# Friends of Midland City University

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# New Chairman Needs New Charter and New Crew

Friends of Midland City University welcomes the recent appointment of Professor Fred Affleck as the new Chairperson of the Board of the Midland Redevelopment Authority. The Minister’s declared motives are sound and the new appointment is an important step in the right direction.

In our view, however, the State Government needs to do considerably more to

ensure optimal use of the Midland Railway Workshop site. It also needs to do more to secure the long term development of higher education in the Midland region on a fair and viable scale.

In essence the State Government needs to do three things:

* grant or guarantee the availability of land for long term future higher educational development. This essentially means the whole of the 80 ha Workshop site not otherwise committed – see Box 1 below;

* develop a 20-25 year strategic plan which is based on a clear vision of the region’s future and a well researched understanding of its current and emerging higher educational needs – see Box 2 below;
* situate current initiatives within the framework of that long term plan and cease piecemeal efforts likely to replicate Edith Cowan’s failed experiment on the site – see Box 3 below.

The major obstacle to these constructive measures is the current *Midland Redevelopment Act* (1999). This *Act* requires the current Midland Redevelopment Authority to orchestrate the redevelopment and disposal of the Railway Workshop site over the next 10 years on a staged and self-funding basis. The *Act,* in other words:

* prevents the grant of land called for above;
* profoundly limits long term planning for social and public interest as against commercial outcomes;
* leaves only the most marginal of spaces and places for higher education development;
* has resulted in a Board (and Executive) which is weak in terms of the expertise and experience it brings to the enterprise of higher education development.

**In brief, the new Chairman needs a new charter and, at least, some new crew members.** Without these additional measures, the appointment of the new Chairman could well prove ineffective.

In a Report which the *Friends of Midland City University* will be launching next month, our organization will make the following six key recommendations to guarantee Midland’s higher educational future:

1. establish a new or amended legislative charter to replace the *Midland Redevelopment Act*;
2. retain current geographic compass of the *Act* but focus charter more strongly on public interest outcomes and, more specifically, on the creation of a heritage and higher education precinct for the Midland region;
3. rename the *Act* to reflect its change of focus - the *Midland Heritage and Higher Education Precinct Development Act;*
4. strengthen the Management Board so that its combined expertise and experience more fully reflect the new charter - include greater representation from higher and post secondary education sector stakeholders;
5. strengthen Executive so that it, too, has greater capacity to meet the demands of the new charter; and
6. provide new Board with a working budget which recognises the social character of its charter and does not force the premature disposal or inappropriate use of assets which may prove critical to its long term mission.

**The Report will also signal the *Friends* intention to field candidates at the next State election to test public support for its campaign.**

## Box 1

All of WA’s other public universities have been granted substantial and secure land holdings. For example, *The University Endowment Act* of 1904 granted some 1,600 ha of land to a fledgling UWA and its Crawley campus alone encompasses some 87 ha; Murdoch University’s main campus extends to 260 ha; and Curtin, Perth’s smallest principal campus, occupies 80 ha in Bentley.

**Box 2**

The Midland region is currently home to 7,500 university students and this number could double or even rise to 20,000 within two decades – excluding any share of the booming overseas student market which a quality campus in Midland could well capture.

### Box 3

Commenting on the closure of Edith Cowan’s tiny Midland facility late last year, the ECU Vice Chancellor ventured the following observation:

“We believe major campuses provide much richer experiences for students.”

We agree: **Let students in Midland have one!**