



**One Gippsland**  
**National priority Fund - EOI Submission**  
**Gippsland First - Earn While You Learn Program**

**About the initiative**

Federation University is seeking support for the *Gippsland First – Earn While you Learn program*.

This initiative will connect students with local employers in the region (both private and public sector). The program seeks to:

1. Address local skill and workforce shortages in the region;
2. Expand the student experience with on the job applied learning in a local context; and
3. Support student welfare and bachelor completion rates by facilitating the ability to earn income to support their study.

The initiative will also create a pipeline of skills to meet the future needs of the health, energy, food and fibre and tourism sectors. These sectors are highlighted in the region's regional plan – the Gippsland Regional Plan – as fundamental to the region's future prosperity.

**Selection Criteria 1: Effectiveness of the initiative to address structural and other barriers to employment of Australian job seekers and/or job creation.**

Gippsland is a diverse region with vast natural beauty and rich resources. The region however has suffered a range of economic shocks that have devastated the region's economy and reinforced systemic disadvantage. This has resulted in a perfect storm of decline. The impacts of issues have resulted in the following indicators:

- Unemployment rate: in Gippsland is 7.2% compared to the state (Victorian) rate of 4.4%
- Labour force participation: in Gippsland it is 53% compared to 63.9% for Victoria
- Year 12 completion rate: in Gippsland it is 35% compared to State average of 79%
- The Bachelor degree attainment: in Gippsland is 12% which is half the Victorian average at 24.3%

Between 2015 and 2020 the combined effect of the COVID-19 restrictions, bushfires, dairy crisis, drought and Hazelwood Power Station and Mine closure have further reduced the region's prosperity with the following impacts:

- Direct output loss of \$3.28 billion;
- Combined direct and indirect output loss was \$6.86 billion;
- A total of 10,213 job losses (direct and indirect).



*Gippsland First Earn While You Learn* seeks to address these challenges through three principles:

- **Local leadership:** One Gippsland (peak regional development body) and Federation University, local government, peak bodies and local employers will collaborate to address the above indicators;
- **Local solutions:** addressing participation and attainment rates through agreed connections to workforce and skill shortages (refer above); and
- **Locals first:** ensuring that students are given every opportunity to connect to and drive the economic and social future of Gippsland long-term by increasing the likelihood of students becoming full time employees on completion of their degree.

Unlike other placement programs that enable students to find placements in any location (quite often major capital cities - Melbourne) this initiative will have a *Gippsland First* focus. The initiative will seek to match students with the needs of local employers increasing the likelihood of ensuring the skills stay in the region and ensuring the workforce participation rates for Gippsland grows.

The program is seeking \$450,000 for Federation University to appoint program resources for a one year period. The resources (two Placement Facilitators and one Program Coordinator) will join the dots between the university, students and local organisations facilitate manage placements and triage issues associated with entering the workforce for the first time. The vast size and diversity the Gippsland region makes two facilitators necessary in order to ensure adequate coverage of all local governments and industry region-wide. The funding will also allow for an in-depth academic evaluation process at the conclusion of the initiative.

The three dedicated roles would allow for a renewed focus to ensure employment outcomes and education connections in Gippsland are more succinctly aligned between Higher Education / TAFE offerings and industry/sector needs.

These facilitators will build the foundations of long-term partnership, accelerating a tailored approach to skills and education that will work to address gaps between education and employment outcomes in Gippsland.

The support for this approach is advocated by one of Australia's most prominent regional think tanks – the Regional Australia Institute –highlighting the importance of “Regional Learning Systems” which in their simplest form look to create partnerships between key employment and skills participants (such as educators and trainers, industry and business, job seekers and students). The aim of this is to build a tailored approach to addressing supply and demand of skills in regions.

When implemented properly, the Regional Learning Systems approach underpins the development of “an education and training led model of business growth and job creation”.

The RAI notes: *“With increases in the cost of education and training, job outcomes are becoming much more critical for many students, particularly in regional areas...Regional*



*students are placing a high financial cost on completing their studies and job outcomes on graduation are crucially important”.*

**Selection Criterion 2: The extent to which the organisation demonstrates local knowledge and connections, organisational capacity and relevant experience in project delivery that will contribute to the achievement of the Fund objectives.**

Federation University will work through One Gippsland to establish a clear, locally lead governance structure to deliver the project that will include:

1. Terms of reference;
2. A project control board (including Federation University, Local Government, Industry);
3. Project plan with project milestones; and
4. Financial reporting framework.

When engaged, the two proposed Placement Facilitator roles would form part of the Head of Campus portfolio operations, with the capacity to leverage linkages and established connections to existing industry relationships.

The University has undertaken a review and realigned its Strategic Plan to focus on the delivery of applied / experiential student learning /on the job practical experience, supported by classroom theory.

There is strong commitment at the most senior level of the university to drive industry partnerships and engagement to focus on employment and job outcomes for graduates. This is evidenced by Federation University being the *number one* university in Victoria and *number four* in Australia for *industry engagement* with 34% of our PHD students either funded or co-supervised by industry partners.

Federation University Schools/Faculties are also heavily committed to reviewing all academic programmes and curriculum to meet current and future regional employer needs.

The campus has long-established existing industry partnerships and local government networks to continue to build on.

#### **Student Support and Experience:**

According to the latest results of the ESS (Employer Satisfaction Survey), SES (Student Experience Survey), CEQ (Course Experience Questionnaire) and GOS (Graduate Outcome Survey), Federation University Australia is currently ranked at a national level:

- #1 in Australia for Employability Skills for the second year running
- #1 in Australia for Teaching Quality

Some examples of activities that Federation University has previously delivered that addressed workforce challenges include:



- Food and Fibre, Workforce Training Innovation Fund
- MBA – 2020: Co-designed with industry to deliver experiential, leadership learning
- Health programmes: new programs established in response to regional workforce needs
- Bachelor of Sustainable Food Systems: hybrid degree codesigned with Food Industry
- Education programmes: Creation of a hybrid Master of Teaching that combines, learning with *real classroom experience* to fast-track students into teaching jobs.
- Business: Bachelor of Cognitive Enterprise - Transform businesses into cognitive enterprises using the latest disruptive technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Blockchain with a degree co-designed with global technology giant IBM®.
- Golden Thread Passport: supporting graduate attributes/learning outcomes required for the future of work. Re-imagined in collaboration with employers, researchers and work futures analytics, the curriculum for the future of work in our region while meeting immediate skills and jobs needs.

Federation university has strong commitment from local governments, government organisations and industry to engage and collaborate including:

- Members of One Gippsland
- Members Committee for Gippsland
- Established TAFE Gippsland and FedUni MOU
- Established Latrobe City and Wellington Shire Council MOUs
- Member of Local Learning and Employment Networks
- Latrobe and Baw Baw Secondary School Principal's Group
- Regional Skills Committee Gippsland led by Federation University and including broad cross sector representation from businesses in food and fibre, energy, IT, Indigenous employment and training, manufacturing, health, tourism
- Strong connections with Bairnsdale Education Hub, Wonthaggi Country University Centre

The University will leverage these connections through:

- Utilising expertise of the recently formed Regional Skills Committee – driving industry partnerships through our existing mechanisms.
- Partnering with TAFE Gippsland, LGAs, industry and government to better understand and integrate vocational and higher education access and pathways

Central operations will be based at the Gippsland campus, Churchill with flexible working arrangements for industry facilitator roles, working from local council offices as required.

### **Selection Criterion 3: The extent to which the proposed initiative contributes to economic and social benefits and the Fund objectives.**

The higher education attainment gap between metro and regional, rural and remote Australia (RRRA) is a direct drain on regional economies and on the Australian economy more broadly. RRRA communities are 40% less likely to gain tertiary education and the



Department of Education modelling suggests that halving this gap by 2030 could increase GDP by 0.6 per cent or \$11 billion by 2050.

In Gippsland addressing this decline is imperative. The link between educational outcomes and broader socio-economic challenges are clear as the percentage of households earning less than \$650 per week in Gippsland is 27.8%, compared to the Victorian average of 20.3% and the regional Victorian average of 22.9% and national average of 18%. Further, average weekly income in Gippsland sits at \$1,048, well below the Victorian, regional Victorian and National averages of \$1,718.5, \$1,124 and \$1,711.6 respectively.

This is why in Gippsland (as in many other regions) there is strong demand for degrees with clear job outcomes. That is also why the objectives of this initiative aim to address structural barriers to job creation and secure employment options by encouraging students to take up higher education degrees through demonstrating clear job outcomes incentivised by a *'earn while you learn'* placement model.

However, this program is not just aiming to support students. It is proposed that by encouraging job seekers to take up these degrees, workforce shortages will be addressed and a pipeline of job ready professionals with in-depth on the job experience will be created, providing industry employers with the employees needed to grow their businesses.

This proposition is supported by work undertaken by the Regional University Network which found students who study in a regional area are much more likely to stay and work in that region when they complete their studies. It was found that 70% of regional university graduates found employment in regional Australia, compared to 20% of graduates from metropolitan universities. This means that by extension the professionals trained in Gippsland will fill workforce need and skills and knowledge gaps in the region.

Secondly, by improving higher education attainment rates and the number of qualified professionals in the region, we can begin to address the regions below average earning capacity by raising weekly household income.

Raising the average household income of Gippsland to be in line with Regional Victoria by 2025 has been identified as a key priority of the region as through the regions key strategic document, the Gippsland Regional Plan.

In disadvantaged regions such as Gippsland, finding the resources and capacity to research, engage and develop plans that can address these issues is often out of reach. By funding this initiative, these facilitators will be able to do the engagement, research and development work required to set Gippsland up long term to address workforce challenges and employment and job creation barriers with a partnership approach across the region.

This initiative will also strengthen the capacity of industries and local governments to identify workforce development needs by providing facilitators to build partnership



between the regions key stakeholders including industry, local government and education providers.

The program will use the information gathered through this partnership to build degrees that are targeted and provide students with the applied learning required to enter the workforce and maintain professional employment long term.

**For more information**

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