Dear Ms Wallis,

Progressing the NSW Economic Development Framework – Priorities for Government Focus in 2014

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the NSW Government’s planned priority actions for 2014 under its integrated Economic Development Framework.

The University of Sydney was a keen participant in the consultation processes that led to the development of Industry Action Plans for the initial set of six high priority sectors. We have recently provided a detailed submission to the Agriculture Industry Taskforce and will participate actively in the separate consultations that are currently underway in relation to the promotion of the international education sector in NSW.

The University is broadly supportive of the directions set out in the consultation document. We particularly welcome the Government’s commitment to make NSW an attractive destination for global talent; strengthen the education and research sectors as vital parts of a diversified and dynamic knowledge-based economy; make NSW an easier place to do business; and foster new industries by promoting collaboration between the private and public sectors and addressing skills shortages.

Under Platform 1, Demonstrate leadership, we welcome the level of interest the NSW Government continues to show in working with education providers to enhance the attractiveness of studying in NSW for international students. International education has the potential to continue delivering significant term economic and other benefits for the people of NSW. The sector needs to be managed carefully, however, due to the highly competitive nature of the increasingly global market for students and its vulnerability to shocks to demand that are beyond the control of individual providers. Long term, the future of international education in NSW must depend on the quality and value of the overall education experience NSW providers can offer compared to their competitors in Australia and internationally. This part of the strategy could be strengthened through the inclusion of a reference to the vital importance of quality to the long term sustainability of the sector in NSW. As the majority of the laws and policies that affect the global competitiveness of NSW’s universities emanate from the Commonwealth Government, we are also very pleased with the emphasis the document places on the NSW Government working with relevant industry sectors to achieve policy improvements in Canberra. We are keen to work with relevant State agencies to ensure that Australia’s higher education regulatory and funding framework enables NSW-based providers to remain internationally competitive.
Under Platform 2, *Make it easier to do business*, we welcome the proposed focus on helping business and industry meet skills shortages. We see significant potential for the NSW Government to work with employers, other States and the Commonwealth to ensure that Australia’s migration, taxation, superannuation, health and education policies make NSW a globally competitive destination for talent. We are concerned that a range of recent changes to migration rules and other policies may have made it harder for universities to attract staff in certain specialised fields. We also note that the Government’s appointment of a Parliamentary Secretary of Tertiary Education has made dealing with the NSW Government much easier for the university sector, and has improved levels of cross-agency communication and coordination in relation to issues affecting the tertiary education sector.

Under Platform 3, *Collaborate to Drive Innovation and Competitiveness*, as one of the main providers in the State of graduates for diverse professions, we are keen to engage with relevant NSW agencies to identify areas of current and anticipated skills shortage, and to devise strategies in response. Areas where there would appear to be a need for a more strategic approach to address pressing challenges are the various health professions, teacher education, agriculture, engineering and technology, the creative industries and high-end research in many fields. We are also keen to work with the State Government to maximise economic and other benefits arising from publicly funded research, and to strengthen collaboration between universities and companies in areas of strategic importance to the State.

Under Platform 4, *Invest in critical infrastructure*, we recommend that the strategy recognise University infrastructure as a vital part of the State’s ‘estate’, and as an increasingly important potential source of capital development that delivers economic stimulus in the short term and much wider economic and other benefits longer term through the production of additional graduates and the creation of new knowledge. Demographic projections suggest that demand for university places in Australia is set to soar over the coming decade. While post-school education delivery may be undergoing a revolution as a result of developments in information technology, it is doubtful that the State’s existing universities will be able to absorb the anticipated growth in demand from domestic students, let alone accommodate large additional numbers of international students. If NSW is to capitalise on these growth opportunities, long term strategies will be needed to provide affordable student accommodation and transport solutions. Opportunities will arise over the coming years for NSW universities to access funding for from the Commonwealth to build hard and virtual infrastructure to support teaching and research. The prospects of NSW universities winning funding from the Commonwealth will be enhanced with strong infrastructure planning support and cross-agency coordination from the NSW Government.

Under Platform 5, *Raising the global profile of Sydney and NSW*, we strongly support this limb of the strategy and look forward to working with the Government to promote NSW’s particular strengths as a world leading centre for education and research excellence.

We trust these high level comments are helpful and look forward to further dialogue with the NSW Trade and Investment as it looks to finalise and implement its priorities for action in 2014.

Yours sincerely

*(Signature removed for electronic distribution)*

Michael Spence