

University of Tasmania

# Summary of Engagement Feedback

March 2019

Report of feedback gathered to 15 March 2019

## Engagement Summary

### Engagement process

The Southern Future exhibition room was established in the Studio Theatre on the Sandy Bay campus as the primary source of engagement with staff, students and stakeholders on the topic of the future campus model. On 14 February, Vice-Chancellor Professor Rufus Black invited staff to visit the Southern Future exhibition room. Eight guided tours were held for staff and one for the TUU executive team, and the room was open every work day from 18 February to 15 March from 10am-2pm. In total, there were over 1070 visits to the room.

The exhibition room held a series of 34 posters which outlined the evolution of the campus, explained the current situation, described the city-centric and distributed models, and finally set out the criteria against which the two options are being assessed.

Opportunities for feedback were provided in the room with people able to add sticky notes with their comments to each of the criteria throughout the space. By mid-March approximately 270 individual notes were contributed by visitors.

Staff and students were also encouraged to provide their feedback through other channels. More than 30 emails were sent to the Southern Future address and about 400 feedback surveys were completed, of which 40% were students. Verbal feedback provided by visitors directly to the project team members was recorded as well as questions asked of the Vice-Chancellor during the guided tours.

Recognising that not all staff would have the opportunity to visit the room, the Southern Future website was created to house a digital copy of the posters, supporting reports, video interviews, and a link to the feedback survey. This website (<http://www.utas.edu.au/southern-future/home>) received a total of approximately 700 unique page views with an average time of 5.5 minutes spent on the website.

To provide an opportunity to more deeply understand the opinions of staff and students on all aspects of the engagement, a social research firm was engaged to hold eight focus groups (six staff and two student) comprised of right to 10 participants each. Two of the staff focus groups were held prior to the opening of the exhibition room to gain insights into the poster design and the remaining focus groups were held three weeks after the exhibition room opened to get feedback on the criteria and assessment of the two campus models.

As at 15 March 2019 (approximate numbers):

- 1100 visits to the exhibition room
- 720 website visits
- 430 feedback surveys completed
- 280 sticky notes with feedback provided
- 72 focus group participants
- 30 emails sent to Southern Future email address

### Key recurring themes to be considered for either option

A wide variety of views have been received through the various vehicles. It is accurate to say a smaller percentage of people – about 15% – have very fixed views either for the City-Centric Campus Model or the Distributed Campus Model.

The majority of feedback has been received from staff and students who now understand the complexity of the decision that is being undertaken by the University Council. They have provided considered opinions, called out potential issues that will need to be addressed in future planning, and have embraced the engagement process.

### Current State of Buildings

There was considerable support for the conclusions of the building condition report, staff validated the feedback received from the early project groups, reflecting concerns as to their general working conditions in many buildings, with regards to general amenities, heating, cooling and basic services.

Feedback from city-based staff reflected inadequacies in the design and functionality of relatively recent developments such as the Medical Science Precinct (MSP) and Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS). The concerns centred around open-plan areas and a general lack of expansion space, as well as the temperature regulating difficulties of the IMAS building due to the building design.

### Parking and public transportation

Parking supply and public transportation services have been two of the most common issues raised by staff and students throughout the engagement process.

People often cite the need to drive due to childcare reasons, disability, residing in an area with poor public transport, or health care issues as preventing them from using public transport. The Sandy Bay campus offers the opportunity to park their vehicle nearby and continue with personal duties off-site with ease – though it is recognised that an improvement can be made in the number of car parks around the campus as the current numbers are inadequate.

The number of car parks in the city is seen as inadequate and the price difference of University held spaces in the CBD compared with Sandy Bay is seen as inequitable by some respondents. Although the questions about parking supply in the city have been addressed with an additional poster in the exhibition room, this was added on 5 March after most in-person walkthroughs had taken place.

Many believe that the congestion will be exacerbated by the influx of staff and students into the inner-city, making the current traffic congestion an even greater issue. Some people are sceptical about the traffic data presented in the exhibition space which shows a city-centric model would only have a small negative impact on travel times in the city. This scepticism was not based on criticism of the underlying modelling methodology and traffic analysis. If the city-centric model is adopted they generally seem unconvinced that there will be a shift towards public transport and active modes of travel, as has been the case for staff and students currently based in the inner-city (Travel Behaviour Survey Report, 2017). While there are also a number of staff excited by the prospect of improved public transport in Hobart.

Generally public transport in Hobart is not viewed favourably by Sandy Bay based staff, with it being infrequent and as a result underutilised and some people are sceptical about the University's ability to influence positive change. As a result, people have questioned whether their current challenges with infrequent bus services, especially to more remote regions or ones requiring multiple

connections will be resolved. Demonstrating the 60-minute bus catchment in greater Hobart has been well received as the concept of making the University more accessible to students from lower socioeconomic areas is seen as a favourable outcome.

The idea of a park-and-ride service has been raised by a number of staff and may provide more flexibility in solving some of the current limitations with the bus service.

Some feel that the argument for the proposed city-centric model relies too heavily on a behaviour change to public transport to get people to work and study and therefore is too risky to make a strong case for this option. It is perhaps not widely known that the City Deal also has aspects of public transport improvements and that the University will not be alone in supporting its improvement. However, some also recognise that the University can be a significant catalyst for change and benefit the wider by bringing a critical mass of people in the city and creating a demand for improved services and amenities such as cycling paths which have some users excited by the idea.

Should the distributed model be pursued some staff have suggested public transport links between Sandy Bay and the inner-city could be improved with the introduction of a University operated shuttle bus.

#### Collaboration and coherence of campus

A strong theme that has come through the consultation process is that people struggle to understand how a city-centric campus will work as a cohesive whole. People see this model as a collection of buildings that have no relationship to each other and that do not encourage inter disciplinary collaboration, both on formal and informal levels. However, there is widespread agreement that some co-locations with industry have created logical precincts such as MSP close to the hospital and other potential moves such as Law nearby the courts.

There is a perception that in the city-centric model buildings will be located further apart than in the current model, making it more difficult for staff and students to make classes on time and the physical distances will mean people will confine themselves to their immediate work area. This perception is magnified by comparing their lived experience of the Sandy Bay campus and a hypothetical city-centric model.

People see the University having to work around established buildings and as such limiting its ability to create a sense of a cohesive campus. People value the ability to walk through much of the Sandy Bay campus without the interruption of traffic and the ability to interact with colleagues in outdoor common spaces. Some feel that the natural environment of the Sandy Bay campus and its segregated location provide it with an atmosphere that encourages study and research. Feedback has been provided by some staff who work in the CBD that they can feel isolated and that it is difficult when they need to commute between the city and Sandy Bay.

There is strong feedback that a key to making the city-centric model work will be focusing on people and how they interact and not assuming that collaboration will occur simply based on the proximity of buildings to each other.

There is a realisation that with a city-centric model there will be benefit to Hobart in terms of increased economic activity through restaurant and retail patronage by staff and students. Some also feel that the additional number of people will invoke a vibrancy to the mostly commercially focused area.

### Campus heart

The location of the campus heart in the city-centric model has been raised frequently by staff and students. The current view of Sandy Bay's campus heart is mixed. Some believe it is strong especially at the time when this engagement process took place, the beginning of the academic year and during the warmest months. Considerably more, however, believe that this atmosphere has long gone and there is no real consistent connection amongst the university community on the Sandy Bay campus.

People who believe that there is a campus heart at Sandy Bay highlight the green spine that is surrounded by most of the campus' buildings as a space where people come together from across the campus. With a potential to consolidate below Churchill Avenue, this heart would further be made stronger by the increased density. These people also struggle to see how this type of space will be created in the city under the city-centric model.

They ask where the central hub will be, where will students socialise casually and where will staff mingle. There is a perception that a mix of University and public buildings in the city will dilute the university atmosphere and that individual colleges will have their own hubs and engagement across the university will be limited. It is difficult for people to imagine the design of a city university that also has a strong campus heart.

### Green space

Easy access to green space surrounding and imbedded within the Sandy Bay campus is a key feature of what staff love about the site. People like to access these spaces to meet with colleagues, enjoy a break during their working day, as well as appreciate the general aesthetic of current the Sandy Bay footprint. Many recognise the mental health benefits of the surrounding environment. There is a concern that this will be lost in the city-centric model.

People see the green space at the Sandy Bay campus as a feature that differentiates the University from others and that attracts people to it and reflects Tasmania's natural characteristics. There is a view that a city-centric model will make the University generic and that it will lose some of what makes it special. Past building designs and delivery may contribute to this notion but recognising that design will be within University control should alleviate some concern. Some have called into question whether students would be attracted to a more urban environment especially when the University competes with the likes of Melbourne universities. There is a perception that it will be challenging to incorporate green space into a city-centric campus and that the Domain is not easily accessible in comparison to the status quo at Sandy Bay.

Continued access to the University's sporting grounds is also important to a number of people.

### Space planning

There is concern about our ability to plan for our future needs and that whatever we build in the CBD under a city-centric model will soon not be fit for purpose and due to space constraints our ability to expand will be limited in the inner-city, but we will have more flexibility in Sandy Bay. Some have cited examples such as RMIT that has expanded from the Melbourne CBD to suburban locations due to lack of space and well as the University of Tasmania's MSP and IMAS buildings reached capacity soon after opening. Staff have been vocal about the need to learn from these experiences which have affected their level of confidence in future University developments.

The possibility of moving to an open-plan working environment in new university builds has raised significant concerns among staff. There is a view that rather than create barriers, staff offices encourage collaboration by allowing conversations between staff without disturbing colleagues. They also allow for staff to have private conversations with students. Staff have also provided negative feedback on some of the open-work spaces in new University builds with voices carrying long distances resulting in staff working with headphones or working from home. Staff have been advocating for a mix of individual offices, shared office spaces for post graduate students and breakout areas for larger groups of people to meet.

Staff have raised the need to consider the requirements of science laboratories for each discipline as some cannot easily be transitioned for use by other disciplines. Because of this lack of flexibility, planning space requirements including the number of labs required across the disciplines will need further consultation.

There is strong concern over the placement of specialist equipment and facilities such as green houses, animal services, aquaculture and the like. Although people recognise the need to upgrade the scientific facilities at Sandy Bay there is a strong view that it is not practical to move their facilities to the inner-city. To imagine these facilities in the city is seen as inappropriate especially with the addition of high-risk laboratories and associated waste management. Furthermore, there is concern of how research may be affected if sensitive scientific equipment may be disturbed by the vibrations in the city. The same issues have not been raised for a potential move of STEM to the rugby oval on the Sandy Bay campus.

During the engagement process it has been communicated that some specialist facilities may remain in Sandy Bay under the city-centric model; however, it has been noted that this will mean there will be the associated logistical problems for teaching and research between two sites which is currently a non-issue. This has also brought up the question of continuing to operate under a distributed model.

Although people are aware of the lack of disabled access currently at Sandy Bay, they also call into question the accessibility in the city-centric campus model. Many people have raised the issue that the university will not have control over non-university land that may also not meet appropriate standards for disabled people and that some individuals who identify as disabled, but do not hold a disabled parking permit, will suffer under the city-centric model due to lack of parking near their destination and the need to traverse through the city streets.

Finally, there are amenities currently at Sandy Bay and MSP that are highly valued by the university community and should be incorporated into future plans. Promoting a work-life balance through access to childcare and the UniGym at Sandy Bay are important to both staff and student alike, while MSP offers ample showers, bike storage, and breastfeeding rooms. The buildings at the MSP are also commended for their design encouraging informal staff and student collaboration in the internal staircase.

### Student impact

Acknowledging that one of the core purposes of a university is to serve its students through teaching, many people have asked about what students want in a university. An additional poster was added to the exhibition room to address this by presenting some of the student experience data, however, there is still much debate over what the needs of students are and how they decide which university they want to study at and doing more research of this has been suggested.

Many are aware of the elite image Sandy Bay possesses and believe there will be a great benefit in attracting students from various socioeconomic backgrounds if the University is primarily located in an inner-city setting. Furthermore, there is general agreement that having modern purpose-built facilities will attract students both domestically and internationally.

### Focus Group Summary

A total of eight focus groups in two sets, comprising 72 people, were held as part of the Southern Future engagement process.

Two groups were held prior to the opening of the exhibition room to provide feedback on the content and structure of the presentation material in the exhibition space. This process was extremely valuable to ensure the information presented had the most impact and assisted staff to focus on the key issues and as a result get meaningful feedback.

After the Southern Future consultation process had been running for nearly three weeks, six focus groups were held to get the perspectives of a cross section of staff and students. The eight criteria proposed to evaluate the two southern campus options were used as the main structure of each of the focus group sessions. The facilitators received both qualitative and quantitative feedback from staff and students on each of the criteria as well as participants' assessment of how both options rank. Finally, participants were asked to share their preferred option.

Staff supporting the move to the city-centric model outlined the benefits that the University could bring to the city. They believe that under this model the University can better engage with the community and create a sense of vibrancy that is currently lacking. They also note the potential to vastly improve the Hobart public transport system as a result of the greater number of public transport users that a city campus would encourage.

Staff in favour of the distributed model believe this provides greater campus cohesion than the city-centric model would. They believe having the majority of university buildings on one site means that it is easier to travel throughout the campus rather than having university buildings combined with other established buildings in the city. There was a greater recognition in the student groups that the current distributed model presents problems for people moving between university buildings with some people having to travel a long way to class and that a city-centric model could mitigate this.

Staff who would like to keep a distributed campus also noted that this environment is more appropriate to a university. With the green spine, it is removed from the rush of the city and allows for the creativity required of academics. They are concerned that productivity may be affected by a city move.

Staff who were undecided raised the importance of having adequate purpose-built facilities that will serve the core goal of the University, to teach and research in which ever model is chosen.

A number of the comments provided by staff in favour of the distributed model are currently under active consideration and are part of what is planned as part of the detailed consultation that will occur through the master planning process and can be addressed in whatever model is pursued.

There was a strong view that student accommodation is home to most of the student activity and that life on campus is not as vibrant as it once was. In general students now come to the University for lectures and tutorials and then leave. Having said that, they were positive about the interaction

between students in the Medical Science Precinct. It is evident that there are opportunities for the University to provide greater support for social activities on campus.

While the students identified positives with the Sandy Bay model, such as the green space, opportunities to find spaces to relax, the quieter setting, the close proximity of the bushland and the nostalgia associated with the campus they have found that the current distributed model makes it difficult for people to move between classes, both due to the steep slopes on the Sandy Bay site as well as the distances between classes. There was a recognition of the poor quality of the buildings and the quality of the new buildings in the city as well as the close proximity of services and student support in the city.