

2 October 2023

Department of Education
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601



Submission to the Consultation Paper: Implementing Suburban University Study Hubs

Swinburne University of Technology commends the Universities Accord Panel and Minister for Education in putting First Nations people, lower socio-economic groups, people with a disability and those from rural, remote, and outer suburban communities at the heart of the Accord.

Swinburne appreciates this opportunity to make a submission in relation to the Commonwealth Governments expansion of student support into outer suburban areas through the Consultation Paper on Implementing Suburban University Study Hubs.

We welcome the immediate extension of demand-driven funding to metropolitan First Nations students and the end of the 50% pass rule that greatly disadvantaged students from equity groups.

We are eager to work with the Accord Panel and the Department of Education in the \$66.9 million committed to double the number of university study hubs, including up to 14 in outer suburban areas.

To achieve change, governments and universities will need to continue to foster increased levels of research, innovation and monitoring to tackle this multifactorial challenge. Among the areas Swinburne see as most promising are:

- **More effectively monitored outreach programs**, supporting development of aspiration among prospective students from equity cohorts/ priority groups. Swinburne already has numerous programs including our:
 - Equity Outreach program aimed at developing partnerships with low-SES, Regional and remote schools, and communities.
 - In2Science program with high school students, which provide immersive university education experiences for participating students.
 - Care Leavers program.
 - Refugee and Asylum Seekers program and
 - More recently our successful Children's University.
- **Greater use of data to rapidly refine and improve support programs for equity cohorts**, especially as they transition into university. In a data-rich digital university environment, there are new opportunities to identify quickly what works. For example, here at Swinburne, we have been engaging for some years in regular modelling of the propensity for students to drop out coupled with outreach to those students to offer a conversation and tailored support.
- **Create and pilot new outreach and learning support models.** A good example is Swinburne Online where, in partnership with OES, we have developed a capacity to support the success of a substantial group of mature students from equity cohorts as they gain a degree online and obtain access to a chosen profession. A further example of this is our year 9 program. A strengths-based program developed through co-design with low-SES schools and aligning with the Victorian schools' careers curricula. The program enables students to identify their passions and purpose in the future world of work, with a scaffolded approach through years 10, 11 and 12.

- **Improved living support for equity cohort students.** For example, increased access to Study Allowance, greater financial advice, and support to undertake Work Integrated Learning (WIL) or further studies, provision of scholarships to support pre-Access, Access, retention, and completion.

For suburban study hubs to be successful in increasing participation for students who typically face barriers in accessing learning opportunities, they will need to collaborate with the local community, offer flexible support services and complement rather than replace, the innovative solutions already implemented by local education providers.

Community-based approach (Q1, 2, 3, 4 and 5).

As an education provider, Swinburne is available to all eligible students in Victoria and Australia. However, even with online learning, support services and providing an inclusive environment to students is limited by location. Barriers for outer suburban cohorts to undertake tertiary education includes:

- A lack of transport options available for students to travel to existing university campuses.
- Access to adequate internet to undertake studies remotely.
- Limited support services to navigate enrolment process and to complete learning assessments (especially if first in family).

Swinburne provides dual sector learning in both higher and vocational education via our three campuses in the eastern metropolitan suburbs of Melbourne, with two of the campuses located in the outer suburbs more than 30 kilometres from the Melbourne city centre. To widen participation, we run a variety of outreach programs from these campuses in Wantirna and Croydon engaging with over 70 local schools and are the only tertiary education provider to a growing population of over 400,000. Existing outreach programs include PrimeSci! from our Wantirna campus providing STEM based enrichment programs both in classroom and on campus through:

- Primary school excursions
- Family science nights
- School holiday workshops and
- Labrats Science Club.

An extension of the university study hub program to outer suburbs will enable the expansion of locally designed outreach activities already provided by education providers like Swinburne, councils and community organisations that are designed to reduce social and economic barriers to quality education.

CASE STUDY: SwinLocal

The SwinLocal partnership was first established in late 2016. It formalises new and existing relationships between Swinburne and 33 individual learn local organisations in Melbourne's East to focus on establishing effective learner pathways from pre-accredited training into accredited and tertiary studies.

SwinLocal works on the importance of place and community-led needs and has created an extension ecosystem of adult learning provision and pathways into further education and employment.

Activities and outcomes to date include:

- *Partnership with CHAOS Network to deliver a Carers Employment Support Program (DFFH funded).*
- *Development of seven high-quality pathways programs from Learn Local to accredited training (including mental health peer work, aged care, early childhood education and care, real estate, commercial cleaning, digital literacy and try a trade).*
- *VCAL Scholarships awarded to LLO students to undertake VET courses at Swinburne campuses.*
- *Hosting of women's career forums for the community.*
- *Industry partnerships.*

- *Trade Trailer for building and construction developed and used to deliver training in the community.*
- *Community projects including kitchen garden at Seville Primary School and a heritage garden restored at Coonara Community House in Upper Ferntree Gully.*

Swinburne recommends that to be eligible to host a suburban study hub, organisations should be required to provide evidence of their existing connection to the local community. Through utilising existing connection to the community, these study hubs will have greater support through:

- Accessing existing communication networks (through cultural/ migrant groups, multifaith communities, peak community and industry groups, libraries, schools and other social clubs).
- Leveraging a well-established and targeted marketing channel for priority cohorts.
- Fostering trust and inclusion for priority cohorts to consider tertiary education as a pathway to continued learning.
- Having an existing understanding of cultural backgrounds, usually a diverse mix in the outer suburbs with many not understanding how to access the tertiary education system.

In establishing the suburban study hub, **Swinburne strongly recommends that a working group with community representation is established to co-design the hub to meet the unique needs of the area.** Through adding existing local community connection as a requirement, these study hubs will flourish and be widely accepted by the diverse local community in a short timeframe. Without leveraging established relationships with community, this connection can take many years to develop and foster.

Collaborative approach to support services (Q6, 7, 8, 9 and 11)

Regardless if on-campus, online or blended learning, a variety of targeted support services are crucial to a high-quality learning environment. This is necessary for all cohorts, First Nations people, lower socio-economic groups, people with a disability, mature age, and those from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds. At Swinburne this support comes in many forms including:

- Career and employability guidance.
- Study and learning support.
- Disability support.
- Health and wellbeing.
- Peer mentoring programs.

It is not practical for study hubs to provide the same level of services as a full university campus, however it is important students receive base level support for obtaining information and advice while understanding connected services through the host education provider.

It is important that there is a collaborative approach to support services between the hub and the host education institute. As such, **Swinburne recommends that a set of principles are developed in relation to shared services and support,** leveraging existing mechanisms such as security and wellbeing support and career and employability guidance.

An example at Swinburne of this collaborative approach is our Skills and Jobs Centre, offering quality career and pathway counselling and support to both Swinburne students and external clients from across the outer east metropolitan region of Melbourne. They have strong connections to local communities and employers and are particularly important for vulnerable members of the community who need support to identify their job options, become job ready and understand the learning pathways that can help them to achieve their goals and aspirations.

Accessibility and connection to local infrastructure (Q12, 13, 14, 16 and 17)

The location and facilities available as part of these suburban study hubs is vital to ensuring greater participation for those who wouldn't otherwise undertake further education. When selecting a location, it is vital that the following factors are considered:

- Utilisation of existing infrastructure of the host education provider.
- Proximity to public transport especially regional transport centres.
- Housing and accommodation options nearby.
- Community, health, and early childhood services.
- Close to employment centres.

These suburban study hubs must utilise existing infrastructure and have strong links to nearby community services. **Swinburne recommends that a strict eligibility criterion is set in selecting location and host education providers.** They must be set up in key population growth areas working with the host education provider and all levels of government, in particular local councils.

For example, Swinburne partners actively with Local Government (Maroondah, Knox and Yarra Ranges in particular) for local community festivals, youth and employment expos, local business network groups, awards and advisory committees and has recently entered discussions about shared facilities and service activities at the Croydon Campus with Maroondah City Council.

It is crucial that the facility requirements meet the needs of the students and local community organisations, and this can only be achieved through a co-design approach working with local leaders and the principles of universal design to ensure access and inclusion of the community.

Complement existing initiatives and encourage collaboration (Q15, 17, and 18)

It is important that the suburban study hub complements and collaborates rather than duplicate existing educational initiatives of the local areas and host institute. This includes not only with tertiary education but also early childhood, primary and secondary learning fostering participation at the earliest of ages.

CASE STUDY: Knox Innovation Opportunity & Sustainability Centre

Already Swinburne undertakes extensive collaboration in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne, for example KIOSC (Knox Innovation Opportunity & Sustainability Centre) was established in 2012 under the Australian Government Trades Training Centres in Schools (TTC) program. In 2022 more than 16,600 students participated in programs delivered through KIOSC, including students from the immediate local area, greater Melbourne and Regional Victoria. 4,855 students have participated in KIOSC programs during Term 1 this year.

Key focus areas include:

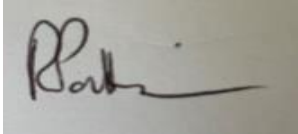
- *Advanced manufacturing and design (engineering, mechatronics robotics, electrotechnology).*
- *Laboratory based sciences (environmental monitoring, water quality testing, food production and formulation of chemistry).*
- *Design and digital technologies (visual communications, 3D computer aided design (CAD), and design thinking).*

In collaboration, the suburban study hubs can work with educational institutes like Swinburne to engage early with students in the local area and the additional opportunities provided by the study hubs.

It is important that when selecting host education providers, the government prioritise those with existing partnerships and initiatives with local schools and other education institutions. As a dual sector university, **Swinburne strongly recommends that these suburban hubs are made available to both higher and vocational education students and be classified not as 'university' but simply Student Study Hubs.** Being classified as university will detour vocational and other students from utilising the study hubs and the facilities.

Swinburne again wants to commend the Universities Accord panel and Minister for Education in taking strong action to immediate extension of demand-driven funding to metropolitan First Nations students and end of the 50% pass rule that greatly disadvantaged students from equity groups. Both these measures and funding for the additional study hubs will go a long way in boosting participation and support to those who will now have an opportunity to gain an education and eventual bright future in the workforce.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pip', on a light-colored background.

Professor Pip Pattison
Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education, Experience and Employability