



INDEPENDENT
HIGHER EDUCATION
AUSTRALIA

IHEA SUBMISSION

CONSULTATION PAPER

IMPLEMENTING SUBURBAN UNIVERSITY STUDY HUBS

2 October 2023

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Introduction

The Australian Universities Accord Review process has highlighted the need to address the challenges faced by under-represented cohorts in accessing higher education. The Interim Report emphasises the impact of location on higher education opportunities, particularly for individuals from outer metropolitan, regional, and remote areas. To bridge this gap, the Australian Universities Accord panel has recommended the creation of Suburban University Study Hubs. These hubs aim to bring higher education closer to students, designing educational pathways that cater to their needs and providing support for under-represented groups, including those from low socioeconomic backgrounds and First Nations students.

As an independent education sector with a strong track record of educating smaller cohorts and achieving superior QILT results, we are well-positioned to contribute valuable insights into the design and implementation of these hubs. Our experience and expertise enable us to understand the unique needs of these cohorts and devise effective strategies to engage and support them.

In this submission, we consider the aim of the Suburban University Study Hubs program and address the consultation questions raised in the Consultation Paper. We argue that a place-based approach can integrate the voice of local communities, widen participation and support, embed equity, meet the needs of different communities, and establish strong connections with local providers. Additionally, we examine the barriers these study hubs aim to address and the services they will provide. Finally, we discuss the selection of hub locations, the importance of social infrastructure, the eligibility of organisations to operate multiple hubs, and the funding and partnerships required for the success of the Suburban University Study Hubs program.

A Place-Based Approach: Integrating the Voice of Local Communities

To foster a place-based approach, it is crucial to ensure the voice of local communities is integrated into the design and operation of Suburban University Study Hubs. This has been the great strength of existing Regional University Centres. This integration can be achieved by adapting courses, providers, and resources available at the hubs based on community feedback and evolving needs. It may require significant changes to course content, delivery modes, student support, and cohort sizes. By engaging with representatives from the community – and communities within the broader community – and forming advisory councils or committees, these study hubs can ensure that the needs of different communities are met.

Widening Participation and Support: Extending Study Opportunities

Suburban University Study Hubs have the potential to widen participation and support by expanding beyond the traditional university footprint. This expansion must include institutes of higher education and university colleges, which are better suited to cater to niche areas of study, diverse delivery modes, and unique student needs. Collaborating with local community organisations, employers, and industry partners can further enhance opportunities by creating internship programs and job placement initiatives. These partnerships will help students gain practical experience and connect with potential employers.

Embedding Equity in Suburban University Study Hubs

Equity must not just be a rationale for the establishment of Suburban University Study Hubs, it must be a fundamental aspect of their design. It is essential to consider the particular needs of both under-represented and disadvantaged groups. To ensure inclusivity, the physical spaces, digital resources, and materials used in the hubs should be accessible and accommodating for all individuals. This requires a commitment to developing an environment that is culturally safe and relevant to students' local context. Organising cultural events, celebrations, and workshops that reflect the diversity of the communities served by the hubs can foster inclusivity. Additionally, recruiting and retaining a diverse staff who can relate to the backgrounds and experiences of students will contribute to a supportive and inclusive environment.

Meeting the Needs of Different Communities

In areas where multiple communities co-exist, Suburban University Study Hubs must take into account their diverse needs. One way to achieve this is by having multiple providers operating from the same hub. By engaging representatives from each community in the planning and decision-making processes, the study hubs can ensure that the voices of all communities are heard. Establishing advisory councils or committees composed of community representatives will contribute to the inclusive design and operation of the hubs.

Establishing Strong Connections with Local Providers

Suburban University Study Hubs should aim to support students engaging with any provider while also establishing strong connections with local providers, campuses, and leaders. This is particularly important in areas where there may not be any local providers to connect with. Breaking down barriers between public and private providers, diverse types of higher education providers, both large and small, is essential. Physically operating as a hub rather than multiple campuses within a warehouse can foster collaboration. Common student facilities, reception areas, libraries, labs, social venues, and wellbeing and health services can be shared among all providers. Organising shared campus events and activities that bring together students from different providers can further strengthen these connections. Additionally, data-sharing agreements between providers can help track student progress and ensure the effectiveness of hub support services.

Addressing Barriers and Providing Support Services

The Suburban University Study Hubs program aims to address several barriers and provide dedicated support services. These services should cater to under-represented cohorts, including First Nations students, students with disabilities, and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Establishing

mentorship and counselling programs can provide guidance and support to students throughout their educational journey. Additionally, academic support services, including tutoring and one-on-one assistance, can help students succeed in their studies. By offering these targeted support services, Suburban University Study Hubs can bridge the gap and provide equitable access to higher education.

Selecting Hub Locations and Maximising Success

When selecting locations for Suburban University Study Hubs, several factors should be considered. These factors include opportunity versus cost, community support, existing services and infrastructure in the location, and demographic considerations. To maximise the success of the study hubs, it is crucial to locate them in close proximity to other social infrastructure. This could include childcare services, counselling services, medical services, aged care support, disability support, learning support, access to part-time work, transportation, affordable accommodation, and crisis centres. By providing access to these essential services, the study hubs can create a supportive ecosystem that enhances students' overall experience.

Collaboration Between Hubs and Education Providers

Suburban University Study Hubs should encourage collaboration between hubs and education providers, including higher education and vocational education and training (VET) institutions. By including providers of all sizes and levels, both public and private, collaboration can be fostered. Joint needs assessments with education providers can identify gaps in services and support that the study hubs can address without duplication. Collaboration between public and private providers has already been successful in overcoming challenges during the pandemic, demonstrating the potential for collaboration to enhance the Suburban University Study Hubs program.

Funding and Partnerships for Suburban University Study Hubs

To encourage and support partnerships that benefit students, Suburban University Study Hubs can highlight the opportunity for partners to access a diverse talent pool of students for internships, research, or recruitment. Incentives can be offered to promote partnership development and ensure that the study hubs complement existing initiatives rather than duplicate services. Learning from similar initiatives, both within Australia and internationally, can inform the design and development of the Suburban University Study Hubs program. By considering successful programs in other countries, such as Canada, Australia can determine the best practices for addressing equity and providing access to higher education for all.

Conclusion

The implementation of Suburban University Study Hubs presents a significant opportunity to address the barriers faced by under-represented cohorts in accessing higher education. Our experience and expertise in the independent sector, coupled with our proven track record of superior QILT results, provide us with the legitimacy, credibility, and knowledge to contribute to this transformative initiative. By fostering a place-based approach, widening participation and support, embedding equity, meeting the needs of different communities, and establishing strong connections with local providers, these study hubs can create equitable pathways to higher education. Selecting hub locations strategically and maximising their success by incorporating essential social infrastructure will further enhance the experience for students.

Collaboration between hubs and education providers, along with the provision of dedicated support services, will contribute to the success of the Suburban University Study Hubs program. By securing funding and fostering partnerships, these study hubs can create a transformative impact on the educational landscape, providing opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their background, to pursue higher education.

Who We Are

Independent Higher Education Australia Ltd. (IHEA) is a peak body established in 2001 to represent Australian independent (private sector) higher education institutions. Our membership spans independent universities, university colleges and other institutes of higher education all of which are registered higher education providers accredited by the national higher education regulator, TEQSA or associate members seeking registration.

Our Vision is that: students, domestic and international, have open and equitable access to world class independent higher education in Australia, built on the foundations of equity, choice, and diversity.

Our Mission is to represent independent higher education and promote recognition and respect of independent providers as they contribute to Australian education, the Australian economy, and to society in general. We achieve this by promoting continuous improvement of academic and quality standards within member institutions, by advocating equity for their staff and students, and by delivering services that further strengthen independent providers' reputations as innovative, sustainable, and responsive to the needs of industry and other relevant stakeholders in both higher education and vocational education and training. IHEA's commitment is to excellence, productivity and growth in independent higher education being delivered through a trusted Australian education system underpinned by equity, choice, and diversity.

IHEA members have different missions, scales, and course offerings across the full AQF range (Diplomas to Doctorates). Members comprise:

- Four private universities (Bond University, Torrens University, University of Divinity, Avondale University),
- Four University Colleges (Alphacrucis University College, Moore Theological College, Australian College of Theology and Sydney College of Divinity), and
- Seventy-two not-for-profit and for-profit Institutes of Higher Education; and related corporate entities.

IHEA members teach 74 percent of the students in the independent sector (i.e., more than 130,000 students) and educate students in a range of disciplines, including law, agricultural science, architecture, business, accounting, tourism and hospitality, education, health sciences, theology, creative arts, information technology, and social sciences. A list of our full membership is provided in Appendix A.

IHEA holds a unique position in higher education as a representative peak body of higher education providers. Membership in IHEA is only open to providers registered with the Australian regulator – TEQSA. However, some IHEA members are dual and multi-sector providers who also deliver VET and/ or English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) courses.

Contacts

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Appendix A



IHEA Member Institutions

Avondale University	Le Cordon Bleu Australia
Bond University	Leaders Institute
Torrens University	Lyons College
University of Divinity	Marcus Oldham College
Alphacrucis University College	Melbourne Institute of Technology
Australian College of Theology: Australian University College	Morling College
Moore Theological College: Australian University College	National Academy of Professional Studies - NAPS
Academies Australasia Polytechnic	National Institute of Organisation Dynamics Australia
Academy of Interactive Technology	Navitas
Adelaide Central School of Art	Australian College of Applied Professions
AIBI Higher Education	College of Business and Technology
APEX Institute of Higher Education	Educational Enterprises Australia
Australasian College of Health and Wellness	Melbourne Institute of Business and Technology
Australian College of Christian Studies	Navitas Bundoora
Australian College of Nursing	Queensland Institute of Business and Technology
Australian College of Physical Education	SAE Institute
Australian College of the Arts (COLLARTS)	South Australian Institute of Business and Technology
Australian Institute of Business	Sydney Institute of Business and Technology
Australian Institute of Business and Management	Perth Institute of Business and Technology
Australian Institute of Management	Western Sydney University International College
Australian Institute of Music	Oxford Institute of Higher Education
BBI – The Australian Institute of Theological Education	Perth Bible College
Campion College Australia	Photography Studies College
Christian Heritage College	Polytechnic Institute Australia
Eastern College Australia	Sheridan Institute of Higher Education
Education Centre of Australia	SP Jain School of Global Management
Asia Pacific International College	Sydney College of Divinity
Higher Education Leadership Institute	Sydney Institute of Higher Education
Endeavour College of Natural Health	Sydney International School of Technology and Commerce
EQUALS International	Tabor College Australia
Excelsia College	The College of Law
Governance Institute of Australia	The MIECAT Institute
Holmes Institute	The Institute of Creative Arts and Technology
ICHM	The Tax Institute Higher Education HEPCO
Ikon Institute of Australia	Torrens Global Education Services
Institute of Health and Management	Think: Colleges
Institute of Internal Auditors - Australia	Universal Business School Sydney
International College of Management, Sydney	Universal Higher Education
Kaplan Business School	UOW College
LCI Melbourne	Wentworth Institute of Higher Education