



Department of Education  
Australian Government

Monday 02 October 2023

Dear Department of Education Colleagues,

**RE: Implementing Suburban University Study Hubs.**

Thank you for providing the opportunity to respond to the Implementing Suburban University Study Hubs consultation paper.

Australian Pasifika Educators Network (APEN) commends the recommendation for implementing Suburban University Study Hubs modelled after the successful Regional University Centres (RUCs). While we endorse the establishment of Suburban University Study Hubs, we strongly advocate for culturally responsive, relevant, and inclusive co-design, delivery, and facilitation of these hubs. Moreover, we emphasise the need for a genuine commitment to urgent extensive community consultation, placing community-led solutions at the forefront.

This is particularly pertinent considering our report on Pasifika Communities in Australia: Census 2021 report findings, which indicate that Pasifika communities in Australia are concentrated within specific geographic clusters, residing in identified disadvantaged socio-economic areas. Queensland has a Pasifika population of 147,928 individuals, while New South Wales has 133,475 Pasifika residents.<sup>1</sup> By strategically aligning government efforts with these demographic realities, Suburban University Study Hubs, hold the potential to create a supportive and enriching educational environments tailored to the unique needs of Pasifika communities. However, this potential can only be realised through intentional design, cultural relevance, and responsiveness to community challenges and needs. The Australian Pasifika Educators Network offer the following recommendations and principles for consideration.

**Place-based approach with community-led solutions.**

APEN strongly advocates for the implementation of a community-centric strategy when establishing study hubs, with the objective of understanding and addressing the distinct needs of the community. This strategy entails the commencement of research and evaluation process to gain valuable insights into the needs and wants of the community. Additionally, its purpose is to identify existing services and gaps within the current educational landscape. Community engagement town halls, workshops and focus groups serve as a platform for community members to express their viewpoints and actively contribute to shaping the design and functionality of the study hubs. Moreover, mechanisms for feedback need to be

---

<sup>1</sup> Gerace et al. 2023, pg 19



established to maintain an ongoing channel through which communities can submit their suggestions, voice any concerns, or provide further input regarding the study hubs. Finally, it is crucial to ensure the community's direct involvement in decision-making processes. To achieve this, it is imperative to include a representative from the local community as an integral part of the decision-making, advisory, or reference groups affiliated with the study hubs. The adoption of a place-based approach with community-driven solutions will guarantee that the study hubs are adaptive, inclusive, and benefit the entire community.

Other additional factors should also be considered to ensure study hub effectiveness and relevance include:

- The **accessibility of the hubs** via public transportation is a critical consideration. Proximity to bus stops, train stations, or other modes of public transport can significantly impact the ease of access for students and community members.
- **Understanding the demographics of the local community** is vital. This includes factors such as age groups, cultural backgrounds, and socioeconomic status. Tailoring the services and resources of study hubs to match the needs of the community can enhance their impact.
- The **proximity of hubs to local educational institutions and resources** is an essential consideration. It allows for collaboration, resource sharing, and a seamless transition between educational spaces, promoting a holistic learning experience.
- To create a supportive and conducive environment, the presence of certain **social infrastructure elements** is crucial. This may encompass services such as childcare facilities, ensuring that parents and caregivers have access to a safe space for their children while they engage in learning. Additionally, the availability of food and beverage outlets can provide sustenance during study sessions. Leisure and recreational facilities nearby can offer a balanced lifestyle for students and community members, promoting well-being and relaxation.

### **Defined institutional and community partnerships.**

APEN recommends defined partnerships with the key organisations to ensure broad representation in this process. Community partnerships and institutional partnerships play a pivotal role in the successful establishment and delivery of study hubs, underpinned by specific Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) that outline their purpose and expected outcomes. Community partnerships foster local engagement and ensure that the study hubs align with the unique needs and aspirations of the community they serve. Through MOUs, these partnerships delineate responsibilities, resources, and collaboration mechanisms, ultimately enhancing community input and ownership. Institutional partnerships, on the other hand, bring academic expertise and resources to the table, enriching the educational offerings and support services within study hubs. These partnerships, formalised through MOUs, articulate the roles and contributions of academic institutions, thereby enabling the seamless integration of educational content and pedagogical support. The purpose of these partnerships is to create a holistic and responsive learning environment, while the outcomes include improved access



to quality education, increased community involvement, and the overall success and sustainability of study hubs as transformative educational spaces.

Furthermore, the MOUs governing institutional partnerships are designed to mitigate potential competition between participating institutions. They establish clear guidelines for collaboration, ensuring that each institution's unique strengths and expertise are leveraged harmoniously to achieve common educational goals. By delineating areas of specialisation and collaboration, these MOUs foster a cooperative environment that prioritises collective impact over competition, thereby safeguarding the integrity and effectiveness of the study hubs as inclusive and collaborative educational platforms. This collaborative approach not only maximises the resources available but also creates a nurturing ecosystem where the focus remains firmly on the community's educational needs and aspirations and provide a more comprehensive and inclusive learning environment for students.

List of potential partnerships: (not limited to)

- Local councils including Aboriginal Land Councils
- Community organisations and services
- National, Interstate and State-wide HE institutions
- Schools and other places of learning
- Industry - The benefit of working closely with industry both in the private and government sector affords the possibility of organising regular networking events or seminars where students can connect with local leaders, professionals, and educators to understand the local market and opportunities better.

### **Governance and management**

APEN recommends the importance of good governance and management of the Suburban University Study Hubs that aligns with cultural responsiveness and relevance to the community and offers several key principles and practices below:

- **Local representation and leadership involvement.** The governance and management structure must prioritise local perspectives and community engagement. This can be achieved by ensuring that the advisory board overseeing the study hubs includes representatives from the community. Additionally, local community champions should be actively engaged in leadership roles within the study hubs. This approach not only ensures that decisions are made with a deep understanding of the community's needs but also promotes ownership and trust within the community.
- **Diverse staffing.** An inclusive and culturally responsive study hub should implement diverse hiring practices. This means actively recruiting staff members who reflect the cultural diversity of the community being served. A staff that mirrors the community it serves can better relate to and understand the unique needs and backgrounds of the students, fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.



- **Cultural competence training.** Regular training on cultural competence, inclusivity, equity, and inclusion should be provided to study hub staff. This training equips them with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively engage with and support students from various cultural backgrounds. It also ensures that staff members are aware of and sensitive to the cultural nuances and challenges faced by the community.
- **Accountability and transparency.** The governance mechanism should include regular audits and evaluations of the study hubs' operations. These assessments should be transparent and involve input from both internal and external stakeholders. Community advisory boards can serve as a valuable resource for providing insights and feedback on the study hubs' performance and alignment with community needs.
- **Proposal criteria for community organisations.** When selecting community organisations to manage study hubs, criteria should include evidence of experience in providing educational support, a track record of successful community engagement initiatives, demonstrated ability to manage and operate educational facilities effectively, and a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion principles, including culturally inclusive pedagogy. These criteria ensure that the organisations entrusted with managing the study hubs are well-equipped to serve the community effectively.

Incorporating these recommendation, principles and practices into the design and delivery of the Suburban University Study Hubs will not only enhance their cultural responsiveness and relevance to the community but also contribute to their long-term success and positive impact on students' educational journeys.

APEN extends our gratitude for considering our submission.

**Tofa Amanda Moors-Mailei**  
Co-Chair Australian Pasifika Educators  
Network

**Bronwyn Williams**  
Co-Chair Australian Pasifika Educations  
Network