



The Hon. Prof. Verity Firth, AM
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Social Justice and
Inclusion)

University of Technology Sydney
15 Broadway, Ultimo NSW 2007

T: [REDACTED]
M: [REDACTED]
verity.firth@uts.edu.au

PO Box 123
Broadway
NSW 2007 Australia
www.uts.edu.au

UTS CRICOS PROVIDER CODE 00099F

Department of Education
Australian Government

4 October 2023

Dear Department of Education Colleagues

RE: Implementing Suburban University Study Hubs

Thank you for providing the opportunity to respond to the 'Implementing Suburban University Study Hubs' consultation paper. The UTS Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion (CSJI) leads the University of Technology Sydney's social justice agenda, implementing whole-of-institution strategies and policies aimed at fulfilling and furthering the university's public purpose role. Working in partnership with internal and external stakeholders across and beyond the university, the Centre takes a community-engaged approach to making progress towards UTS's shared social justice vision of a healthy, sustainable, and socially just society. CSJI strongly recommends the following key principles in the implementation of the Suburban University Study Hubs:

1. Suburban Tertiary Study Hubs

For real improvements in equity outcomes, we need a holistic approach to deliver a connected lifelong learning ecosystem – founded on universal access to tertiary education, and delivered through flexible secondary schooling pathways and an integrated and learner focused tertiary system that delivers a range of credentials, with VET and HE as equal and respected partners. We recommend these hubs to be part of the broader education ecosystem developed in collaboration with vocational education and training providers such as TAFE, offering vocational and enabling pathways, as well as university sub-bachelor and bachelor qualifications. The Federal Government should partner with the states to ensure TAFE and other RTOs form part of the offering of Tertiary Study Hubs. The National Skills Agreement bilateral process with the states provides a good opportunity to commence these discussions.

2. Place Based Approach for Community led Solutions

As institution-agnostic, the hubs should be designed with the community's needs in mind. We recommend conducting an assessment/analysis to understand what communities want/need to identify existing services and skills gaps. Community Engagement Workshops where community members, including local employers and industry, can voice their opinions and provide input about the design and operation of the Study Hubs is critical. The Interim Report highlights Regional University Centres (RUCs, to be renamed as Regional University Study Hubs) as exemplars of place-based, community led initiatives that will be critical to meeting the 53% target and improving student participation, retention,



and completion rates in regional and remote areas. We recommend learning from the RUC's regarding place-based approaches, and adapt that approach for suburban and outer-suburban settings.

3. Investment in Community Engagement and Sustainable Partnerships

The Accord's prioritisation of these Study Hubs, coupled with the Federal Department of Education's Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program (RPPPP), signal a significant shift in the student equity landscape – a shift away from single institution outreach towards coordinated, sustainable, long-term, and collaborative partnerships between universities and RUCs; a model that places community at the centre of widening participation. The Eastern Australian Regional University Centre Partnership (EARUCP), funded by a \$5.1 million grant under the RPPPP and co-led by UTS and the Country Universities Centre, exemplifies this new HE equity landscape. This partnership between 20 Universities and 16 RUCs encourages universities to step outside their institutional boundaries and work collaboratively in meaningful co-designed outreach with other universities and RUCs. Institutional neutrality at the hub level is paramount in the EARUCP. This allows learners who access the hub to have a choice of university providers. Local initiatives are not constrained by what a single university can offer, and can be genuinely designed by the community, for the community, in partnership with university practitioners. These initiatives build on local strengths and knowledges to foster a culture of learning in these communities. Evaluation of the EARUCP will seek to understand the key enablers for sustainable partnerships between universities, RUCs, and communities. The Tertiary Study Hubs will be of even greater value if they provide learners with options for vocational education and training as well as university study.

For universities, the environment is becoming increasingly challenging due to ongoing restructuring and the absence of dedicated resources to support collaboration and equity. One of the preliminary findings from the EARUCP project has been that both staff at universities and in study hubs require resourcing and capability building to effectively engage with communities contribute to sustainable partnerships and evaluate program impact.

Thank you for taking the time to review this submission and we look forward to receiving further information in the near future.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Verity Firth', is written over a light blue circular stamp.

Prof. Verity Firth

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Social Justice and Inclusion)