

31/07/2017

University Precincts Advisory Committee
C/o: Department of Industry, Innovation and Science
GPO Box 2013
Canberra, ACT, 2601

Dear University Precincts Advisory Committee,

The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the University Precincts – Issues Paper, May 2017.

The ATN is a national collaborative group of five major universities including Queensland University of Technology (QUT), University of Technology Sydney (UTS), RMIT University (RMIT), University of South Australia and Curtin University. ATN Universities have a presence in each mainland State and are all urban, with most of our campuses occupying a significant footprint of the CBD. All of our universities have genuine linkages to industry as an inherent part of both our teaching and research. Students are at the core of everything we do.

ATN universities have a strong commitment to transforming the communities in which they are based. The ATN are an active voice in promoting partnerships between industry and research to grow our economy and deliver significant economic, social and cultural benefits to local and global communities. We encourage use of our campuses to drive interaction and deeper relationships with our communities and often act as a catalyst for innovation.

The ATN welcomes the opportunity to comment on the national universities precinct strategy. Our submission will focus on the importance of a strategy in meeting the aims of the National Innovation and Science Agenda, the work that universities are already doing in creating thriving university – industry community based precincts, and touch briefly on some of the challenges the ATN believes such a strategy faces.

The ATN commends the committee for their commitment to developing a national university precincts strategy. The ATN believes a national university precincts strategy will enhance Australia's ability to meet the aims of the National Innovation and Science Agenda. University precincts are districts that enable collective innovation and boost collaboration between universities, industry and government. Universities are the lifeblood of a national system of innovation and the impact, and a clearly defined national strategy to enable, encourage and guide the development of university precincts may be a useful tool in creating and fostering increased collaboration. As noted in the discussion paper, the ATN feels it is important to note that the development of precincts may not necessarily occur around a university campus, but will involve considerable university/universities involvement and presence. This presents a challenge for the strategy in implementation as it will need to properly incentivise universities to engage with precincts that may be located outside of their primary campus.

In developing a strategy it is important to take stock of the myriad of activity which is occurring in Australian universities, and ensure that any strategy can build upon the history of developing university-industry collaboration. The strategy cannot occur in isolation if it is to be

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS. FINDING SOLUTIONS.

8/1 GEILS COURT
DEAKIN ACT 2600

+61 2 5105 6740
INFO@ATN.EDU.AU
WWW.ATN.EDU.AU
TWITTER @ATNUNIS

successful. It will need to build upon existing initiatives; for example the Industry Growth Centres and CSIRO's 2020 strategy. The ATN notes the work that Innovation Science Australia is doing to map existing activities, and recommends that any Precincts Strategy be considered as part of a broader, whole of government, collaboration strategy.

Universities are already engaging in creating precincts, through collaboration with industry. The ATN universities are proactively engaging with industry and government to build a thriving innovation community around their campuses. University engagement extends to running highly successful accelerators, incubators, and actuators on their campuses. By running these programs, universities are enabling the next generation of organisations by providing them expertise, facilities and opportunities to develop solutions. Examples of this include:

- QUT's bluebox which is providing capability to entrepreneurs to build new industry based on QUT initiatives, and undertake new and more flexible end-user focussed approaches to early stage commercialisation,
- University of South Australia's presence in the South Australian Government's Health and Biomedical Precinct. A precinct that is built upon existing connections between the University of South Australia, the new Royal Adelaide Hospital and the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI),
- RMIT's Advanced Manufacturing Precinct which leverages RMIT's expertise in technology and design innovation. The precinct is developing the next generation of engineers, designers and technicians, and working closely with industry both in Australia and internationally. The Advanced Manufacturing Precinct offers research capability in aerospace, automotive and biomedical sectors,
- Curtin University's Innovation Central Perth which is a collaboration between Cisco, Curtin and Woodside Energy. At present it has over 80 researchers and links to advanced facilities and a global industry network. The Centre utilises an open environment to bring together start-ups, industry experts, developers and researchers with the aim of creating ground-breaking and innovative solutions that foster growth, provide jobs and help build sustainable economies.
- UTS anchors the Ultimo Precinct which is a world scale, emerging precinct with large upside potential. This precinct requires ongoing support for long term success. The precinct is the 4th largest start-up community in Australia, and already possess the attributes to support a thriving innovation precinct. The precinct has more than 52 start-ups per square kilometre. UTS contributes physical infrastructure and world leading research facilities and technology, teaching, community, and commercial spaces, bodies of knowledge and human capital both academics and students who create, hold, preserve and refresh critical knowledge and capabilities.

Historically, precincts have been located in centralised, high population locations. A universities precinct strategy will need to ensure that it does not compromise existing developments, and treat locations individually, taking account of geographical circumstances. It would be unfair to exclude universities which are not located in capital cities for example in a national universities precinct. Furthermore, universities located on the periphery of existing precincts and hubs will need to be included in any strategy. Each precinct will warrant unique circumstances to be considered, such as the location of the precinct, the ability of industry in

8/1 GEILS COURT
DEAKIN ACT 2600

+61 2 5105 6740
INFO@ATN.EDU.AU
WWW.ATN.EDU.AU
TWITTER @ATNUNIS

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS. FINDING SOLUTIONS.

those locations to engage, and the capability of each location to successfully create a thriving precinct. As part of this approach, it will be vital to recognise that precincts require support and facilitation, not creation and management, to successfully meet their aims. The National Innovation and Science Agenda will benefit by having a national precincts strategy that ensures all of Australia is involved in the next generation of university – industry collaborative knowledge creation.

There remains a significant challenge to ensure that all three levels of government commit to joint investment in both funding and opportunities for university precincts. In order for government to be most effective in precinct development and success, we believe that there needs to be clear definitions of roles at all levels of government. Further, the ATN believes that any strategy must possess a mechanism that will promote and allow effective collaboration. A strategy that prompts discussion around developing more effective tax, urban planning and talent attraction policies and practices will assist in ensuring precincts develop and flourish.

Any strategy document that is created needs to ensure that it has scale at its heart. Both scale in terms of ensuring the strategy can be implemented across Australia, but also scale in terms of being able to attract interest from industry. If the strategy lacks the appropriate scale then the document in and of itself will fall short of enabling the next wave of Australian university – industry collaboration that will yield fruitful outcomes. Further to scale, the strategy will need to contain the right incentives to entice university, government and industry to development and support the precincts throughout all stages of the innovation lifecycle. Although there is activity already occurring, if there is to be a meaningful national strategy that is designed to drive behavioural change, it is likely that it will only succeed if sufficient funding is attached to incentivise all parties. Without adequate university, government and industry support, the strategy document will fall short of creating world leading university precincts.

Please do not hesitate to contact the ATN Directorate on (02) 5105 6740 or via e-mail at renee.hindmarsh@atn.edu.au to discuss any elements of the submission further.

Yours sincerely,



Renee Hindmarsh

ATN Executive Director

8/1 GEILS COURT
DEAKIN ACT 2600

+61 2 5105 6740
INFO@ATN.EDU.AU
WWW.ATN.EDU.AU
TWITTER @ATNUNIS

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS. FINDING SOLUTIONS.