The University of Tasmania is increasingly a significant contributor to the northern community as student and staff numbers in both Newnham and Inveresk grow.

Overall UTAS has grown from 10,000 to almost 16,000 equivalent full-time students over the past decade, and its Launceston campus has shared in that growth. In the same time span actual student numbers in the north have grown from 3,332 in 2001 to 4,827 this year. Staff numbers, both academic and general, have increased from 435 to 820.

These numbers have significant impact on the economy of the north, as newcomers buy land, houses and cars, do their general shopping and send their children to school. Apart from government, statewide the University of Tasmania is the third largest employer after Woolworths and Coles.

This means that the university, with these staff levels and a total 2010 budget of $486m, has considerable input into the total state economy. About $250m of that annual budget is spent on salaries and related costs. It’s estimated that of this year’s budget, UTAS will spend $180m on operating costs; around 75 per cent of that will be spent with Tasmanian or related businesses. The university is conscious of its significant role in supporting Tasmanian business wherever possible and pay more than 400 Tasmanian suppliers in excess of $10,000 each every year.

The University of Tasmania’s total statewide infrastructure spend from 2001-2011 will be 394m. Since 2000 there has been significant capital investment in Launceston by the university, the planned Heartland building project for the Newnham campus, focussed mainly on a new library and student centre with associated services, will bring infrastructure spending and employment to the northern Tasmania over the next five years.

Inter-state and international students coming to the north also contribute significantly to the local economy. It’s estimated that statewide Tasmania’s 2,300 international tertiary students contribute around $76m a year in living costs and fees; by 2020 this will increase to $130m. In 2000 there were only 677.

The impact of international student growth and student growth in general can be seen in Launceston readily. Mowbray is one of Launceston’s fastest growing suburbs; this is caused in part by the influx of UTAS students and their families living there and in the nearby suburbs of Invermay and Newnham.

Plans for a $50m retail development in Mowbray, possibly including the north’s first Big W store, are no doubt influenced by that population growth.

Economists estimate that for every increase of 100 full time students at UTAS, there is a contribution of $16m to real Gross State Product, $1.9m to real consumption spending and an additional 26 new full-time Tasmanian jobs.

The strong Launceston student growth in degrees in education, nursing, environmental design, business and arts portend an even greater contribution by UTAS to the northern community.

Student numbers referred to in this article are counted as equivalent full-time rather than full-time and part-time.

Two senior academics have been appointed to the Launceston campus of the University of Tasmania in 2010.

Professor Marie Sierra has taken up her appointment as head of the School of Visual and Performing Arts at Inveresk.

Until recently she was head of sculpture and spatial practice at the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne University, where she was also graduate research co-ordinator for the School of Art and associate dean of research for the Faculty of VCA and Music.

Prof. Sierra has held many solo exhibitions in Australia; her most recent awards were an Australia Council Grant to visit the 2007 Venice Biennale and a highly commended award in the 2004-Helen Lempriere National Sculpture Prize.

Later this year Professor Morgan Miles will take up his appointment as Professor of Enterprise Development in the School of Management at Launceston. He was appointed as part of the New Stars Recruitment Program which recruits a new generation of academic leaders and role models to UTAS, attracting international calibre, high potential research or teaching and learning scholars.

Prof. Miles was most recently employed as Professor of Marketing at Georgia South University, in the United States. Since 1989, Prof. Miles has been widely published on topics such as entrepreneurship, business and marketing, and he has 25 years experience in designing and teaching undergraduate MBA and post graduate entrepreneurship courses.

Prof. Miles’ primary tasks will be to undertake high quality research in enterprise development, and to develop a teaching program in enterprise development on the Launceston campus.

Academic excellence and fresh energy is maintained at the University of Tasmania by the regular, short-term appointment of high-calibre academics, scholars and other eminent individuals.

In October this year Associate Professor Leonard Imas will visit the National Centre for Maritime Engineering and Hydrodynamics at the Australian Maritime College (AMC) for three weeks.

Professor Imas is director of undergraduate naval engineering at the Stevens Institute of Technology (USA) and will produce publications in collaboration with the AMC’s Dr Jonathan Binns.

The UTAS Visiting Fellows and Scholars Program also funded a 2009 visit by Professor Catherine McDonald, programme director in social work at Melbourne’s RMIT, to the School of Sociology and Social Work in Launceston.

Prof. McDonald led meetings, seminars and workshops with UTAS staff, postgraduate students and social workers.