigenous community, and others who aspire to upskill and reskill. The industry embedded nature of the courses will support the development of individual capability, increased attainment rates, and produce job-ready graduates.

The nature of entrepreneurship and how it is supported is much different in a regional, rural, remote context. as compared to the cities. Our design for the Tamworth campus is very much focused on industry linkages, innovation and entrepreneurship.

Science Technology Engineering Maths

UNE is developing a Precinct on our Armidale campus that will deliver modern technology-enabled teaching and research in science disciplines in cooperation with government and industry partners.

The first phase of this included the development of a unique facility that combines laboratory and teaching spaces with the UNE Natural History Museum open to the public. In addition, UNE operates the mobile Discovery Voyager program that takes hands-on, curriculum aligned experiences in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts & Maths (STEAM) to 4-16 year olds in schools across northern NSW.



These on campus and outreach initiatives are a precursor to our [Boilerhouse Discovery project](#) which will provide a unique all-day, all-weather place for families, students and community to play and learn together, immersed in STEAM-themed experiences. The Boilerhouse will also create new early-childhood teaching and research opportunities for UNE staff, students and practitioners in our region. Combined with the development of a broader precinct, which includes our extensive on-campus partnership with NSW DPI, we aim to deliver world-class research with partners in an open setting that promotes greater interest and engagement in STEAM learning among our communities.

The multi-functional Boilerhouse is set to open in 2023 and will address educational inequalities faced by regional, remote and rural communities. It will bring to life UNE's commitment to building a strong learning region and foster links with schools and education providers.

It is also expected that this project will become a tourist attraction for visitors to the Armidale/Tamworth corridor. UNE has committed \$4 million to this project, received a pledge of \$3.5 million from the Abbott Foundation, \$6 million from the NSW Government and requires a further \$5 million to bring the project to completion.

The SMART Regions Incubator

UNE is developing ‘entrepreneurs of the future’ who will drive inland innovation and job growth in the regions. Established in 2017, the [UNE SMART Region Incubator](#) (SRI) has supported local entrepreneurs to birth over 60 start-ups which have created more than 150 jobs and attracted over \$5.4 million in investment to the region. These results will be further enhanced by the SRI’s recent expansion into the [Moree region](#).



In partnership, with NBN Co, UNE SRI is offering the ‘Steps2Grow’ start-up course for free to any 15-25 year old in a RRR community, supporting the next generation of entrepreneurs. In partnership with Moree Shire Council, we are offering a Young Entrepreneurs Program for Moree for 2 years from August 2020.

To support health start-ups responding to the COVID-19 crisis the UNE SRI will deliver a pre-accelerator program for health start-ups in collaboration with MTP Connect and Regional Health Partners. UNE Researchers in health, agriculture, environmental science, and cultural heritage are attending the UNE SRI Researchers EMERGE Program to translate research for commercial and community impact.

The UNE SRI is also accelerating existing partnership work with the NSW Government through offering Virtual Human Centred Design Workshops for NSW Regional Government employees in partnership with Jillian Kilby, The Exchange Dubbo and Sydney School of Entrepreneurship. This program of work delivered by the UNE SRI builds capacity for government employees to meet service and digital transformation targets.

We believe that the UNE SRI could provide a significant contribution to post-COVID-19 recovery by delivering structural changes that drive the future of economic growth and job development. The UNE SRI will continue to support research-rich startups and bring forward the next generation of founders to create an economic recovery strategy with a proven track record. The extension of the SRI into Moree will see our engagement footprint, and the benefits of workforce development and new modes of service delivery, extend further into the north west of NSW.

The SMART Farm Innovation Centre

[UNE’s SMART Farm Innovation Centre](#) is a research, education, and outreach facility for UNE-led advances in precision agriculture research and development worldwide. It creates opportunities to showcase the latest on-farm technologies to visitors from all over the world. The Centre is utilised by the Precision Agriculture Research Group which is developing innovative low cost and accessible technology for industry and farmers.

Our specific regional location makes UNE ideally situated to excel in research to benefit the Agricultural sector. AGBU has developed a number of genetic evaluation systems used by a range of industries to identify and select animals with the best genes. The Unit collects growth and performance data on millions of sheep and cows, which provides valuable information for farmers and industry. While internationally renowned its work, AGBU also has a significant local impact.

An independent study showed that genetic improvements had brought an extra \$4 million to the farms of the New England region in terms of productivity dividends. UNE now hopes to leverage this type of progressive work as the basis for working more closely with new industry partners to create a next generation agri-data centre in Armidale.

Innovative Short Courses

UNE has been a pioneer in the development of flexible, innovative educational offerings, and in recent years we have commenced offering a bespoke program that allows students to gain new skills and a qualification in a short, six-month full-time period with the ability to choose from over 1,000 units. We have already taken short courses to a new level, and welcome the opportunity to now offer these as an undergraduate certificate as well. It would be appropriate for the Government to extend the proposed courses offering micro-credentials to undergraduate short courses and credentials on a fee-paying basis.

The first of our bespoke courses is the Graduate Certificate in Professional Practice (GCPP) which allows students to choose groupings of units that boost their professional development into an AQF level 8 qualification. The existing GCPP relies significantly on blending the accreditation of prior experiential learning and provides student candidates with a skill-set boost designed to directly advance their current careers. As such, this unique and innovative offering is an ideal vehicle to support the aims of the higher education certificate short courses. One possible issue however is that the offering does not have a strictly defined field of education and therefore is difficult to specifically align to the areas of national interest. As an example, a career professional in health may take on units in psychology as well as in communications, which cut across multiple fields of education.

Online Education

Online learning is not an alternative delivery model for UNE, it is a core part of the institution. UNE has spent decades refining remote learning, starting with distance education in the 1950s and then moving to online learning as technology advanced. 80 per cent of UNE's students study online and the institution supports thousands of online learners to improve their lives through quality education every year.

UNE is an institution that has a strong track record in supporting students who are undertaking online study in order to protect and promote their careers, often in situations of disruption. This is reflected in our student cohort. More than 20% of our students are from low SES backgrounds and we have the highest proportion of online students in the sector (more than 80% of enrolments in 2018, of whom over 40% are identified as rural and remote student candidates).

UNE has offered a series of new undergraduate certificate courses to individuals looking to upskill in response to COVID-19. UNE has made available a course on eLearning to upskill NSW teachers in the face of the rapid shift to online delivery.

UNE's model of education is well suited to the post COVID-19 world. We have successfully transitioned our students to online delivery, including 97% of our international students affected by COVID in 2020.

Supporting Creative Arts

The creative arts industry has been particularly hard-hit by the essential measures put in place to control the spread of COVID-19. UNE-VENUE will hasten economic recovery by placing New England's diverse history and culture at the centre of a visitor economy strategy.

The focal point for UNE-VENUE's development will be a five-year plan to create a year-round, region-wide celebration of multi-cultural creativity; the UNE Festival of Creative Arts. Starting in the Armidale-Tamworth corridor, this festival will become a visitor economy powerhouse that attracts tourists from around the globe and keeps them active the region all year.

UNE-VENUE's programs will provide industry-focused learning in the creative industries, developing the soft skills needed for the jobs of the future. They will develop an entrepreneurial approach to sustainable creative practice, exploiting student-created opportunities in collaboration with the UNE SRI.

UNE's Support for the Local Community

Savage bushfires on the back of a prolonged drought heralded the start of 2020 for the UNE community. UNE's residential college system provided nearly 2,000 bed nights to volunteers and reservists throughout the bushfire season and served over 7000 meals.

The institution was also on standby to provide respite accommodation for those displaced from their homes. UNE staff assisted with animal welfare issues and remain in discussions about habitat recovery. Numerous staff were also assisting on the fire fronts in a volunteering capacity.

UNE is actively supporting the migrant and refugee community in our region with programs including mental health support and English-language service provision. These programs, which are mostly delivered without external funding, will contribute to stronger cultural and economic capital in the region.

Conclusion

UNE requests that the Federal Government:

- Support the unique health initiative offered by the NEViHN,
- Assist UNE to increase student engagement with industry by supporting the development of the Tamworth campus
- Continue to support STEAM development from early ages through to tertiary education level by providing funding to the Boilerhouse project; and
- Support entrepreneurship as an area of national interest when finalising the design of the revised course funding arrangements.

Each of these initiatives is a tangible step towards creating the job-ready graduates of Australia's future. UNE will continue to work with the Federal Government to achieve its goals of innovative, flexible and accessible tertiary education.