

Suburban University Study Hubs

Background

The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) is the peak body for Catholic education in Australia and is responsible for the national coordination and representation of Catholic schools and school authorities. Our role is to ensure the needs of Catholic schools are served through funding, legislation, and policy.

Working closely with state and territory Catholic Education Commissions, NCEC advocates at the national level on behalf of the Catholic sector and the hundreds of thousands of Australian families who entrust the education of their children to our schools.

Catholic schools are universal in reach and open to all families who seek a Catholic education. Australia's 1,759 mostly low-fee Catholic schools educate one in five, or nearly 794,000, students and employ more than 104,000 staff. We are the largest single provider of non-government schooling in Australia.

The mission of Catholic education, since its inception, has been to serve students from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly the disadvantaged and marginalised. Our schools welcome students from a range of backgrounds including an increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (up 63% in the last decade). Students with disability represent almost 21% of Catholic school enrolment, and 42% of students experience socio-educational disadvantage. Almost 40% of Catholic schools are in regional and remote areas.

The Suburban University Study Hubs Program

NCEC strongly supports the Australian Government's focus on expanding access and equity opportunities for under-represented groups to Australian universities and higher education institutions.

The Suburban University Study Hubs Program is a welcome initiative in support of this goal.

Catholic schools have a substantial history and strong reputation for providing access to educational opportunities and aspiration for low socioeconomic status, First Nations, and other disadvantaged communities. Catholic schools emphasise supporting student outcomes through delivering education in a way that uses the local context and knowledge to tailor their offerings to students and the surrounding community.

In addition to educating students in primary and secondary school settings, Catholic schools have significant experience in promoting students' access to post-school pathways. For example, the most recent VET in Schools data shows that there were over 62,000 VET program enrolments in Catholic schools in 2021. Catholic schools in Queensland had the most program enrolments, followed by Catholic schools in Victoria and then New South Wales.

The *Consultation Paper: Implementing Suburban University Study Hubs* identifies a range of potential operators for the delivery of the Program including community-led organisations, university or TAFE/VET providers, and joint ventures or consortia.

NCEC submits that the framework for potential operators should be broad enough to enable not-for-profit educational institutions such as Catholic schools to partner with and/or be co-located with the future Suburban University Study Hubs.

Some Catholic schools have similar models already in operation.

St John Paul II Catholic College, Nirimba in North West Sydney has a Year 11-12 campus co-located with three partners: a government school, Wyndham College, a campus of TAFE NSW, and The College of Western Sydney University. The co-location of these educational institutions enables an awareness of opportunities, participation in educational experiences, and access to post-school pathways which students may not otherwise have.

NCEC proposes that the significant experience and strength Catholic schools and systems have in supporting the education of under-represented groups makes Catholic education a good fit to facilitate partnerships under the Suburban University Study Hubs Program.

I look forward to opportunities for further consultation with the Department regarding Catholic education being included in the range of potential operators for the Suburban University Study Hubs Program.

Should you have any questions, please contact me via phone [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED]

Yours faithfully



Jacinta Collins
Executive Director