

Department of Education
Australian Government

Friday 29th September, 2023

Dear Department of Education Colleagues,

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

Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia (EPHEA) strongly supports the goal of suburban study hubs, in increasing access to higher education for people from the most vulnerable communities.

EPHEA strongly encourages the consideration of the following design principles in the development of the hubs.

Suburban Tertiary Study Hubs

In order to meet the ambitious goals set by the Accord to increase access to higher education, we strongly advocate for the study hubs to offer a holistic tertiary education experience and pathways for underrepresented student groups. Whilst proximity to higher education is one barrier to pursuing a university degree, so is the previous educational experiences of students. Therefore, a cross sector approach to study hubs, which includes vocational and enabling pathways, as well as university sub-bachelor and bachelor qualifications to encourage lifelong learning and pathways into and through university. In addition to this, a tertiary study hub model could smooth the transitions between providers, by offering static learning support across qualifications.

Community and evidence driven

Similar to the Regional University Centre model, it will be important that a place-based approach is taken to establishing and operating the facility, allowing communities to drive establishment and operations based on community need. Using local knowledge to tailor offerings to students and the community will be critical as a design principle. In addition to this, given the limited number of suburban tertiary study hubs it will be important to take an evidence-based approach to ensure that the placement of such hubs are based on community need; as opposed to being driven by political or funding priorities. As such, communities should be able to demonstrate that there is no university access within a set radius of their community and access to higher education in those communities are below the national average.

Investment from Universities and Vocational Education Providers

One of the challenges of the Regional University Centre model, is the absence of clear structures within Universities and Vocational Education Providers to enable seamless and effective support of students. In order to support both staff and students working within Tertiary Study Hubs, there needs to be a dedicated relationship manager in universities and vocational education providers to enable seamless case management of students and the challenges that navigating a complex higher education environment presents. Capacity building for both university and hub staff needs to be built into the program from the beginning. This can benefit both Regional University Centres and Suburban University Study Hubs.



In addition to this, many universities operate a face-to-face teaching and learning model. Despite the shifts that occurred during COVID, the gains that have been made in flexible delivery have been lost in many institutions. To maximise student choice and support aspirations, there needs to be a continued investment by universities to deliver blended and online learning.

Thank you for taking the time to review this submission and we look forward to receiving further information in the near future.

Kind Regards,

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