

6 October 2023

Department of Education
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601

Submitted via online portal

Dear Colleagues

Consultation on Suburban University Study Hubs

TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) thanks the Department of Education for the opportunity to participate in the consultation on the proposed Suburban University Study Hubs which are the government's response to one of the five immediate actions recommended in the Australian Universities Accord Panel's Interim Report. TDA will not address the consultation questions individually, but would like to offer some broad reflections for consideration.

TDA is the national peak body that represents Australia's network of state and territory publicly owned Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes and dual sector universities. While the primary business of TDA members is vocational education and training, over half of TDA members also deliver higher education. This can be as part of a dual sector university, through third party arrangements, or their own qualifications.

TDA welcomes the additional funding for the establishment of up to 14 Suburban University Study Hubs and supports the aims of these hubs as articulated in the consultation paper. However, TDA believes that in order to better support diversity, equity of access and participation and to be 'provider agnostic', the government should re-consider the name of the hubs to be more inclusive. The word 'university' is an exclusive word for some, and may act as a barrier for many of the individuals that the hubs are trying to support.

Language does matter and if the government is trying to move towards a more cohesive tertiary education system which includes both vocational education and training (VET) and higher education on equal footing, then the name of these study hubs already sends a message to some people that they are not for them.

TDA welcomes efforts to increase enrolments of equity groups in higher education, while recognising that many of these students may be more suited to TAFE and TAFE dual sector organisations. If these study hubs are designed to develop readiness and aspiration for tertiary level study in their communities, then their name should be reflective of the broader tertiary education sector. TDA believes that this will increase the success of these centres in terms of access and equity.

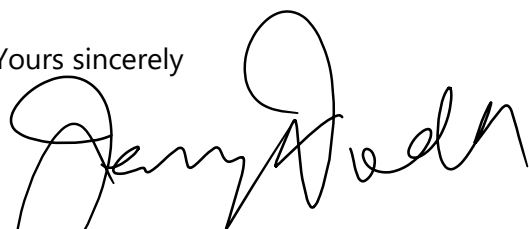
The interim report also discusses at length the movement towards a more aligned tertiary education system encouraging parity of esteem between the VET and higher education sectors. This is an example where we can achieve this if the hubs are appropriately named.

The other key point that TDA would like to make is to encourage the government to build on the existing TAFE and university footprint when deciding on the location of the suburban hubs. We strongly support the aim of co-locating the study hubs with existing infrastructure including TAFE campuses.

TAFEs are place based institutions embedded in their communities and operate in over 550 locations in Australia. The skills and training needs in one part of Australia may not be reflected in another region of Australia. TAFE is well positioned to provide this local place based learning and advice, contextualised for the local education and skills needs of the individuals and industries in the communities it serves.

TDA looks forward to ongoing engagement with the government as it progresses the recommendations from the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report. I can be contacted at jdodd@tda.edu.au or on 0408 514 183.

Yours sincerely

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

JENNY DODD

Chief Executive Officer
TAFE Directors Australia