



2 October 2023

Suburban Study Hubs Program
Australian Government Department of Education
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By email: suburbanhubs@education.gov.au

Dear Program Team

Submission: Implementing Suburban University Study Hubs

The National Growth Areas Alliance (NGAA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *Implementing Suburban University Study Hubs Consultation Paper* (the Consultation Paper).

The NGAA is the peak body for local governments in Australia's outer metropolitan growth areas and advocates to state and federal governments on growth area challenges and opportunities. Together, we represent more than five million people living in Australia's fast-growing suburbs and are united by the shared experiences of population growth rates at double the national average and long-term under-investment in vital infrastructure.

We take an evidence-based approach, with a Policy Platform built on the foundations of our comprehensive research strategy. We also help to develop Alliance Councils' capacity to deliver good growth through best practice case studies, policy discussions and comprehensive networks.

We welcome the commitment from the Federal Government to doubling the number of University Study Hubs and locating up to 14 of them in outer suburban areas without an existing significant physical university campus and where the percentage of the population with university qualifications is low. We agree that these changes will improve access and equity for under-represented groups at Australian universities and higher education institutions.

Outlined below is our overarching feedback and specific responses to the consultation questions that are relevant to our members.

What is the aim of the Suburban University Study Hubs Program?

Overarching feedback

The NGAA fully supports the federal Government's initiative to expand the University Study Hubs program.

Residents of outer suburban areas, especially in Australia's growth areas, face numerous barriers to accessing higher education, including limited public transport options and long distances from physical educational institutions. There is a real need within outer suburban areas to extend and supplement existing tertiary education offerings and complement, not replace, the role of providers. We welcome

the flexibility that Study Hubs provide for students who typically face barriers in accessing learning opportunities and agree that this will widen participation and support lifelong learning.

We consider the proposed Study Hubs fulfil a similar role, and offer a similar range of benefits, as community hubs and business hubs. Recent [research](#) commissioned by the NGAA analysed the benefits of both community and business hubs. The benefits were identified as being broad, including the following:

- Economic development benefits include an improved knowledge and success of local small businesses, which come from events, training programs and workshops that are provided to businesses in the business hubs.
- Networking benefits come from the provision of office space for local businesses, enabling networking between occupant businesses, facilitating meetings with customers, and providing opportunities for networking with the council's economic development team.
- Employment benefits come from increased local job opportunities and diversification of employment conditions as local business that have been supported and grow create new jobs.
- Health benefits of the case studies include an improved work-life balance for small business owners, as they have access to office spaces outside of their home, enabling a clearer separation of work and home and providing a space where they can meet clients outside of their home.
- Community cohesion benefits of the case studies relate to the fact that, given most of the case studies are either a meeting space in themselves or are co-located with meeting spaces, such as libraries or parks, this provides community cohesion benefits because people can interact, meet on purpose or incidentally and have a local place to go to. This is of particular importance in growth areas where often meeting spaces are scarce.

Consultation Questions

- 1. How can a place-based approach be fostered, as part of the Suburban University Study Hubs program, that ensures the voice of local communities is integrated in their design and operation?**

We suggest creating a working group in each region that includes students, teachers from local TAFEs, Universities, job seekers, Local Government representatives, and WFA providers.

Local Governments also have detailed data about their communities and have been intimately involved in the planning and urban design of their municipality. We recommend that the relevant Local Government be involved in the development of the Study Hub, including in deciding the location, to make full use of this local knowledge. We consider that the Local Government representatives will be best placed to advise which existing services and amenities the Study Hub is best co-located with. For example, there may be an existing community hub that includes a business or co-working centre that is well suited to being co-located with a Study Hub.

- 2. How can the Suburban University Study Hubs widen participation and support and extend further study opportunities, adding to existing or planned investments?**

We suggest delivering marketing campaigns to raise awareness in catchment areas, promoting the Study Hub services to schools and prospective students, as well locating the study hubs close to the local libraries and community centres.

We also recommend that the program works with the respective Local Government staff to identify the barriers to participation in their municipality and seek to address those. For example, barriers to participation for women in a particular municipality may be care-giving responsibilities, therefore co-locating the Study Hub with a child care facility could address this barrier.

Additionally, Study Hubs can enhance existing and planned investments if they are located within established strategic metropolitan centres that have a pipeline of infrastructure projects.

3. How can equity be embedded into the design of Suburban University Study Hubs?

Further to the response above, other factors can contribute to providing equitable access such as safe, well-lit public spaces that are fully accessible to people of all abilities (such as ramps for wheel chair access, ergonomic tables and chairs, braille friendly keyboards).

4. Where multiple communities may co-exist within the same area (for example, ethnic, cultural, industry-based, etc.), how can Suburban University Study Hubs ensure they meet the needs of these different communities?

As previously noted, Local Governments have detailed data about their communities and are well placed to be involved in the discussions about how diverse needs may be met. We recommend that the relevant Local Government is involved in the planning and design from the inception of the project. We further suggest ensuring design elements consider and respond to the needs of the respective communities (such as a prayer room) and engaging a bi-cultural support worker in the Study Hubs.

5. How can we ensure that Suburban University Study Hubs operate to support students engaging with any provider, while also ensuring strong connections with local providers, campuses and leaders?

When designing the Suburban Study Hubs, we recommend engaging with the local providers, campuses, leaders, and aspiring students, to provide breadth of course and provider opportunities, while also linking local provider opportunities that further facilitate local employment and placement opportunities for the students. This approach supports breadth of course opportunities while also strengthening the local education providers who service direct links to employment and placement opportunities.

We also suggest the hubs need to maintain an impartial approach. Their main priority should be the students accessing the facilities. The hubs need to build connections with the local training providers for information sharing. For example, if a local training provider is offering a short course, that might benefit the students accessing the facility, they should display the relevant information on their notice board.

What barriers will the Suburban University Study Hubs address and what services will they provide?

Overarching feedback

The NGAA member feedback supports the conclusions of the 2021 evaluation of the existing regional program which found that University Study Hubs address a gap in access to appropriate facilities to enable study and facilitate better study experiences. Overall, early evidence demonstrates that University Study Hubs improve student completion and retention.

We welcome the proposal for the University Study Hubs to support students who may be studying in a variety of ways, and that the Hubs will support these students by providing a local option for accessing convenient support, reducing barriers through in-person support and providing ICT equipment and local study spaces.

We agree that tailored wrap-around support should be based on local community and student need.

Consultation Questions

6. What dedicated support services should Suburban University Study Hubs provide? Are there gaps in support for under-represented cohorts (for example, First Nations students, students with disability) Suburban University Study Hubs could address?

We suggest that providing access and advice relating to the most effective support services students require will be a feature that attracts and retains students in their chosen course and leads to successful completion. We consider that study and academic related support services are key, as well as access to a Cultural Support Worker, Mental health support worker, and an opportunity for special tutoring for students with a disability. The region's high support needs may be assessed and the Study Hub's specialist support services could then better match these, while also being able to provide general support on various matters. Further, direct links and referral services to community support and the University provider specialist support (online or phone) will also be required.

7. How can Suburban University Study Hubs provide a culturally safe environment for all students, that is relevant to them and their local context?

We consider this is best achieved by engaging all the stakeholders of the proposed Study Hub, including the Local Government and prospective students.

8. Are there examples (in Australia or internationally) of similar support services (in tertiary education or other sectors) that could inform the design of Suburban University Study Hubs?

Yes. Existing University support service types and structures may inform suitable approaches for the Suburban Study Hubs. These services and methods for engaging students early continue to be refined within the Universities and may provide valuable insights and models.

9. Are there existing support mechanisms that could be leveraged and offered through the Suburban University Study Hubs? How could the Hubs provide a useful additional impact and avoid duplication of services?

Dedicated support services at the Suburban Study Hub will be highly valuable as this provides integrated and wrap around support which contributes to facilitating success in students' learning. Many support services in the community are stretched and may likely result in extensive wait time. The most common support services should be provided in the Suburban Study Hub, along with the first tier of advice for other services, and links to the established University or community services. We also suggest co-locating a Skills and Jobs Centre close to a Study hub to assist with demonstrating the options available to prospective students.

10. How can Suburban University Study Hubs best communicate the supports they provide to local students and support aspiration in their local community?

The relevant Local Government may be in a position to assist with reaching out to, or communicating with, the community, in addition to promotions through all the local secondary schools, TAFEs and Universities, community centres, community networks, and local notice boards

11. What role could Suburban University Study Hubs play in supporting enabling/tertiary preparation courses for students from under-represented backgrounds?

The Suburban Study Hubs could collaborate with local University provider(s) for the coordination and delivery of preparatory University programs. Effective models may be used including well promoted and scheduled block mode delivery, targeted support, and additional online collaborative learning. The Study Hubs may facilitate the pathway planning for the students to transition into formal university enrolment upon successful completion. Close partnership with local university provider(s) should be encouraged within the model.

Where will the Suburban University Study Hubs be located?

Overarching feedback

The NGAA supports the proposed approach to help identify locations with the greatest need for a Suburban University Study Hub, and we urge the Federal Government to carry out stakeholder engagement to supplement the quantitative data analysis and research.

We reiterate that Local Governments hold detailed data about their communities and are exceptionally well-placed to provide valuable insights into community needs and recommend locations for Study Hubs.

Consultation Questions

12. What factors should be considered when selecting locations for Suburban University Study Hubs?

In terms of physical attributes, we suggest there is benefit in locating Study Hubs where they are readily accessible, for example, close to public transport and with free parking around the area, close to local food shops.

In terms of demographic characteristics, we recommend that suburbs where the proportion of the population that has a bachelor degree is below the national average be prioritised.

NGAA member examples are outlined below:

City of Wyndham, Victoria

About 10 percent of the population in Hoppers Crossing, Werribee, and Wyndham Vale in Melbourne’s western growth areas has a bachelor degree or higher (refer to the table below). According ABS data from the 2021 Census, 5.5 million people (circa 21 percent of the Australian population) has a bachelor degree or higher. In comparison, 32.8 percent of the population of greater Melbourne has a bachelor degree or higher. On this basis, we suggest locating a Study Hub in one of these suburbs within the City of Wyndham.

City of Wyndham: Level of tertiary education by Suburb

Suburb	% of population with Bachelor degree or higher	Above or below national average
Hoppers Crossing	10.4	Below
Manor Lakes	16.5	Below
Mambourin	20.0	Below
Point Cook	17.8	Below
Tarneit	15.5	Below

Truganina	16.3	Below
Werribee	10.8	Below
Williams Landing	20.0	Below
Wyndham Vale	10.7	Below
Wyndham	14.4	Below

City of Playford, South Australia

As an additional example, overall, 8.4 percent of the population in the City of Playford has a bachelor degree or higher, which is well below the national average. Specifically, 6.8 per cent of the population of Elizabeth has a bachelor degree or higher. On this basis, we suggest locating a Study Hub in Playford in general and Elizabeth in particular.

City of Playford: Level of tertiary education by Suburb

Suburb	% of population with Bachelor degree or higher	Above or below national average
Elizabeth, South Australia	6.8%	Below
City of Playford	8.4%	Below

City of Casey, Victoria

In the City of Casey, as of 2021, 22 per cent of the population have a Bachelor Degree or higher. This is significantly lower when compared with Greater Melbourne. Further, 8 percent of the First Nations people have Bachelor Degree or higher, and 40.7 percent of the population have recorded no qualifications. We therefore suggest locating a Suburban Study Hub in the City of Casey.

City of Armadale, Western Australia

Locating a Suburban University Study Hub in the City of Armadale would help address social disadvantage that continues to challenge some parts of the community. Armadale consistently scores lower than other local government authorities in the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). High levels of unemployment and housing stress, domestic violence, substance abuse, youth disengagement and lower levels of education are intergenerational challenges that some parts of our community experience.

Further, the Western Australia Government estimates that approximately 100,000 more jobs will be needed in the South East corridor to support the predicted population growth. Training, education and workforce development are essential to foster this job growth, however access to tertiary education opportunities is lacking. On this basis, we suggest locating a Suburban Study Hub in the City of Armadale.

13. What other types of social infrastructure should be located in close proximity to Suburban University Study Hubs to maximise their success? (e.g., childcare services)

We have already noted relevant social infrastructure, and would add that locating Study Hubs close to the following would be of benefit:

- Library;
- skills and jobs centre;
- public transport;
- retail and food outlets; and
- free car parking.

Overall, however, we consider it likely that the social infrastructure required will vary between locations based on the needs of the Study Hub users in the community. We therefore suggest engaging all the stakeholders of the proposed Study Hub, including the Local Government and prospective students, to identify the appropriate social infrastructure.

14. How can Suburban University Study Hubs complement, rather than replace, the innovative solutions being implemented by education providers to support students in outer metropolitan and peri-urban areas?

We suggest collaborating with local University or other education provider(s) to ensure the proposed Study Hubs complement existing innovative solutions and avoid duplication of services.

We also note that any given Study Hub will cater to students studying across all different educational institutions, therefore we suggest enabling the Study Hubs as a 24 hr swipe in use facility so students can access the facility at any time of the day or night with prior booking.

Who can apply?

We agree with the broad list of potential operators for the delivery of the Suburban Study Hubs program, and we suggest that Workforce Australia Providers also be considered. We also note that Local Government is experienced provider of numerous community services and may also be considered. However we note that not one size fits all councils and we suggest that flexibility should be considered when looking at potential operators and operating models.

Consultation Questions

15. What skills, services and attributes should an organisation be able to demonstrate as evidence of their ability to establish and operate a Suburban University Study Hub?

Success of the high functioning Regional University Study Hubs may inform this. Given a key objective is to increase University education outcomes, the support structure and funding may be managed through Federal HE funding, operations expectations, and reporting.

Further, some of the skills and attributes required by the organisation should include:

- Technology integration
- Diagnostics (trouble shooting)
- Administrative services
- Reporting and analysis

16. What governance mechanisms should be in place to ensure each Suburban University Study Hub is operating effectively and meeting the needs of the local community?

We suggest an approach whereby the provider is required to report through quality assurance programs. For example, the funding and reporting may best be linked to the Federal HE portfolio, and where participating Universities (through enrolment) also report on student milestones.

17. Should a single organisation be eligible to operate multiple hubs? If so, how could local community drive and engagement be built into the Suburban University Study Hub operating model?

This may be possible as long as the operating and reporting expectation includes local community, Local Government, and industry involvement. The terms of local contribution should be clear, to ensure efficiency and success for the students is enabled.

18. How could the Suburban University Study Hubs encourage collaboration between hubs and education providers (including universities and VET)?

Universities and Vocational Education and Training (VET) have obligations to serve their regions and beyond through online study and support. Higher Education funding obligations may incorporate the collaboration expectations for the Rural and Suburban University Hubs. Success of the Suburban Study Hubs can be directly linked to the (desired) increased enrolments and completion rates for the host University and the region.

What will the Suburban University Study Hubs Program fund?

Whilst the Consultation Paper notes that the Department will establish Conditions of Grant with each Suburban University Study Hub operator for a period of 3-4 years, NGAA member feedback indicates that from a Local Government perspective, it is preferable to have operating funding for eight to ten years to ensure the sustainability and the success of the program.

There may also be the potential for councils to put forward space in a council-owned property, or council owned land, however this would likely need to be agreed as part of an engagement or stakeholder consultation process.

Consultation Questions

19. How can Suburban University Study Hubs encourage and support partnerships that benefit students? What incentives would be most effective to promote partnership development?

Creating an employment pipeline of students and graduates for partner investors may be attractive. However, with funding uncertainties and limitations, the proposed Study Hubs should be operational through the Department funding, thereby providing equitable access for students within the identified regions.

20. What learnings are there from existing initiatives, and/or are there new ideas that could support the design and development of the Suburban University Study Hubs, noting that they are intended to be different from institution specific study centres/hubs.

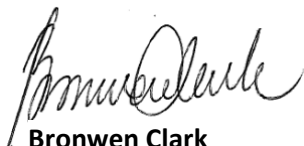
A well-connected community of support for the access and success of the student enrolment is paramount. This collaboration facilitates successful study and work models that support the students during and after their studies are completed. Students who study in their region are far more likely to stay and work in their region and thus contribute to the prosperity of the region. Joint commitments and partnerships between education/ training providers, Local

Government, community and industries will enable this. Ballarat Technology Park (run by Federation University) is an exemplar for region-based education, employment through partnerships, and the retention of the qualified graduates in the region.

Contact

The NGAA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Consultation Paper and provide a Local Government perspective on the proposed Suburban Study Hubs. Should you wish to discuss any of the matters raised in this response, please contact Caroline Speed, National Research and Policy Lead, on caroline.speed@ngaa.org.au.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bronwen Clark', written in a cursive style.

Bronwen Clark
Executive Officer
National Growth Areas Alliance