State Library of South Australia

Submission to the Consultation Paper:
Implementing Suburban University Study Hubs

Acknowledgement of Country

This document has been written on the lands of the Kaurna people. In the spirit of reconciliation, the authors acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

Introduction

The State Library of South Australia thanks the Panel for the opportunity to make this submission to contribute to building the long-term plan for Australia's higher education sector.

The State Library writes this submission in two capacities as:
- the central agency for providing services to public libraries in South Australia
- a business unit of the Libraries Board of South Australia

In line with these roles the State Library of South Australia makes the following overarching recommendations.

1. LibrariesSA has a solid community base which ideally positions them for a place-based approach.
2. LibrariesSA are culturally safe public facilities that provide a place where people of all backgrounds, colour and creed feel supported.
3. Co-location with a public library includes a variety of benefits and will maximise the success of a Suburban University Hub.
4. LibrariesSA staff have a track record of building successful partnerships and alliances and have a firm commitment to lifelong learning.
5. LibrariesSA is a sound investment for the establishment of one or two Suburban University Hubs in South Australia.

About the State Library of South Australia

As the keeper of South Australia's stories, the State Library provides the community with a place to reflect upon our identities, preserve our memories, and gather our knowledge. Through its values of trust, service, respect, knowledge and relevance, the State Library documents our unique and evolving place in the world.

The State Library is the central support agency for State's public libraries and is responsible for leading the LibrariesSA One Card Network.

About LibrariesSA One Card Network

One Card[1] was fully implemented across the public library sector in 2014, providing unprecedented community access to a state-wide public library collection. It brought together the 140+ libraries across the State to work together to achieve outstanding public library outcomes for all South Australians, such as access to a collection of over 3 million items regardless of where they live.

Through ongoing innovation, the One Card Network has now created the nation's largest eBook and digital content library which allows additional access to information, which is a fundamental requirement of a democratic society.

South Australian libraries are clearly an important amenity for South Australians with the vast majority of adults having used a public library service at some stage in their lives, and more than half of all South Australian adults being members of a public library. This is further evidenced by just under a third of the community using public library services at least monthly[2]. This high level of usage clearly demonstrates the dependence that the South Australian community has on public library services.

Ongoing library user surveys confirm that people use public libraries to borrow items, followed by access to technology. Internet access is now the second most frequently used service at any public library in the State.

Library users have embraced the One Card Network, which allow them to access diverse library services and collections with the use of a single library card.

This makes LibrariesSA an ideal partner for the **Suburban University Study Hubs Program.**

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[1] A strategic reform program undertaken by the Libraries Board during 2012-2015, which delivered a shared library system to all public libraries and their councils, resulting in significant cost savings and efficiency gains.
[2] Value of Libraries Study, Hudson Howells Action Market Research, 2020

Why partner with LibrariesSA?

South Australian Public Libraries empower curiosity through literacy.

Our diverse collections inspire people to ask questions about their world, to see it from other points of view and become fuller versions of themselves.

We nurture enlightenment in everyone by ensuring equal access to resources and ideas because we believe that learning—and the opportunity it opens—is a right shared by all.

Our collaborative, state-wide network brings together adaptable spaces, creative programs and local events to elevate the collective learning experience.

Facilitated by helpful staff, our trusted places are there when, where and how they are needed, whether to provide sanctuary and support, information and insight, or purpose and belonging.

All of us are searching for something, and South Australian Public Libraries exist to connect us in shared discovery.

South Australian Public Libraries create a community for all who seek.

Responses to the Suburban University Study Hubs Consultation Paper

1. Aim

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

Libraries have a transformative effect on the lives of all people, and they are civic institutions that welcome anyone who wishes to become a more informed and independent citizen. There is no other public resource that so well summarises this aspirational notion of democracy.

93% of library users say that they see the library as a trusted public place, and 81% go to the library to find information they trust. A further 93% say they trust library staff have the knowledge to provide assistance with the service they need[3]. This means LibrariesSA already has a solid community base which ideally positions them for a place-based approach.

Because library staff enjoy high levels of community trust, they will be effective in community-led co-design of the study hubs. It is important that the process, not just the outcome, is developed in collaboration with community members who will be directly impacted by the design. Because of library staff's excellent knowledge of their local communities, by working alongside existing leadership in a community, the process and facilitation are more likely to be contextually appropriate, comfortable, and familiar to community members, e.g., students.

2. Barriers

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

One of the primary challenges in supporting local communities, is the lack of resources and inadequate infrastructure. However, LibrariesSA has existing, robust staffing resources and infrastructure in place to connect, support and enable local community members to learn and thrive.

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[3] Monthly customer survey (2022-2023) with over 12,500 responses received to date

South Australian library staff received regular training in cultural competency, and to date over 350 library staff has completed the AIATSIS CORE Cultural Learning Program.

As such, LibrariesSA are culturally safe public facilities that provide a place where people of all backgrounds, colour and creed feel supported, and can express themselves and their culture, history and identity with dignity and pride. It is an environment that fosters shared respect, meaning, and knowledge, and the opportunity to learn together without judgement.

3. Suburban University Hub Location
Question 13: What other types of social infrastructure should be located in close proximity to Suburban University Study Hubs to maximise their success?

A public library! In South Australia we have various libraries within large councils on the fringes of Adelaide City, that may provide ideal locations for a University Study Hub. Co-location with a public library includes a variety of benefits, such as:

- sharing of resources such as staff, space and equipment
- encouraging wider public use by providing access to a range of services at one facility - the 'one stop shop'
- creating a critical mass of visitors and a vibrant hub
- improving the cost effectiveness of the service provided while enhancing service quality
- reducing duplication of resources
- rationalisation of property portfolios
- providing specialist facilities and services e.g. specialist expertise in technology and provision of equipment
- reducing worker isolation and encouraging more coordinated service delivery
- increased hours of operation
- increased security

4. Who can apply?

Question 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?

LibrariesSA staff offer a range of general skills that enable them to provide an outstanding service to their communities. They are known for their effective communication skills, professional ethical standards and social responsibility, their ability to fulfil customer needs, project management skills, critical, reflective, and creative thinking and problem-solving skills.

LibrariesSA staff have a track record of building successful partnerships and alliances and have a firm commitment to lifelong learning. They have relevant information and communications technology and technology application skills.

Specialist librarian expertise could contribute to the establishment and operation of a successful Suburban Study Hub, as they have the skills to:

- analyse the contexts in which information is originated, described, stored, organised, retrieved, disseminated, modified and used
- interpret the ethical, legal and policy issues that are relevant to information provision
- identify needs and behaviour of individuals, community groups, organisations and businesses through creation, collaboration and partnerships
- provide and promote free and equitable access to information and customer services
- evaluate services to determine their relevance to the needs of users
- apply research skills to provide appropriate information to customers
- facilitate the development of information literacy and the ability to critically evaluate information, including the use of online resources and databases

5. Funding

Question19: How can Suburban University Study Hubs encourage and support partnerships that benefit students? What incentives would be most effective to promote partnership development?

LibrariesSA help build social capital in their communities. In a study[4] published in 2021, the researchers clearly demonstrated that collaboration between universities and public libraries through understanding of the needs, context and experience of low-socioeconomic students can initiate and inform targeted action to help support these students, increase inclusion and belonging, and facilitate student success.

> *"The library service can make connections with higher education so that learning continues like a ribbon through people's lives and to prevent universities from drifting away from local communities".[5]*

However, adequate funding is key. Public Libraries are but one of many services provided by local government, and the competition for the public dollar is fierce. Co-locating a Suburban University Hub in one or two of our public libraries make sense but needs to be funded adequately to be successful.

Public libraries in South Australia generated $252 million of benefits in 2018-19. After accounting for operational costs, the net community welfare contribution is estimated at $163 million. This equates to $95 per capita per year in net community benefits.

That means for every dollar invested in public libraries in South Australia, $2.80 of benefits are generated for local community members. This makes LibrariesSA a sound investment for the establishment of one or two Suburban University Hubs in South Australia.

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[4] Emma Power, Helen Partridge, Sue Owen & Blanca Pizzani (2022) Exploring partnerships between public libraries and universities in regional low-socioeconomic communities: the student experience, Higher Education Research & Development, 41:7, 2324-2337, DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2021.2011153

[5] Claire Pickering, Senior Library Officer, Information and Culture, Wakefield Libraries

Incentives to promote partnership development with public libraries include:
- Resource incentives such as:
    - University paid student casuals to work in the University Hub
    - For-credit university placement that allows student casuals to gain valuable course-credit for their work in the University Hub
    - Provide student volunteers working in the University Hub with free professional development, for example a bespoke session on using digital tools, software, or literature reviews
- Additional funding to uplift the library's technology to further support students
- Additional funding for training of public library staff to support student needs
- STEM funding for the library to develop community-based Maker Spaces for children to foster a learning environment that young children embrace and want to part of

The following is important to promote effective partnership development:

- A clear governance structure and commitment to equal partnership
- Well established, professional relationships between all partners, especially at senior leadership level
- Adequate project development funding and committed resources
- Shared values and agreed strategic direction, with a clear value to both sides that justifies the time and effort of working together with mutual benefit for both partners
- Role clarity