



Securing the Future of Higher Education for Tasmanians

UNIVERSITY of
TASMANIA 

How moving into the City will secure the future of Higher Education for Tasmanians

There's been a lot of discussion about the University's decision to consolidate its campus in the centre of Hobart. To help make that discussion as informed as possible, we thought it would be helpful to provide an overview of:

- The context for the choice between a distributed Hobart campus and consolidating in the City
- How and why we decided to consolidate in the City in 2019
- The evidence that supported that decision and how that evidence has changed and evolved
- The consultation we have undertaken to ensure the University's move is a good thing for both Hobart's CBD and Sandy Bay

The context for the choice between a distributed Hobart campus and consolidating in the City

In 2019, as we looked to the future, the University needed to make a choice between our current distributed Hobart campus and consolidating in the City.

We knew our facilities didn't meet contemporary standards around student experience, accessibility and sustainability. Our people were fragmented between Sandy Bay and the City. And we knew we needed a lot more than just renovations to bring our facilities up to standard.

At the core of this decision was this: we needed to secure the future of higher education for Tasmanians in a world of constrained funding. We needed to think innovatively about how we'll work in the future, how to give our students a better experience, and how we could do this affordably.

We're committed to serving Tasmania by providing the teaching and research it needs

As the only provider of higher education in the state, we have some important responsibilities. It's vital that we deliver:

- Access to higher education in all our regions, through physical campuses in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie
- A full range of courses that both provide broad learning opportunities and equip people for entry into professional careers
- Courses at all levels, from Certificates and Diplomas, through to Bachelors, Masters and PhDs
- Courses that meet the needs of a very diverse student population
- Research capability that meets the needs of the state, to better understand our own history and environment and directly support sectors like agriculture and coastal ecosystem management, and nurture Tasmania's globally important research work
- Knowledge that supports the next generation of innovation on the Island and the development of new enterprises in Tasmania

Achieving all these things is vital for Tasmania, but it's also expensive.

We've had to prioritise delivering our teaching and research goals at the expense of renewing our infrastructure

Australian Government total higher education spending as a percentage of GDP has declined from 0.88% in 1989 to 0.49% in 2019-20. Over the same period, domestic bachelor degree students in Australia went from just under 300,000 in 1989, to over one million in 2019. This means that government funding for higher education has continually declined on a per student basis.

Not only has per student funding declined, but Commonwealth funding is not well designed to enable a medium sized university like ours to deliver such a broad mission. Funding is based on national average costs of delivery, but the average university in Australia is not regional. They are large metropolitan universities which have advantages of scale, do not have to offer courses with small numbers of students and most do not need to support a network of regional campuses.

Faced with this funding challenge, the University of Tasmania prioritised the delivery of teaching and research, leaving very little for the renewal of infrastructure. In any one year, that trade-off made good sense. Over time, it becomes a difficult problem to solve. The result is that now we have a campus that is in one of the worst conditions of all Australian and New Zealand Universities.

Despite attempts over the years to refurbish or refit these buildings to support contemporary teaching practices, in 2019 our utilisation of teaching spaces was at 14%, against national benchmarks of 56%, demonstrating just how poorly they serve us.

More broadly, our spaces don't meet modern standards of accessibility and sustainability. At least two-thirds of our buildings would need completely rebuilding to meet standards required for ramps, appropriate gradients, width of doorways and internal corridors. And our older buildings are using twice the energy and water of our newer buildings built in the last decade, let alone against current and emerging standards.

The deterioration of our facilities has had an impact on student experience, with only 56% of Sandy Bay students satisfied with the study spaces in 2018, well below the Australian average of 80%.

Renewing our infrastructure was a challenge for campuses in the North as well as the South. Fortunately, in Launceston and Burnie, unique circumstances enabled us to attract very significant Commonwealth, State and local Council contributions to enable our facilities to be renewed. These campuses have a focus on increasing access to higher education, through moving to central locations and setting benchmarks in sustainable building design. The Burnie project and the first of the Launceston buildings are already complete, with the rest to follow over the next two years.

How and why we decided to consolidate in the City in 2019

In Hobart, we had to choose between a campus that continued to be distributed between Sandy Bay and the City, or a consolidated City Campus. We couldn't move what was in the City back to Sandy Bay, as shifting them back would be to the detriment of our close work with our partners, and to the experience of our students. Plus, we would never recover the money from the Medical Science, IMAS or Hedberg buildings to enable them to be rebuilt in Sandy Bay.

We began our decision-making process with extensive and far-reaching consultation. We established an Exhibition Room at the Sandy Bay campus, where we explained our situation and the benefits and drawbacks of the two models. We had over 1,000 visits to the room, established online forums for engagement, ran focus groups and 400 feedback surveys were completed by staff and students.

The staff, students and members of the community we consulted provided a rich set of perspectives, and these have guided our work to this day. Their feedback highlighted qualities that people valued about campuses. What stood out were the importance of having a campus heart, a coherent University community and green spaces.

Some felt that a City campus could bring the whole university together. and that a city location could increase vitality at the heart of the campus, which they thought had waned considerably at Sandy Bay over the years. While students debated the relative merits of the different locations, there was a strong attraction to being part of a vibrant city area because of the other amenities and jobs to which it gave them easy access.

Others couldn't see how the buildings in the City would cohere as a campus, questioned how you would have a campus heart, or whether it would have a 'university feel'. They were also concerned about the loss of a connection to green spaces.

There were also practical issues that people provided important perspectives on. People familiar with city campuses in other states were often positive about being able to have new science facilities clustered together and adjacent to the ones we already have in the City. Others were worried about whether the City was the right location for some specialist facilities and questioned whether it would provide space for future growth. Across the board, people were keen to make sure we kept our sporting facilities.

Understandably, parking and transport were important topics. Many Sandy Bay staff said a positive of the campus was the ability to park easily so they could manage their other commitments. They doubted people would change their transport habits if consolidation into the CBD occurred. City staff who make much more use of public and active transport saw things differently.

While opinions varied about the options, there was little disagreement about the serious attention the buildings and future infrastructure needed.

University Council determined that, on balance, the best decision was to consolidate into the city

Decisions of this level of complexity will always be 'on-balance' decisions. The process recognised the decision involved a range of distinct qualitative and quantitative criteria. University Council weighed the criteria and evidence to determine that consolidating in the City was the best way to advance the University's mission, strategy and to meet its obligations to deliver high quality higher education and research for as many Tasmanians as possible.

The evidence that supported that decision and how that evidence has changed and evolved

It's worth pausing for a moment to reflect on how our students engage with our campuses and who they are, because they're quite different – in important ways – from the students of 30 or 40 years ago, when the Sandy Bay campus was in its heyday.

This evolution has been shaped by the changing nature of students themselves and the pressures they face. The average age of our commencing students in 2021 was 32, and school-leavers were only 18% of our commencing cohort. Ten years ago, school leavers presented 32% of that cohort.

Today's campus is characterised by the fact that students come primarily to study, and spend only small additional amounts of time on campus. Two-thirds of our face-to-face students aren't spending time on campus outside lectures or independent study, and 80% of students aren't participating in sports, clubs or societies. The average amounts of time on campus are relatively low: our face-to-face students are spending under 12 hours on average per week on campus in direct study, and just under 3.5 hours on average for other activities.

Many of our students are already working, have busy lives, or need to work to support their studies. Students feel the financial cost of attending university. We know that 54% of our commencing students support themselves with paid work, and many balance work experience opportunities and extracurricular activities so that they can compete for opportunities by the time they graduate. Over the last decade in Australia, students who are in full-time work have gone from 32% to 42%, and part time work has been consistent at around 32%.

As a result of balancing these factors, more students are studying part-time. 38% of our students now study part time and over half of these students do so to balance work commitments.

Students also interact with the University in fundamentally different ways due to the internet. It has untethered students from needing to be in particular places, changed the way they organise themselves socially and how they consume entertainment. That has all made them less dependent on campuses, and changed how they use them.

Along with technology, social habits have changed. There has been a marked reduction in the consumption of alcohol among young people and the reduction in its centrality in a wide range of student social lives. That again changes how campus are used.

None of these changes means campuses aren't important. In fact, quite the reverse. They are important more than ever, because in-person social time has an even greater premium. But campuses that will attract and retain students need to respond the very different student of today.

It's this student we need to keep in mind when considering our campus choices.

Access for students through location

Of all new full-time jobs in Australia in the last 20 years, 47% required a degree. We're facing a future where tertiary education will be in demand for more jobs than ever before. But here in Tasmania, we have the highest proportion of adults in Australia without any further qualifications beyond Year 10. We're committed to making sure Tasmanians have enhanced access to higher education. There are four components to access that are impacted by our campus location – distance, affordability, balancing study and other commitments and psychological barriers.

In terms of **distance and physical access**, bringing our campus back together in the city will make it easier for students to access learning opportunities close to better public transport connections. As the physical distance between a student's home or work and university increases, the likelihood of enrolling decreases. This is further exacerbated by the time, cost of, and means of travel to the campus, and multiple transport connections through Hobart CBD to get to Sandy Bay can double

the time it takes to get to campus. From a number of suburbs including Moonah, Geilston Bay, Lenah Valley, Rosny Park and Acton Park, moving to the city will reduce travel time by half for staff and students. We also see material improvements in many more suburbs, with those in Rokeby, Old Beach, Howrah, Dodges Ferry, Sorell and Bridgewater having their travel time reduce by a third on average and up to 40%.

There are over 7 times as many jobs in the city than there are in Sandy Bay (including around 5 times as many part-time jobs.) Being closer to the city offers students proximity to working opportunities and transport connections to better manage their time around study.

Our Sandy Bay site is ill-equipped to cope with the levels of ramps and pathways required by modern standards for accessibility. The distance between Sandy Bay Road bus stop and Morris Miller Library is 700m uphill, and from there access across to science facilities above Churchill Avenue is very difficult – and that's not mention the many other buildings. A central, less dispersed, city campus gives us an opportunity to provide a much easier footprint to navigate, with most facilities being within a 10-minute walk of our campus heart, allowing people to come together more effectively. Designing new buildings from the ground up also ensures that we can incorporate the best accessibility design principles.

Balancing study and other commitments is an important part of why distance and time matters and is a major challenge for today's students. 76% of our commencing Tasmanian students told us Hobart work/life/study balance was one of their main concerns about starting university. Part-time students are now 38% of our student cohort, and over half of these choose to do so to balance existing work commitments.

Understandably, that challenge of balancing commitments tends to increase significantly among older students. The University's students are substantially older than the national average as we meet the challenge to provide greater access to education for all Tasmanians, including those who weren't able to access it when they left school.

Affordability of higher education is a key concern for students, nationwide. Today's students face barriers to study including time, cost and other life commitments, and many students now need to work to support their time at university: Here at The University of Tasmania, over half of school leavers with an offer who decided not to enrol with us cited worries about cost. Of those who did enrol, 55% of part-time students chose to study part-time rather than full-time because of cost. Of our own commencing students, 54% are supporting themselves with paid work.

In terms of **psychological access**, research suggests that young people and families from disadvantaged backgrounds regard higher education as remote and alien from their own experience. Therefore, an important part of creating access is to locate higher education in a place that is experienced by people of all backgrounds is designed to be a place that is inviting to all. While Sandy Bay has many attractive qualities, it is also a very affluent suburb whose location does not help tackle the perception of higher education as remote from people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

A campus experience that sets itself apart

By virtue of our location in Hobart and in Tasmania, we already have a compelling differentiated setting. We want to make sure our campus further strengthens this ability compared to mainland Universities. This helps us retain Tasmanian students and attract mainland students. We know that this can be effective from our experience of the way the Bachelor of Marine and Antarctic Studies delivered at IMAS in Salamanca has led the way in attracting interstate students.

With this input in mind, we assessed whether Sandy Bay or the City presented a more compelling opportunity for a differentiated campus experience by evaluating four key criteria in 2019:

1. The opportunity to **house facilities** in historic University buildings. Making the Domain a key part of the University experience presents a compelling case here, as our original home
2. A **unique experience of the natural environment**. Clearly, Sandy Bay offered a significant advantage especially in those buildings above Churchill Avenue
3. **Part of a distinctive urban setting**. Distinctiveness in this case is guided by what students value. However, it's clear that a high proportion of today's students value ready-access to the facilities and lifestyle offered by central city areas. An interesting example of this is that our student accommodation in the city is much more popular than our accommodation above Churchill Avenue, with nearly 70% of students opting for city accommodation as their first preference, despite only a third of students studying in the city.

4. **Integration with professional and clinical settings.** This was an important rationale for the move of previous parts of the University from the Medical School to the Art School. There remain a range of areas, from Pharmacy and Business, to Social Work and Law, where the City offers significantly better options. Today, work integrated learning is a vital part of University study for many disciplines and is highly valued by students. In the College of Health and Medicine alone, we offer approximately 10,000 placements totalling over 800,000 hours per year, through relationships with 1,200 industry and community partners.

Following a rapid online shift throughout the pandemic, we want to attract people back to campus, as we believe face-to-face interactions are a critical part of a university experience.

A united University community

Supporting a differentiated campus experience is the ability of students to mix and engage with the full breadth of other students in a true campus heart. Today, a third of students study in the City and rarely visit the Sandy Bay campus. With our students balancing work and life commitments, they have even less time available to spend on campus outside of class. It is therefore even more important to make it easy for our students to connect with each other. Bringing almost all southern students into close proximity – as is intended in the City campus – creates the opportunity to develop a vibrant campus heart for today's students. This sort of critical mass of students is needed to support contemporary versions of the experiences students once engaged in, in places like the Refectory (the "Ref").

What is true of students is also true of our staff, with a third of them also in the City. We have heard that our city-based staff and students often feel isolated except within their individual schools and feel a general lack of support services. The social fabric generated when people can easily meet and coincide in common spaces would be greatly enhanced if all staff were in much closer proximity to each other, and facilities like the Staff Club were equally accessible to all staff.

Compared to the current distance of 3.5km between the Sandy Bay campus and current city facilities, a city move would reduce the distance between facilities for our students to travel. We will have a central campus heart, within 10 minute walk for over 90% of southern students. This will particularly ease the requirement for students studying across both sites, for whom it takes approximately half an hour by our own current bus service to get between the two locations. Being closer together will make it easier for our people to work in a multidisciplinary way, and for students to study multiple disciplines.

Ease of collaboration and access to shared resources

A well-connected university matters not just for the experience of community it creates, but also to support collaboration. Collaboration is vital to contemporary research and, in a growing range of areas, to being competitive in grant funding schemes. It is critical in tackling many of the challenging issues we face.

Physical proximity is important to collaboration. A study of the relationship between distance and collaboration at Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that academics located in the same workspace were three times more likely to collaborate than those who were 400m apart. The frequency of collaboration dropped by half again among researchers whose offices were 800m apart.

The fact that we are currently distributed between the city and Sandy Bay means that we are losing out on opportunities for better proximity and better collaboration between all of our disciplines. And this is not just for staff – in moving to the city, our engineering students can be closer to medical sciences, in an era where medicine and technology are fusing. Our music students will be able to undertake arts or business electives and our medical students will have access to broader university amenities and spaces that they currently cannot engage with.

There are also a wide range of important student support services, from counselling, learning access, and career services, that are better provided from a single central location, where a critical mass and breadth of staff can serve student needs.

Connection with the broader community

Collaboration within the University is important but, to fully serve Tasmania, collaboration and connection with the community is also vital. Currently, our Sandy Bay campus is not particularly accessible or inviting to our broader community. Moving to the city provides an opportunity to increase our visibility to the people of Hobart, and to be a welcoming place for all Tasmanians. Our city presence has already fostered some greater connections to our wider community, including:

- Our Hedberg Centre for Performing Arts is connected to the Theatre Royal and has been designed as a collaborative incubator space for place-based creatives – through performance, recording and rehearsing, research and events, and partnerships and engagement. A new unit delivered in collaboration with NIDA is just one example of greater student learning opportunities through being connected physically with industry and having world-class facilities to offer
- Our IMAS building is not just a space for students – we host industry forums, open exhibitions, public art installations and school visits that invite community discussion and participation on key topics around marine science, such as salmon farming and climate change

Central to increasing our connection to the community will be a modern, city-centric library that is accessible to everyone – a welcoming place where our community can come together and gather for events and workshops, and where we can showcase our collections to the people of Hobart. We can make some of the incredible research work we do visible to the public, inspiring next generations of students. We can undertake exciting and important initiatives, such as a new allied health multidisciplinary clinic to help our students learn in real environments and our city's health precinct thrive.

For industry and community engagement, having the full range of university disciplines at the hub of the city where government, business and community organisations are concentrated breaks down the barriers to collaboration. Again, as we know with staff collaboration, physical proximity matters. It is not that collaboration doesn't happen if you are more distant, but given its importance, there is good reason to prioritise making it easier.

Sustainability of transport options

Transport and traffic are a big part of everyone's day. While the University might seem to loom large when it comes to morning traffic, our staff and students constitute only 4% of the traffic that passes through Macquarie Street per day, or 2% of the traffic over the Tasman Bridge.

It might seem counterintuitive, but we discovered the move to the City would reduce the University's total traffic volume and improve flows in the City.

With 663 staff FTE now based in the city, and 3,777 students undertaking their primary course at city-based locations in 2021, we know a lot about the difference in their transport behaviour compared with the Sandy Bay staff and students. Because of better public transport and active transport networks like bike paths, university staff and students located in the city are driving less compared with those based at Sandy Bay – 22% less students, and 28% less staff.

In the first few weeks of Semester in 2022, we have, on average, 1,970 people travelling to the Sandy Bay campus per day. In line with the assumptions from our Travel Behaviour Survey in 2021, this amounts to approximately 1,176 cars. If we extrapolate the behaviour of current city staff and students for a city-centric model, in a city-centric model we could expect only 722 of these cars to drive into the city each day. This is a net reduction of around 475 cars on our roads every day.

This has been a consistent picture for some time. Back in 2018, GHD Pty Ltd and RED Sustainability Consultants completed a Preliminary Traffic Impact Assessment for Central Hobart which modelled our move, our travel behaviour, and potential scenarios. It found in all scenarios, a likely reduction in trips made by car to a University in the city.

What they also found was that a move to the City would improve traffic flow. This is largely because staff and students who live across greater Hobart engage in significant cross-town travel to get to Sandy Bay. The modelling revealed that, for Sandy Bay itself, the improvement in traffic would be considerable, with a reduction of 10 cars per minute during peak hour.

We are committed to making further positive contributions to ease traffic congestion into the future and help our people get to and from work and study. We will be analysing and adjusting our class timetabling around peak times, investing in safe pedestrian and cycleways across the city, and working closely with our partners around public transport to support more sustainable and available options. We have an opportunity to be the critical mass that is needed as the catalyst for improving Hobart's public transport infrastructure, which will be a benefit for all people of Hobart, not just the university.

Financial sustainability

Our 2019 business case explored the financial implications of the two options and found that it would be \$120 million more costly to redevelop the Sandy Bay site than to consolidate and build a new campus in a smaller city footprint.

Since then, a great deal of further work has occurred, so we know a lot more about the relative net costs of the two options. The relative cost of buildings in the two locations has not fundamentally changed. What has changed is the income that would be generated from the sale of our city properties compared to the long-term redevelopment of Sandy Bay:

- If we were to sell the City properties that we are yet to develop and continue a distributed campus model (i.e. retain the existing Medical Science Precinct, the Hedberg, student accommodation and Hunter St) at a 40% premium to the price we purchased them for, we would receive approximately \$100m;
- In the alternative case, by consolidating into the city, Deloitte Access Economics have estimated that, across the life of the Sandy Bay development we would stand to gain approximately \$770 million.

The financial implications of these two options for our sustainability is now even more stark:

- The distributed campus option would require the University to find \$450m from operations to upgrade our campus in a constrained Commonwealth funding environment, which is an unprecedented level of expenditure for the University that has typically been able to allocate a maximum of \$10-15m annually for building infrastructure spending;
- The consolidated city campus option would cover the cost of the redevelopment and provide the University with \$200m more over time. This will provide an ongoing income stream to support the delivery of education and research in Tasmania, enhance access through scholarships and, in some measure, address declining Commonwealth funding.

The consultation we've undertaken to ensure this move enhances both the City and Sandy Bay

Once the Council made its decision in 2019, we set out to work closely with stakeholders from across the City to make sure the campus would not just be *in* the City but very much *for* and *of* the City.

In November 2019, we held an Appreciative Inquiry Summit, inviting over 400 stakeholders from across Greater Hobart. They came from state government, local government, local businesses, local community organisations across education, transport, health and community services, as well as some of our staff and students who wanted to contribute.

The process started with people identifying what they value about Hobart and what they would like to see any University move enhance. The qualities people identified were:

- A sustainable campus characterised by bringing nature and green spaces into the city
- A campus that is welcoming to all and that builds community
- A campus that enables us to work better together with our many partners
- Reimagined traffic and transport options
- A campus which preserves the Domain as a special space
- Architecture that enhances the city

There was then careful deliberation about how this could occur. What emerged were a series of values, principles and aspirations for a city campus that would make Hobart a better place to be. Those values, principles and aspirations have continued to guide our designs and processes.

From here, we kicked off a master planning exercise and we spent 2020 and 2021 consulting with stakeholders to refine this vision and develop a series of Urban Design Principles that would guide all our work and an initial masterplan.

We held a series of forums through our Community and Expert Reference groups, enabled online feedback through our website, and had a month-long staffed exhibition space in Melville St and the Sandy Bay campus where we shared our plans and invited feedback from the community. We shared findings and tested feedback around initial plans with key stakeholders along the way – including city neighbours, elected members from state, federal and local government, and industry partners around traffic, transport and local business.

This process helped to refine our overarching principles that our community had for the campus, and we went about developing supporting strategies to implement them:

1. **The Place Principle:** Enhance the distinctive natural and human qualities of nipaluna/Hobart
2. **The Sustainability Principle:** Bring nature into the city as an integral part of a sustainable campus
3. **The Accessibility Principle:** Create a highly accessible campus that enhances connections across the city and from the Southern Region
4. **The Community Principle:** Create an inviting heart to a connected series of university and city communities.

All this work and feedback culminated in the release of our Preliminary Urban Design Framework (UDF) in 2021, which details our initial masterplan for the city campus. Upon release, the UDF received 4,300 views from our internal and external community, and feedback was encouraged.

In 2021, we also undertook a four-stage engagement process around creating a community vision for the Sandy Bay campus. We heard about the things that people love about the Sandy Bay campus, and the values that need to be nurtured for its future purpose. Our engagement included 101 face-to-face and focus groups, 11 online workshops, 350+ exhibition participants, 136,000+ emails delivered to staff and students, and 21,000+ flyers through letterbox drops to residents of Sandy Bay, Mt Nelson, Dynnyrne and Tolmans Hill, and an interactive website with over 3,500+ views where visitors were encouraged to leave feedback for each stage of the process. The result of all these consultations was the development of the draft concept master plan, which was integral to our submission to Hobart City Council to remove the educational overlay over the site, which would enable a vision such as this be pursued.

We're committed to getting the best outcomes for the City, Sandy Bay and their communities

We are committed to and have faith in public processes and forums that enable systematic and public reviews of our proposals. The Planning Scheme Amendment process that governs Sandy Bay's future provides extensive opportunity for public review and input. We are very open to evolving the proposal in light of that feedback.

Any City developments, like our current proposal in relation to the Forestry Building, need to go through a Development Application process, which again provides extensive opportunity for public input and expert review to ensure that the development meets the needs of the City.

As we develop the next buildings, we will engage in the sort of extensive consultation with future users, both internal and external, and other stakeholders with an interest, as we have done with our new buildings in Burnie and Launceston.

The next of those developments will be the buildings associated with our Campus Heart. Our staff, students, city neighbours and future users from across Greater Hobart will have significant opportunities to shape the design and function of this precinct.

We look forward to working together to see the University evolve in the City in a way that enhances Hobart and its communities, while securing the future of higher education for Tasmanians.