



Consultation Paper: Implementing Suburban University Study Hubs

University of Tasmania Submission

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UNIVERSITY of
TASMANIA 

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At the University of Tasmania, we are a place-based, regionally networked university and our mission to make a difference for lutruwita/Tasmania requires deep engagement with our local communities.

As the only university based in Tasmania, we train much of the state's future workforce, and we strongly advocate for and invest in programs and facilities to promote educational access and participation, to improve life-long learning and skills development across the state.

To increase educational attainment rates, we need to improve access to education.

Tasmania has a disproportionately high number of people facing disadvantage in all forms - including those living in rural and remote areas, First Nations people, people living with disability, and unique and complex health challenges. Tasmania has the highest proportion nationally of people living in the most disadvantaged areas (30%).¹

Our state is the second least digitally inclusive state, recording an average Australian Digital Inclusion Index score of 70 compared to the national average of 73.2. Our digital ability score, which measures an individual's digital skill level, is the lowest in the country, recorded at 61.0 compared to the national average 64.9.²

Tasmania has a low proportion of people with a university degree at 21.9%, compared to 26.3% nationally, and 15.9% of our population have no formal education post Year 10.³ As a result, our state currently faces significant challenges in educational attainment and participation, and these challenges are likely to worsen in the future without targeted, community-driven solutions.

Delivering our mission to address these challenges means our university attracts high numbers of educationally disadvantaged students, including regional and remote students (61%), low SES students (28%), and adult learners (~70% of our total student cohort, compared to national average of 50%). These are the types of students who require additional supports to succeed in study, and who will benefit from improved access to education and educational support services within their communities.

In Tasmania, areas of high disadvantage are geographically concentrated in specific regions and suburbs. A regionally networked, place-based approach to improving educational opportunities within these areas is needed. This includes physical presence of educational facilities, regionally relevant courses aligned to local employment opportunities, and study options which include preparation and pathway courses.

At the University of Tasmania, our networked campus model across the North, North-West and South of the state reflects this approach, and the establishment of study hubs would build on this further. We welcome the announcement from the department to create additional regional university study hubs, and the expansion of the model to include suburban university study hubs.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics Census – Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (2021), www.abs.gov.au

² Australian Digital Inclusion Index (2022), www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics Census Data (2021), www.abs.gov.au

The suburban study hubs program should include all capital city peri-urban locations where improved access to education is critically needed.

Currently the consultation paper proposes that the location of suburban hubs would be determined based solely on the Australian Statistical Geographic Standard (ASGS) classification of Major Cities of Australia (RA1). If interpreted narrowly, this would exclude Hobart, the capital city of Tasmania with a population of over 265,000, and where a significant proportion of the outer urban population experiences considerable educational disadvantage.

In this response, we provide examples of two peri-urban locations – Brighton and Sorell. These locations are both classed as Inner Regional Australia under ASGS classification which excludes them from being eligible for suburban study hubs under the current guidelines.

Whilst located geographically close (within 30km) to the city of Hobart, the populations of Brighton and Sorell experience comparatively significant inequalities which impact on population health, socio-economic status, and educational outcomes.

Life expectancy is considerably shorter in Brighton (median age at death 74.3) and Sorell (77.6), compared to Hobart (85.9), and more people live with chronic disease – 42.7% in Brighton and 43.1% in Sorell, compared to 34.7% in Hobart. Employment outcomes and earning potential is also impacted, with lower median household weekly incomes of \$1,352 (Brighton) and \$1,400 (Sorell) compared to \$1,842 in Hobart.⁴

The outcomes on educational attainment and participation are clear. While 42.5% of the population in Hobart have a bachelor degree or higher, only 6.9% in Brighton and 12.7% in Sorell have degree level qualifications.⁵ The inequality and level of disadvantage in Brighton and Sorell is startling, and we recommend as peri-urban areas on the fringe of Tasmania's capital city, these locations should be considered eligible for suburban study hubs.

We note that other current regional development projects, such as the Australian Government's Precincts and Partnerships Programs for regional and urban locations⁶ classify geographic eligibility based on the ABS Greater Capital City Statistical Areas (GCCSA). Both Sorell and Brighton are eligible for the urban component of this program.

Adopting an approach which considers community need and existing community-led partnerships will ensure suburban study hubs deliver significant impact.

A needs-based approach to determine the location of suburban study hubs should consider community needs and the likely return on investment from establishing this critical infrastructure for improving access to learning and skills development. This could be achieved using a similar framework for assessing needs as in the 2021 Scoping Report for Regional University Centres.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics Census Data (2021), www.abs.gov.au

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics Census Data (2021), www.abs.gov.au

⁶ www.infrastructure.gov.au/territories-regions-cities/regional-australia/regional-and-community-programs/regional-precincts-and-partnerships-program

This framework assessed community need based on access, retention and outcomes, as well as considering demand factors. These are all factors we consider important to the success of study hubs and centres, whether they are in a suburban or a regional location.

To consider our proposed approach, we share the example of Brighton in Tasmania – an area which is located on the fringe of a major city, hosts an established Jobs Hub, and would benefit greatly from improved access to education services.

Case Study: Brighton municipality, Tasmania.

Brighton is a local government municipality in the south-east of Tasmania, located approximately 20km north of Tasmania's capital city Hobart. Suburbs in the Brighton region include Bridgewater, Gagebrook, Old Beach, Brighton and Herdsmans Cove, with a population of ~17,000.

Brighton is a fast-growing community, with a 5-year population growth of 13.1%.⁷ It is also the most disadvantaged quintile nationally by SEIFA ranking.⁸

Educational attainment and participation are significantly lower in Brighton compared to Hobart. Based on 2021 ABS Census data for Brighton and Hobart Local Government areas only 6.4% of the Brighton population are currently participating in tertiary education at a university, compared to 30.5% of the population in the Hobart municipality. Brighton also has significantly lower rates of educational attainment - only 6.9% of the population have completed a bachelor's degree or above, compared to 42.5% of Hobart residents. Approximately 20% of the population in Brighton have no formal education post year 10, compared to 6% in Hobart.

The Brighton municipality's formal educational facilities include five primary schools, one high school (with a second under construction), a Trade Training Centre to support vocational learning, and an agricultural school farm. Tertiary education facilities are currently not available within the Brighton municipality. Brighton also hosts the community-led Southcentral Workforce Network which has deep connections to school leavers and job seekers and understand their future training needs.⁹

Although Brighton is relatively close in distance to the University of Tasmania's Hobart campuses, public transport options are limited and a typical route into Hobart CBD requires two buses and takes over an hour in travel time. Public transport outside of Hobart CBD is widely considered unreliable and not convenient for commuters.

The significant differences in educational characteristics, alongside the poor access to tertiary education facilities, demonstrates that the Brighton municipality would benefit from a suburban study hub model, where the community can easily access higher education information and support within their region.

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics Census Data (2021), www.abs.gov.au

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), Australia (2021), www.abs.gov.au

⁹ <https://www.swntas.org/>

In addition to access and support for higher education in communities, we propose an approach which encourages connection to local employment opportunities, delivering education and employment services in one location to deliver impactful outcomes.

Job seekers in Tasmania can often face barriers in securing and sustaining work, particularly profound for those outside of our cities. These challenges vary between communities and contribute to generational outcomes in educational attainment and workforce participation.

Involving both education and employment services in multi-use hubs would connect students with potential employers, inform education providers on the skills and education needs of local industry, and provide a holistic, outcomes-based service for the community. In many suburban locations, employment services and infrastructure to support job seekers already exists, and these could be expanded to support the delivery of suburban study hubs. One example is Business and Employment Southeast Tasmania (BEST), a Jobs Hub in Sorell.

Case Study: Business & Employment Southeast Tasmania - Sorell, Tasmania

BEST is an initiative of the Tasmanian Government's \$15 million Jobs Hub program, an initiative to coordinate training and employment services to meet local community needs. This approach connects employers with potential workers and provides skills development and other supports to enable access to employment within communities.

BEST is in Sorell, which is 25km north-east of Hobart. While relatively close to the city of Hobart, Sorell is considered the peri-urban hub for south-east Tasmanian communities, with many residents of these communities travelling to Sorell rather than Hobart for appointments, education or work, and to purchase supplies.

As with Brighton, despite the relative proximity to the capital city of Hobart, the educational outcomes for people who live in Sorell are significantly lower. 8.3% of the Sorell population are participating in tertiary education at a university (compared to 30.5% in Hobart), 12.7% have completed a bachelor's degree or above (42.5% in Hobart), and 16.4% have no formal education post year 10 (6% in Hobart).¹⁰

At the Sorell Jobs Hub, BEST is already supporting access to education for their community. This includes providing information about study opportunities in areas of local need, supporting individuals with application processes and creating connections between students and employers to support graduate outcomes in the region.

BEST have previously worked closely with our university to successfully encourage student participation in pre-degree programs in areas of workforce need for the southeast region including health, community support, technology and business. Tas TAFE are currently trialling a pilot program in partnership with BEST, with a TAFE staff member based at the Jobs Hub one day a week to provide advice to potential students on course enquiries, pathways to study and application support.

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics Census Data (2021), www.abs.gov.au

BEST is currently finalising funding and plans to build a new Jobs Hub building in Sorell, a larger facility which will be able to provide greater services to the community. The design of the new facility has considered how to encourage greater collaboration across education and employment services, and includes workspaces, meeting and interview rooms, and two large training rooms with IT capabilities that could be used by industry, community organisations and education providers.

The design of this facility, its location in a city fringe suburban hub, and the existing engagement of local community and industry would position the BEST Jobs Hub as a suitable location for a suburban study hub and would enable the facility to provide support to a broader part of the community.

The consultation paper noted a strength of the existing regional university study hubs program is the place-based, community-led approach which enables individual facilities to deliver services based on community need. We support this statement and agree that success of suburban study hubs require strong partnerships and involvement from local community, business and industry. It will be important that all suburban study hubs are implemented with local connections to the communities which they are intended to service.

We have engaged with the Brighton Council and Business & Employment Southeast Tasmania in Sorell in preparing our response to the consultation paper. Our discussions with these organisations indicate that study hubs and access to education in these areas are greatly needed and they would also be warmly welcomed and supported by the community.

We strongly support the approach within the consultation paper which considers how both tertiary and VET sectors can be represented, and which demonstrates the ability for services to be tailored to local community and industry needs. Suburban study hubs should enable access for students to study undergraduate, postgraduate or certificate level qualifications, as well as short courses and micro credentials. The provision of pathways into study and programs that support and prepare potential students to begin further education should also be considered, based on local need.

We look forward to continuing to engage on the suburban study hub model.

We consider the suburban study hub model an important initiative to support those who live close to our cities, but who still face significant challenges in accessing education. The intent of these study hubs is closely aligned to the mission of our university, and we strongly support initiatives to improve access to education for historically disadvantaged populations.

By taking an approach which considers population demographics and partnership opportunities for community outcomes alongside location, suburban study hubs will deliver great impact and will achieve the intent of improved access and greater educational attainment for populations with the greatest need.

We thank the department for the opportunity to participate in this consultation, and we would welcome the opportunity to engage further as the approach for these study hubs is finalised.