



University of
South Australia

SUBMISSION

Consultation Paper:
Implementing Suburban University Study Hubs

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Executive Summary

The University of South Australia (UniSA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the *Consultation Paper: Implementing Suburban University Study Hubs* and is pleased to provide relevant information from its experience maintaining regional and suburban campuses, and involvement in Regional University Study Hubs, along with comments and suggestions to the questions raised in the Consultation Paper.

UniSA believes the success of the proposed Suburban University Study Hubs (the hubs) will be contingent on a skillfully managed consultation process with identified communities to ensure broad representation and identification of needs. Similarly, being able to provide the services and supports most valued by individual communities will positively impact the level of engagement with existing and prospective students, particularly those in equity groups.

A co-design approach, through all phases of development, that incorporates community needs, knowledge, and aspirations is important to ensure the hubs are fit for individual community purpose. As is ensuring their physical location is accessible and centrally located with other relevant services.

Hub operators will understand the education sector, student needs, and tertiary pathways, and be able to demonstrate experience in facilitating collaboration in the sector and/or delivery across both VET and HE. They will ensure community representation in their governance structures and have a clear track record of responding to community needs.

Subsequently evaluating the hubs and responding to emerging or changing needs will also be critical in maintaining their relevance and usefulness to a diverse cohort of students and facilitating increased participation. Involving education providers with experience in regional delivery will enable the suburban hubs to draw on existing knowledge to ensure the success of the hubs.

Introduction and background

UniSA is a metro-based university with valuable experience in delivering education into regional South Australia and the outer suburbs of Adelaide, and with a strong track record in place based and equity approaches to education delivery.

UniSA has opened the doors to tertiary study for the most diverse student community and maintained two regional campuses (Mt Gambier and Whyalla) to support local students with higher education and pathways. Additionally, the University has maintained a campus in the low SES area of northern Adelaide (Mawson Lakes), concentrating on careers and pathways in education and STEM. Having seen the power of place-based education over the last 30 years, UniSA commends the intent to increase place-based facilities to support access and participation.

Due to the nature of its creation, the University also has a rich history as a multi suburban entity, retaining legacy facilities for use since establishment. At the appropriate time consideration will be given to the possible conversion to study hubs of these existing facilities given their potential to efficiently align to the objectives of the hubs and sustaining the University's operating presence in these locations.

Finally, UniSA's existing non-metro presence, along with its commitment to a place based approach, has demonstrated the advantage to local communities of locally driven, multi campus enabled research activities, designed to strengthen community and the local economy. Accordingly, UniSA would favour a model for the study hubs that includes scope for providers to engage with the community to deliver such research that will further the intent of the hubs and benefit the communities in which they are located.

In addition to these observations, UniSA is pleased to provide responses to the questions outlined in the consultation document and looks forward to contributing to the Suburban Study Hubs Program.

The aim of the Suburban University Study Hubs Program

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?

Early consultation with local communities that clearly outlines the scope and intent of the study hubs will assist in the collation of focused and relevant feedback regarding the model that most suits the needs and ambitions of an individual community. A co-design approach, to the brief development, design and documentation, construction, and occupation phases will support the development of fit-for-purpose hubs tailored to community need. All hubs should be developed with Universal Design principles underpinning the objectives and outcomes and consideration should be given to engaging a First Nations design and consultation specialist to lead engagement with First Nations communities.

Skilled facilitators who can articulate the vision for the hubs, draw out a range of views, and encourage aspirational thinking within scope, are best placed to:

- Ensure the role of the hubs is understood by those involved in consultation.

- Ensure local community representatives and stakeholders, including current and prospective students, are included in the development of the service design.
- Adapt the consultation process and style to accommodate varying target audiences and create authentic engagement and involvement from First Nations peoples.
- Encourage consideration of how the site may be used by the community for other approved purposes.

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

Ensuring that the support facilities, opening hours, staff and partnerships of each centre are designed and provided in a way which meets the needs of the local community and Universal Design principles, are central to the selection and development of locations.

On an ongoing basis ensuring that key factors such as attrition, retention, progress, success, and student satisfaction are properly reviewed as part of a framework of continuous improvement and to maintain relevance. In line with the aspirations of the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report, consideration should be given to the principles of lifelong learning through the development of mechanisms to capture student success at multiple exit points which provides students with a positive learning experience and recognition of their completed studies.

Ongoing collaboration between partners and provider institutions to consider what opportunities there are for further growth and widening of access, including appropriate recognition of prior learning and an easier system for students moving between the HE and VET sectors.

Initiatives that could be delivered through a suburban hub to maximise impact, include:

- Using the hub to engage with future students seeking study advice by running small study events, workshops, and seminars which have proven success in transitioning students successfully to an appropriate HE study program.
- Sessions providing study and admission information, advice on credit for prior learning, and pathway planning services.
- Offering pathway programs (such as those provided by UniSA College).
- Postgraduate study, short course promotions or Executive education offerings
- Collaboration with employment services to deliver training or education to the broader community.
- Information sessions from local councils and other service providers to connect existing and future students to the supports and services they need to enable their study.

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

It is critical to recognise that many students experience multiple barriers to participation through intersectionality of equity issues, increasing their disadvantage and difficulty in participating in post school education. Embedding equity into the design and operation of the hubs will require a nuanced and adaptive approach to considers the impact of cumulative disadvantage.

Similarly, a broader approach to equity, beyond the current six equity cohorts, will be beneficial in creating a universally supportive and welcoming environment. Consideration should extend to the needs of student groups such as first-in-family, culturally and linguistically diverse, refugee/asylum seeker, LGBTIQ+, and those with care responsibilities.

Equity goals, strategies and assessment frameworks should inform the design of, and services offered in, the hubs to ensure they are suitable for use by these cohorts. Early engagement with these cohorts about the barriers to tertiary participation and the measure most likely to remove them, could be achieved by:

- Targeting and consulting with audiences that are underrepresented to inform the equity supports required and establish frameworks and service models for delivery and cultural sensitivities/preferences are considered.
- Ensuring staff working in the hubs are qualified/trained to understand equity needs and provide services in line with agreed service delivery models.
- Undertaking regular evaluation to evaluate students' experiences and identify further improvement opportunities.
- Embedding Universal Design principles into the selection and development of the hub sites and drawing on existing literature providing expert advice on how to embed equity into physical buildings and the surrounding location.
- Ensuring the hubs are resourced at a level that provides physical, psychological and cultural safety, and provides sufficient service levels.

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?

It is important that identification and clear articulation of individual community needs is included as part of the application process to ensure potential providers can be assessed on ability to deliver against these needs. This may include:

- Ensuring the design of physical spaces response to, and meets the needs of, local communities and are culturally responsive.
- Documenting the expected requirements of premises, staffing levels, support services, and other relevant factors;
- A skilfully managed consultation process, utilising cultural consultation specialists where appropriate, that ensures engagement with all relevant stakeholders and identification of shared and diverse needs;
- Staff working in the hubs are, where possible, are drawn from the community, and receive training to understand needs and provide appropriate services;
- Ensuring community diversity is reflected in the local governance of the hubs (such as reference or advisory group), and is included in ongoing consultation, leadership, and feedback mechanisms;
- Translation of communication or promotional materials into relevant languages.

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?

A clear understanding of the purpose of the hubs within each community is critical, while existing providers, campuses and leaders could play a central role in their delivery and use them as a locus for increased collaboration and engagement. Elements to consider include:

- Clear presentation of the services and information available to help inform expectations, and clear delineation between the role and purpose of the hubs and the students' providers.
- Ensuring staff have clarity of both the role of the hubs and their individual roles within them, and have sufficient knowledge of the sector to support students' interactions with all providers;

- Strong connections between hub staff and education providers to maintain expectation clarity and enable sharing of information to maintain currency and resolve any issues.
- Ensuring that the equipment and facilities are of a standard and quality that support good connection with any institution.

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

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) that Suburban University Study Hubs could address?

Under-represented cohorts are also more likely to lack access to other goods and services, which could be alleviated by the hubs offering:

- Quality career advice, planning, and development services.
- IT facilities such as computers, printers, and reliable high speed Wifi.
- Connections to community services and providers where the scope of the support services offered by the provider has been reached.
- Coordinating mentorship to support and encourage students.
- Opportunities for peer-to-peer learning experiences.
- Providing general administrative advice to support students to, for example, complete forms, understand policies, manage their time and access further external support.

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

In addition to the measures and approaches proposed regarding community consultation to identify the full range of supports and services needed in different community, the outcomes of the consultation should inform the governance and operating context of each hub. This could be achieved by:

- Ensuring the local context is clearly defined to accurately identify service requirements and opportunities for collaboration with wider local services.
- Policies and service frameworks that guide behaviours and ways of interacting within the hubs, to ensure students understand what they can expect, what their obligations are, and for staff to be trained and managed accordingly.
- Implementing mechanisms to identify and address unsafe practices.
- Creating connections with role models and leaders from various community cohorts.

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?

The Regional University Study Hubs and existing regional campuses of tertiary providers can provide a great deal of relevant information for the development of the Suburban University Study Hubs, such as those outlined in the executive summary of this submission drawn from UniSA's regional campuses. Consultation with the existing providers will serve to deepen understanding of what is most effective across a range of circumstances as well as potentially identify what has been less successful and should be avoided in the establishment of the suburban hubs.

Additionally, there may be value in considering strengths and opportunities identified in the Career Development Centres previously established by the Commonwealth Government and provided neutral career advice and planning by trained professionals for members of the public.

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?

Streamlining the services offered within diverse communities will require an analysis of the existing services available, identification of gaps, and determination of what additional supports are most needed by the local population and what secondary supports are required to enable their use. For example, access to wellbeing services and course counselling may be available to students at the hubs through higher education providers, but there may not be any childcare facilities or public transport close by.

Providers may be able to offer a range of services that could be delivered into the hubs such as:

- Aboriginal student services, future student study advisers, current student service teams.
- Local information sessions, workshops, and events.
- Localised support services for local students studying Online.
- Use the hubs to deliver content to local high school students who are also studying at TAFE or University, for example, the UniSA Accelerate program.

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

Student consultation should help inform this, including the mode of communication and seeking feedback and ideas through community forums. Two key areas are:

Collateral

- Website should include clear articulation of services and opportunities.
- Social media presence.
- Videos and imagery that include interviews with local constituents, stakeholders and community members.
- Testimonials / “my journey” accounts of positive HE experiences from former or current students within the local area.
- Flyer with key supports and benefits, available at local events and community centres etc

Engagement/Outreach

- Media engagement– local media relationships and partnerships to communicate benefits and opportunities.
- Collaborations with key community stakeholders, partners, and community organisations such as job centres, libraries and childcare facilities.
- ‘Opening’ events on location, inviting community members and stakeholders.
- School and RTO engagement – communication strategy with key staff in the local catchment primary and high schools, TAFEs, RTOs.

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

There is scope for providers to deliver preparation/pathways courses at the study hubs, offer study support to high school students to familiarise them with tertiary style study and/or simply to provide access to study facilities and reliable equipment and services that may not otherwise be available for students to undertake such courses. Delivery of these courses should also be adapted to meet the

needs of non-school leaver student cohorts and a range of delivery modes (face-to-face, online, blended) to allow provision of the full range of undergraduate degrees.

A place-based approach to study support that brings together providers, local councils, employers and other education providers through the study hubs provides a strong basis for preparing students for tertiary education and supports the removal of barriers often experienced by equity cohorts.

Where will the Suburban University Study Hubs be located?

There is an opportunity to base the suburban hubs in public libraries. Certainly, in South Australia the public library network has some of its largest and best resourced libraries in the outer suburban areas. It would be sensible to look first to partner with existing organisations such as public libraries which already have an educative, digital literacy, community support, and public outreach mandate.

In many cases nearby shopping centres provide access to other facilities, food outlets and places for students to meet and socialise.

The Federal Government could partner with state and local governments to enable public libraries in each State and Territory to develop as suburban study hubs.

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

The success of the hubs will depend on a range of factors including:

- Student safety and how this will be managed by the hub operators.
- Easy to access, including public transport and parking.
- Proximity to services such as childcare and food outlets to enable students to maximise the use of the location and manage their commitments.
- Local population size, demographics and existing education participation rates / engagement with existing local education providers – understanding barriers to participation and structuring the hubs to ensure these are addressed.
- Identifying locations where industries or businesses require skilled workers or workforce renewal or locations where there is high intention to further study.
- Quiet study spaces within the hub and suitable spaces for assessment such as online invigilated exams.
- Kitchen facilities with basic supplies, reliable technology, and related equipment.
- Good facility accessibility (physical access design, natural light, exterior lighting at night etc)
- Afterhours access to the facility for those working and/or with care responsibilities and appropriate staff and security during these hours.

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)

Nearby infrastructure to support the success of the hubs include:

- Parking, childcare, access to transport, sporting facilities, counselling and wellbeing related services.
- Cafes and social facilities such as venues which might be used for celebratory and or fun activities such as graduations, orientation, and social events.
- “In language” communications and activities for communities with higher proportion of CALD or First Nations populations.

- Space for community organisations to connect with students such as food banks, financial counselling services, budgeting, basic food preparation skills, etc.

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?

An exercise to map the services available, and gaps, across existing providers in the area should inform the support services offered in the hubs and may allow cooperation to create consistency for students using the hubs regardless of their provider. However, it is also important to provide clarity on the support offer by students' providers and those offered by the hub itself.

The hubs could also offer all students opportunities to meet and encourage the development of peer support and broadening of students' networks.

Who can apply?

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?

Successful hub operators will demonstrate:

- A track record in community outreach.
- Evidence based experience in consultation and subsequent development of services and infrastructure in response.
- Existing organisational artefacts and policies, both legal and people and culture based.
- A history of delivering well governed, successful projects.
- An understanding of education pathways, delivery, and student support.
- Facilities management experience.

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?

An advisory body or reference group overseeing the hubs

- Feedback mechanisms for the community – eg. Pulse surveys, satisfaction surveys, point of contact for feedback (eg email/website)
- Post interviews with participants on occasion
- Clear, transparent, and published KPIs and objectives established at commencement and reviewed and reported on regularly.
- Clear governance and oversight structures that are publicly available.
- Reporting mechanisms to monitor efficacy of the hubs and ensure student wellbeing.

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?

There may be circumstances where this is appropriate, however, contractual arrangements should include requirements for community representation within the governance structures of each hub, and regular feedback opportunities from users and the broader community to inform the ongoing strategy, operation, and service design of the hubs to ensure these remain relevant to different community needs.

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

Close working relationships between hub operators and education providers will be an important factor in the success of the hubs and hub operators should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the tertiary sector and principles of lifelong learning. Organisations with experience in delivery across both environments will be invaluable in fostering collaboration and could be a required partner for operators of all hubs.

Operators should also be able to demonstrate experience in facilitating sharing of best practice and resources to further promote collaboration, with due consideration to privacy safeguards for the sharing of data and knowledge.

What will the Suburban University Study Hubs Program fund?

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

The study hubs have enormous potential to increase collaboration and partnerships across the education sector, industry, and community organisations to improve participation and meet local and national workforce needs. Examples of initiatives to achieve this include:

- Industry sponsored students.
- Structured mentoring programs.
- Incentives for providers and community organisations to partner in delivery of support/pastoral care.
- Funding for community partners to deliver supplementary support options that benefit study success (e.g. mental health literacy, financial counselling, good study habits).
- Connecting hub students to scholarships that enable them to purchase study equipment (e.g. stationary, laptop); and community scholarships/grants (e.g. young carer bursary, NILS).
- Engagement with local high schools to support student success at this level and encourage continuation of study beyond high school.
- Outreach activities in community venues such as childcare centres, libraries, and job centres to reach non school leaver future students.
- Strong alliances with metro-based tertiary providers to foster institutional communications, consistency of messaging and collegial partnerships.
- Inclusion in the application process of in-principle support of one or more tertiary providers with students resident in the geographical area.

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.

Drawing on the experience of providers who are familiar with education delivery in regional or outer suburban areas will be invaluable in establishing effective study hubs. These providers, whilst primarily delivery against institutional objectives, are often accomplished at understanding their communities and local contexts, and establishing modes of delivery and wraparound services that support the particular needs of students in the these areas. Accordingly, it is recommended that consideration be given to:

- Reviewing lessons from the regional hubs initiative and institutional regional campuses, noting that suburban hubs will have their own specific and unique challenges.

- Review former arrangements with the local community partnerships (education > industry scheme).
- Consider limited provision of information and support of quality career development and planning for community users to promote lifelong learning.
- Ensure resourcing that positions the hubs as desired destinations, including welcoming physical spaces staffed by a team who can help create a student-friendly environment, that supports their studies and grows their peer support and community/employment networks.

Conclusion

UniSA supports the establishment of Suburban University Study Hubs as a means of increasing participation, particularly amongst equity cohorts, and promoting and facilitating lifelong learning in collaboration with communities. Further opportunities to contribute to the establishment of the Program would be welcomed, particularly given UniSA's strong commitment to the delivery of education in regional and outer suburban areas, the provision of education to a diverse student population, and established industry networks and partnerships.



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