

Submission to the Legislative Council Select Committee – Inquiry into the Provisions of the University of Tasmania Act 1992

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Canberra
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INTRODUCTION

This submission is divided into three main sections:

1. Key points;
2. The University of Tasmania's (UTAS) proposed CBD move and redevelopment of the Sandy Bay campus – this is a case study highlighting flaws in the governance and accountability arrangements that apply to UTAS: flaws which have allowed the State Government to abrogate its responsibility to the Parliament and community; and
3. Comments against specific terms of reference.

About me

While I have lived in Canberra since 1986, I grew up in Hobart and graduated from the University of Tasmania (BA Honours 1981).

I worked for 30 years in the Commonwealth Public Service, including 19 years as a Senior Executive. My experience encompasses high level policy work, major Commonwealth asset sales, management of multi-billion-dollar transport infrastructure programs and supervision of national regulatory schemes. I also served as a Director on the Board of ANCAP Australasia Limited for five years and participated as the Australian representative in a number of international forums. I have significant experience in financial analysis and assessing benefit cost analyses.

Since March 2022, I have lodged a series of applications under the *Right to Information Act 2009* (RTI Act) with UTAS, state government agencies and the Hobart City Council seeking to ascertain what evidence there was for UTAS' proposed move to the Hobart CBD, and to understand UTAS' decision-making process. I was also seeking to understand the level of State Government involvement in the proposed move.

The response to my RTI applications has generally been unsatisfactory and I have three requests for external review with the Ombudsman relating to five RTI requests to UTAS (see Section 3), and a request for internal review with the Department of Education. I am also waiting on a response from the Department of Premier and Cabinet to an RTI application lodged in May 2022.

Through my RTI requests I have obtained two main documents/sets of documents:

- A redacted extract of UTAS Council Minutes from 2014 to 2022, which UTAS has also published on its website;¹ and
- A package (95 pages) of documents received from the Department of State Growth, which I would be happy to make available to the Committee.

While the response to my RTI applications has been unsatisfactory, it has been possible through the documents received, and material on the public record, to build a picture of some of the factors and processes involved in UTAS' decision to move to the CBD.

¹ https://www.utas.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1591161/University-of-Tasmania-Council-minutes-extract-Hobart-City-Move.pdf

1. KEY POINTS

- UTAS is a great Tasmanian public institution, but is in major decline.
- The *University of Tasmania Act 1992* (the 1992 Act), particularly as amended between 2001 and 2012, has been a major contributing factor to this decline.
- In the Legislative Council debate surrounding the establishment of this *Inquiry into the Provisions of the 1992 Act*, some speakers indicated that they believed the amendments, which were principally focused on the constitution of the UTAS Council, were entirely driven by national reform initiatives.
- This is not correct. For example, the *Voluntary Code of Best Practice for the Governance of Australian Universities* (2011), which was invoked in the Second Reading Speech for the 2012 amendment to the 1992 Act, provides considerable flexibility regarding governance structures, as does the 2018 iteration of the Code.
- The structure of the UTAS Council can be seen as extreme both with regard to the 2011 Code and in comparison to, at least some, other universities.
- This same extremity can be seen in UTAS' weak accountability arrangements and the removal of the restraint on alienation of the land at the Sandy Bay campus site vested in UTAS.
- This extremity has manifested in a decline in UTAS' teaching and research function and in its internal management structure and culture. I will leave authorities such as Emeritus Professor Jeff Malpas to comment on these matters.
- This extremity has also been evident in UTAS' decision-making process to move its southern campus to the Hobart CBD and redevelop the Sandy Bay campus.
- Accountability arrangements for UTAS are so weak that the State Government has been able to abrogate responsibility and take a 'hands off approach' – this represents a gross failure of government.
- UTAS' proposed move to the Hobart CBD, and redevelopment of the Sandy Bay campus, is a major issue for UTAS, Hobart and Tasmania.
- The proposition - that a decision of this magnitude, whereby UTAS' southern campus is relocated to the city and the Sandy Bay campus is effectively turned into **a new suburb**, should be left to UTAS - is absurd.
- It also raises the question, "How bad does UTAS' decision making need to be before the Government intervenes?" This applies equally to educational issues.
- The plan to relocate UTAS to the Hobart CBD is a legacy from Vice Chancellor (VC) Rathjen. Consultation on the plan should have occurred in 2017, and is now well overdue.
- There is no substantive, critically assessed evidence in the public domain to support the move.
 - The documentation provided under the UTAS FAQ "Where is the data and plans to support the move?", largely comprises generalisations and unsubstantiated assertions.²

² See <https://www.utas.edu.au/about/campuses/southern-transformation#faqs>

- It is clear that even in UTAS' own internal deliberative processes, decisions have been made by key people, prior to consideration of evidence or business cases. **When business cases are developed after decisions have been made, they are likely to be one sided, at best.**
- The costly public relations campaign which has just commenced featuring the Chancellor of UTAS is, by now, a typical ploy. It would not surprise if a business case supporting the CBD move emerged during the course of the campaign – such a business case would be five years late and would have little credibility.
- The Government should immediately call a halt to UTAS' move to the CBD and commence a review of the 1992 Act and UTAS' operations.

2. THE PROPOSED CBD MOVE AND REDEVELOPMENT OF THE SANDY BAY CAMPUS

Legislative Background

Drafting instructions for the 1992 Act were based on advice from the interim UTAS Council that had presided over the amalgamation of UTAS and the Tasmanian State Institute of Technology. The UTAS Council sought increased flexibility for future UTAS operations. This was chiefly manifested in two major initiatives in the 1992 Act:

- The provision of an explicit power for UTAS to acquire, hold and dispose of property – s7(1)(a) of the 1992 Act: and
- Removal of the provision against alienation of the land at the Sandy Bay site vested in UTAS by the *Tasmanian University Act 1951*.

Notably, however, in his second reading speech, Minister for Education John Beswick made the following comments:

This bill does not set out to regulate in detail every aspect of the administration of the University of Tasmania. That would be a major mistake. There is considerable dynamism in the Australian higher education scene. Universities are expected to find an increasing share of their budget from non-government sources, and to be much more entrepreneurial than before. In order to compete in this rapidly changing scene, the University Council will need a degree of flexibility in marshalling its resources to respond to new challenges. **The bill provides the university with that flexibility but also ensures its basic accountability to the Government and the people of Tasmania, particularly through a significant government, parliamentary and community representation on the council of the university.** [my bolding]

It was therefore a key principle that **flexibility was to be balanced by accountability.**

Accountability was chiefly provided by the constitution of the UTAS Council, which under the 1992 Act, as passed, comprised 24 members representing a diverse range of views and experience, including one member elected by the House of Assembly and another by the Legislative Council. The UTAS Council also included two members appointed by the Minister for Education, one of whom in 1993, when the 1992 Act commenced, was the head of the Department of Education.

Belief in this accountability arrangement was strong and provides a partial answer to the question of why, if the Parliament had not intended to give UTAS full control over the land at the Sandy Bay site, did it totally remove the restraint on alienation.

The other part of the answer lies in the views and expectations of the time. For example, the Honourable Dr Julian Amos, who was involved in debate around the 1992 Act, has advised me in personal correspondence that:

“The Bill that was brought before parliament in 1992 sought to resolve the structure and representation on the University Council, after the university amalgamated with the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education.

The feeling at the time was that merger would not only lead to a more efficient tertiary institute, but also make it more relevant to modern day needs, and in particular the practical needs of the Tasmanian community and economy.

That thinking may well have led to some consideration of private engagement, and although not explicitly stated, to the idea of private public partnerships.

Heady days indeed.

On reflection, the idea that some University land might be required to establish such a relationship, or series of relationships, would not have been of concern.

However, the idea that the entire site might be sold off would not have entered our minds, for an instant, and if presented as an option would have been vigorously opposed.”

Certainly, the UTAS Council did not foreshadow any major land dealings in its advice to government and the matter received no consideration in debate.

It also notable that under the 1992 Act, reporting requirements remained as undemanding as they had been under previous legislation governing UTAS, with a requirement only to produce an annual report six months after the end of the financial year (the calendar year for UTAS). There was then a significant level of faith in accountability arrangements based on the constitution of the UTAS Council.

A series of amendments to the Act between 2001 and 2012, however, radically changed the constitution of the UTAS Council (see [Table 1](#) below). The direct link to the Parliament was removed by an amendment to the 1992 Act in 2001, while the appointment of senior staff from within the Department of Education has been sporadic in the last 20 years. There has also been a striking reduction in academic, student and graduate representation from 11 out of 24 members (46%) under the 1992 Act, as passed, down to three out of 14 members (21%) under the 2012 amendment, and an increase in Council appointed/elected members from six (25%), counting the Chancellor and VC, under the 1992 Act, as passed, up to eight (57%) under the 2012 Amendment. The comparison becomes sharper if Ministerial appointments are added to Council appointments with six becoming 8 in 1992 (33%) and eight becoming 10 (71%) in 2012. As the 1992 Act, with and without amendments, clearly contemplated close consultation between the Minister for Education and the UTAS Council over appointments, it seems reasonable to surmise that such consultation has regularly occurred.

- On 4 May 2022 I lodged an RTI application seeking, among other things, “All briefs and correspondence relating to the appointment of UTAS Councillors by the Minister for Education under ss 8.(1)(d) and 8.(5) of the *University of Tasmania Act 1992*” from 1 January 2015 to 4 May 2022. I was subsequently advised by the Department of Education that while reasonable attempts had been made, no information could be found in relation to this and my other requests. I have appealed this decision.

It is also striking that, while academic staff, graduates, students and professional staff directly elected 12 out of 24 members (50%) under the original 1992 Act, under the 2012 amendment this figure was reduced to 2 out of 14 (15%).

Table 1: Constituency of the UTAS Council – 1992 to present

Legislation/Amendment (Am)	1992 Act	2001 Am	2004 Am	2012 Am
Commencement	Jan-1993	Sep-2001	Jan-2005	Jan-2013
Ex-Officio				
Chancellor - elected	1	1	1	1
Vice Chancellor - appointed	1	1	1	1
Chair of the Academic Senate	1	1	1	1
Alumni Chair		1		
Alumni Deputy Chair		1		
Others				
Elected by Legislative Council	1			
Elected by House of Assembly	1			
Appointed by the Minister	2	3	4	2
Appointed jointly the Council and Minister	2			
Appointed by the Council	2	3	4	up to 6
Possible appointment by Council of an additional person with international experience		0-1	0-1	
Appointed by the Visitor (Governor)	1			
Elected by academic staff	5	3	3	1
Elected by graduates	3			
Elected by general staff	2	1		
Elected by professional staff			1	1
Elected by students	2	2		
Student(s) appointed by Council after consultation with relevant student associations			2	minimum 1
Total	24	17-18	17-18	10-14

Notes: Councillors appointed jointly by the UTAS Council and Minister have been counted as Council appointed on page 5. While Council positions were not always fully filled, they were generally filled in accordance with the numbers in the Table. Since 2012 there have generally been six (non-student; non-Vice Chancellor) Council appointees on the Council. Since 2012 there has only been one student appointee. Since the 2004 amendment, there has been a requirement for the Minister and Council to consult on appointments (s8(5)(b) of the 1992 Act).

The second reading speeches and parliamentary debate over the amendments to 1992 indicate that changes to the constitution of the UTAS Council were largely driven by national reform initiatives. To some extent they were, but - as has been indicated previously - the changes made to the UTAS Council under the 2012 amendment, which were particularly drastic, went much further than the *Voluntary Code of Best Practice for the Governance of Australian Universities* (2011), which had been endorsed by Commonwealth, State and Territory Education Ministers.

Whatever the motivation, it is undeniable that the changes in the constitution of the UTAS Council have decreased the focus on the core business of the University – excellence in teaching and research – while increasing the focus on business management. At the same time, the emphasis on direct accountability seems to have been totally lost or, at least, disregarded by both the UTAS Council and the State Government. The changes in the constitution of the UTAS Council have also

created the potential for the Council to self-replicate (through the appointment of people with outlooks/skills similar to the people they replaced) and the institutionalisation of group think, particularly as many appointees to the UTAS Council from the early 2000s have served for long-terms (up to 10 years or more).

With the benefit of hindsight, it seems incomprehensible that, in passing amendments to the 1992 Act, which radically altered the constitution of the UTAS Council and removed direct accountability arrangements, the Parliament did not consider other forms of accountability. For example, a requirement to consult with the Government over land sales and leases might have been contemplated, in line with legislative requirements for a number of other universities, as might more regular and prescriptive reporting requirements.

The result of the failure to explicitly provide for a reasonable standard of accountability and oversight is that successive governments have been able to abrogate responsibility for critical engagement and decision-making in areas that should rightfully be the preserve of the Government and the Parliament, on behalf of the community. At the same time, UTAS or, more accurately, its key decision makers have shown an increasing disregard for both accountability and transparency that ill-befits a public institution that should be modelling best practice behaviour.

These issues will be considered further in Section 3.

VCs Rathjen and Black, and the CBD Move

Up to now, discussion has been focused on UTAS or the UTAS Council, but it seems necessary at this stage to focus on individuals, particularly VC Rathjen.

From the time of VC Le Grew, UTAS has been building its presence in the CBD in a piecemeal way, sometimes with a strong rationale and good results.

At what stage, this piecemeal relocation turned into a plan for a full-scale relocation is not clear.

However, it is clear from the documents released to me under RTI legislation, and documents available on the public record (including in particular a large batch of papers released by the Hobart City Council in late May this year)³, that - by 2016 - VC Rathjen had a clear ambition to relocate UTAS into the CBD. For the most part, VC Black appears to simply be following the Rathjen agenda.

In planning to relocate to the CBD it is not clear what VC Rathjen's thinking was. There is, for example, little if any substantive evidence in the public domain that the move would increase student accessibility. There are, anyway, more cost-effective ways of improving student accessibility than relocating an entire university, such as improved and dedicated public transport options. Moreover, the physical location of a university is less likely to be a factor in improving enrolment rates than strategies to improve year 12 retention rates and improve ATARs. Given UTAS' extreme (and highly challengeable) view of how teaching should be conducted, the physical location of UTAS might, anyway, be considered a relatively minor issue.

It may be reasonable to suspect that VC Rathjen was attracted to relocation, from the outset, primarily because it would enable UTAS to draw funding support from commercial use of the Sandy Bay campus site. Certainly, this is a clearly articulated motive of UTAS under VC Black.

³ http://hobart.infocouncil.biz/Open/2022/05/CO_30052022_ATT_1642_SUP_EXCLUDED.PDF

The decision to move to the Hobart CBD and redevelop the Sandy Bay campus – some key steps

At this point it seems appropriate to list some of the key steps in the decision-making process to move to the Hobart CBD, as they highlight issues of governance and accountability, which will be considered further in Section 3.⁴

September 2016 – the UTAS Council approved the science, technology, engineering and mathematics facilities (STEM) “Business Case for submission to Infrastructure Australia” – there is no indication in the redacted extract of the UTAS Council Minutes provided to me under RTI legislation what the Business Case encompassed. There is also no indication that the UTAS Council had in any way considered this matter previously. Given subsequent developments, it is possible that, at this stage, VC Rathjen was using the STEM business case as a ‘stalking horse’ for a city move.

- I have recently lodged an RTI application for the STEM business case and background research.⁵

October 2016 – following an invitation by VC Rathjen to attend the UniverCities conference and to visit the university cities of Freiburg and Cambridge, an agenda paper was prepared for the Hobart City Council Special Governance Committee Meeting of 24 October 2016, recommending participation. There were a number of references in the paper to VC Rathjen’s desire to move UTAS to the CBD, including:

“4.5 The Vice Chancellor is clearly wishing to engage the Council in a discussion about what it means to have UTAS based in the inner city and how Hobart can best position itself to take full advantage of being a University City.

...

4.14 It is clear that UTAS is on a definite pathway to relocate into the inner-city.”

(for more detail see [Attachment 1](#))

Following the trip, Lord Mayor Hickey wrote to VC Rathjen, stating at the outset:

“Firstly, I wanted to assure you that the Council is completely committed to and shares UTAS’s aspirations to move into the inner city.”

A copy of Lord Mayor Hickey’s letter is at [Attachment 2](#))

From this time on, it is clear from Hobart City Council papers that there was an alliance between VC Rathjen and Lord Mayor Hickey to move UTAS into the CBD. This was crucial as - until recently - the Hobart City Council has given unwavering and unquestioning support to the move. It also appears that, at this stage, VC Rathjen was acting well in advance of the formal decision-making processes of the UTAS Council.

⁴ All references to UTAS Council decisions are from the redacted extract of the UTAS Council Minutes at: https://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1591161/University-of-Tasmania-Council-minutes-extract-Hobart-City-Move.pdf

⁵ Infrastructure Australia released an evaluation of the STEM business case, but this does not include the underlying assumptions and appears to be a seriously flawed document. See: https://www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-06/UTAS-STEM-summary_0.pdf

- In March 2022, I lodged an RTI application with UTAS for records relating to the overseas trip in 2016, as well as to another overseas trip in 2017, in order to ascertain how the UTAS Council were briefed on the purpose of these trips. The application was refused and the matter is now before the Ombudsman.

May 2017 - the UTAS “Council approved guiding principles...and the proposed process for developing a strategy and master plan for Southern Campus Infrastructure” (the significance of this becomes clear below).

July 2017 - VC Rathjen felt sufficiently confident to press his case for relocation of the southern campus to the Hobart CBD publicly, while indicating that “it was a matter for the University Council” (see [Attachment 3](#)).

- From the redacted UTAS Council Minutes, it appears that VC Rathjen was indeed anticipating a decision by the UTAS Council. Equally clearly, however, VC Rathjen seems to have had a good sense of how the UTAS Council would decide the matter.

August 2017 - the UTAS Council “endorsed further planning to be undertaken around the viability of the option to relocate to a Hobart CBD campus to enable an informed decision to be made about the future of the southern campus...”.

November 2017 - the UTAS “Council approved the development of a masterplan business case for a Hobart CBD campus and the future use of the Sandy Bay campus...[and] a detailed financial and socio-economic analysis as part of the masterplan business case for a Hobart CBD campus and the future use of the Sandy Bay campus, with the analysis to include a comparison against a realistic alternative.”

- This last clause sounds like an addition by some Council members keen to see options explored in a balanced way. However, VC Rathjen’s mind had already been made up for some time.

The succession of VC Rathjen by VC Black in 2018 apparently did nothing to interrupt the process to relocation that was now underway. Two more steps are worthy of note:

January 2018 – On 1 January 2018, Jenny Gale, the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, was appointed to the UTAS Council. Also in January, Prime Minister Turnbull and Premier Hodgman signed a Heads of Agreement to develop and implement a Hobart City Deal, which included “the development of the University of Tasmania’s STEM presence in the city”. Various groups were formed to implement the Deal and it is clear from the Minutes of a Senior Officials Meeting of 31 May 2018 that Senior Officials were well aware that UTAS was considering relocation to the CBD, even if Ms Gale was not providing this information directly to the Government.

April 2019 - the UTAS “Council approved the business case which supports the 'City-Centric Campus' model as a basis for the future development of the University's Southern Campuses.

[redacted] wanted his vote against the city option recorded in the minutes.”

While – contrary to recent public statements by VC Black (see [Attachment 4](#)) – this decision allowed for the retention of some educational facilities at the Sandy Bay campus, there is no doubt that this was the major decision point in the process initiated by VC Rathjen.

This makes it all the more important to note that of the 14 UTAS councillors present at this meeting, two joined the Council in January 2019 and two others in February 2019. That such an important

decision was made with four new Council members can only be regarded as poor practice, particularly as the average length of service of Council members already appointed to the Council was over seven years at 1 January 2019, while the Chair (Chancellor) had been on the Council for nearly seven years. These are circumstances where, with an influential full-time VC, group think might operate and the most surprising aspect of the April 2019 meeting is, perhaps, that one UTAS Council member voted against the move.

- In light of this, it may be reasonable to suggest that there should be an obligation for UTAS Council members to show that they have satisfied their “Obligation for care and diligence” under s11A. of the 1992 Act through, for example, a signed declaration when major issues (appropriately defined) are considered.

Consultation and the State Government

I believe that by 2017 UTAS (VC Rathjen) should have been engaging the State Government in meaningful consultation about the direction it was considering taking. If it did, the Government should reasonably have engaged the Parliament and the community in consultation at this time. If it did not, the Government would certainly have been aware of UTAS’ chosen course by early 2018, and it should have engaged the Parliament and community at this stage.

The question needs to be asked, why the State Government apparently believes the relocation of UTAS to the Hobart CBD, and the redevelopment of the Sandy Bay campus as a suburb, is an appropriate decision for UTAS to make. The alliance between UTAS and the Hobart City Council may have made it relatively easy to take a ‘hands off’ approach’, but it is not a tenable position for a state government. It is even less tenable given UTAS’ (the VCs’) constant and consistent tendency to present the Government, Parliament and community with faits accomplis, and to generate evidence (what little there is of it), and engage in window-dressing consultation, after decisions have already been made.

3. COMMENTS AGAINST TERMS OF REFERENCE

(1) The constitution, functions and powers of the University

Because it is common for universities to operate on land gifted by the community it is common for the statutes which create universities to contain a requirement that the alienation of land be approved by the responsible Minister. Examples include:

- Under the *University of South Australia Act 1990* (s6), the University cannot alienate or lease land for more than 21 years except with the approval of the Governor.
- Under the *University of Melbourne Act 2009* (s37), the University cannot alienate or lease land for longer than 21 years without the approval of the Minister
- Under the *University of Sydney Act 1989* (s18(2A)), the University cannot alienate land acquired from the State at nominal or less than market value without approval of the Minister.
- Under the *University of Western Australia Act 1911* (s15), the University is not permitted to lease land for longer than 21 years without approval of the Minister.

As previously noted, the 1992 Act provided an explicit power for UTAS to acquire, hold and dispose of property, while removing the provision against alienation of the land at the Sandy Bay site vested in UTAS by the *Tasmanian University Act 1951*. This was in direct response to a request made by the UTAS Council.

This has allowed UTAS to potentially alienate its entire Sandy Bay campus without community approval or government oversight. At the very least, an amendment to the 1992 Act should be passed to require approval from the Government in respect of any significant land dealings on the Sandy Bay site. Given UTAS' propensity to operate as a property dealer and developer, it may also be reasonable to set a dollar threshold above which other property transactions by UTAS require approval by the State Government.

(2) The constitution, role, powers and obligations of the Council and Academic Senate

The changes in the constitution of the UTAS Council that occurred in the period 2001 to 2012 have been discussed at some length above.

It may be possible to identify Australian universities with similar constituencies of their governing bodies to UTAS. It is certainly possible, however, to identify others that are dissimilar in providing, for example, for greater participation by academic staff and/or elected representatives, such as Sydney University or the Australian National University.

The *Voluntary Code of Best Practice for the Governance of Australian Universities* (2018) also provides significant latitude in regard to the constitution of the governing bodies of universities.

Given the issues which have emerged around UTAS, I believe there is a strong argument for an increased academic presence on the UTAS Council and for more elected representatives. It is vital, however, that the best people possible are appointed/elected to the UTAS Council, including people with inquiring and critical minds – people capable of challenging a full-time VC.

(3) The appropriateness of the Act to ensure accountable executive, fiscal and academic decision-making

UTAS' Annual Report

The 1992 Act, as originally passed, had the following (sole) requirement for reporting:

- “12-(1) The Council is, within 6 months after the end of each financial year, to–
 - (a) present to the Governor an annual report of the proceedings of the University during that financial year; and
 - (b) furnish a copy of the report to the Minister.
- (2) The report is to contain a full account of the income and expenditure of the University for the financial year to which it relates.
- (3) The Minister is to cause a copy of the report to be laid before both Houses of Parliament within the first 10 sitting days of each House after the report is received by the Minister.”

While, with the changes to the UTAS Council's constitution, it might have been expected that requirements for more regular reporting to the Government (say quarterly or half-yearly) may have been instituted, this did not occur. Moreover, the annual reporting requirements in the 1992 Act

were not, in any way, strengthened through the series of amendments between 2001 and 2012. As can be seen, there is little by way of prescription in the 1992 Act regarding the contents of the annual report. The reporting deadline is also unduly generous, meaning that the report can be tabled in Parliament as late as September, based on recent sitting dates, nine months after completion of UTAS' financial year. Other universities in Australia have more stringent annual reporting requirements in respect to content and reporting deadlines. For example, universities in New South Wales are governed by the reporting requirements in the *Annual Reports (Statutory Bodies) Act 1984* (ss7-13), which among other matters have the effect of requiring that a university's annual report be tabled in Parliament within five months of the end of the financial year, unless an extension is sought from the Treasurer.

This Act is also prescriptive as to contents (and provides for further prescription), including:

“s9 Nature of report of operations

(1) The report of the operations...shall include (whether in the following order or otherwise) particulars in relation to the following matters:

- (a) charter,
- (b) aims and objectives,
- (c) access,
- (d) management and structure,
- (e) summary review of operations,
- (f) legal change.

(2) The report of the operations...shall, in addition to the matters referred to in subsection (1), include such particulars, if any, as may be prescribed in relation to such matters, if any, as may be prescribed.

(3) The report of the operations...shall be prepared in such manner, if any, and such form, if any, as may be prescribed.”

Even in respect of the minimal reporting requirement set in 1992, UTAS has had an increasing disregard for transparency and accountability. For example, while – excluding photos – UTAS' *Annual Report 2010* (AR2010) had approximately 44 pages of text and (non-financial) tables, its *Annual Report 2021* (AR2021) had approximately 19. This decrease is even starker when the content of the pages is examined. The text in AR2010 was relatively substantive; the text in AR2021 is full of jargon and reads – and is set out – more like a marketing document or brochure. AR2021 does include over 60 pages on the Financial Statements, but these are opaque in key areas, for example, the *Total other financial assets* of \$494 million in 2021 (p70) are not usefully explained; nor is the increase in this figure of over \$94 million from 2020.

I understand that John Lawrence will be lodging a submission to the Inquiry specifically focused on UTAS' Annual Report 2021. John is an economist and accountant and currently a public policy researcher and writer, and will provide more detailed comment on UTAS' Financial Statements.

Right to Information

UTAS' increasing disregard for transparency and accountability has also been apparent in its management of its obligations under the RTI Act. As a public institution it should be modelling best practice behaviour; instead it has a reputation for being obstructive and uncooperative.

- As background on RTI matters, I draw the Committee's particular attention to the Ombudsman's decision of 24 February 2022 in the case of Alexandra Humphries (ABC) and UTAS.⁶ On the more general issue of transparency and accountability, I cite the many articles and letters on this matter that have appeared in *The Mercury*, including particularly those published by Greg Barns in 2022. I attach a copy of Mr Barns' article of 21 March 2022, as this is particularly relevant (Attachment 5).

My own experience in dealing with UTAS over RTI applications has been salutary.

Over the period 21 March to 20 April 2022, I lodged four RTI applications with UTAS, seeking to ascertain what evidence UTAS had for its proposed move to the Hobart CBD, and to understand UTAS' decision-making process. My experience, consistent with that of Ms Humphries and – as I understand it – other RTI applicants to UTAS, was that UTAS took a highly defensive approach, demonstrating little, if any, commitment to transparency and informing public debate. In two cases, UTAS unilaterally rewrote the terms of my applications - which is not provided for under the RTI Act - and still provided limited information in response to the modified terms.

- One of these cases was my request for full UTAS Council Minutes from 1 January 2015 to 24 March 2022. The response was to provide me with a redacted extract of the UTAS Council Minutes (perhaps accounting for about 10% of the full Minutes) on what UTAS subjectively deemed relevant to the CBD move.

In three cases, including one where it had already provided limited information, UTAS refused my application under s12(3)(c) of the RTI Act, on the basis that it had decided prior to the lodgement of the applications, to shortly provide "information" (so described) within 12 months.

In fact, s12(3)(c) of the Act requires that UTAS had made decisions prior to the lodgement of each of the three applications to "release the information that is the subject of the application", that is, information specifically covered by the terms of the application. I lodged a fifth RTI application on 5 May 2022, seeking evidence of such prior decisions. UTAS has provided none. UTAS has also not released the specific information I sought, asserting belatedly in one instance that the information was not UTAS' to release. I have been through internal review procedures with UTAS, which were unsatisfactory, and have recently lodged three applications for external review of UTAS' decisions with the Ombudsman (effectively covering all five of my applications). I have sought priority consideration of my applications in the public interest.

During August 2022, I lodged two more RTI applications with UTAS.

I would welcome the opportunity to outline my experiences in dealing with UTAS over RTI applications to the Committee.

⁶ https://www.ombudsman.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/651894/R2202-032-Humphries-and-UTAS-Final-Decision.pdf

Correspondence with the VC Black

Following an interview by VC Black with Mel Bush on ABC radio on 14 July 2022, in which I believed that he made a number of misleading statements, I wrote to VC Black that day. VC Black responded briefly, without addressing the issues I identified, on 18 July 2022.

I wrote again to VC Black with a number of attachments to my letter (copies of the prior correspondence as well as material related to issues in the Mel Bush interview) on 9 August 2022 (this letter is at [Attachment 4](#), with its attachments given the same alphabetic attachment descriptors, prefixed by the number 4, they were given in that letter).

VC Black replied briefly on 19 August 2022 ([Attachment 6](#)).

I make three comments with regard to this letter:

- VC Black denied that he made misleading comments on the availability of the UTAS Council Minutes – I maintain my view that he did and believe that I am supported by the partial transcript of his interview with Mel Bush that I attached to my letter of 9 August 2022 ([Attachment 4](#));
- VC Black used the Ombudsman as a shield – erroneously elevating matters before the Ombudsman to the same status as court proceedings; and
- VC Black failed to address a number of matters in my letter of 9 August 2022 that were not subject to RTI applications and not before the Ombudsman.

I am detailing this correspondence here because I believe it typifies UTAS' disregard for transparency and accountability, and makes it clear that this attitude begins at the top.

Publication of UTAS Council Minutes

Evidently, UTAS used to publish UTAS Council Minutes. This practice should be re-established in some form, although it would need a broader commitment to transparency by UTAS than currently exists to make this truly worthwhile.

(4) The appropriateness of the Act to protect and promote academic freedom, independence and autonomy

I will leave comment on this matter to others.

(5) Any other matters incidental thereto

Conduct of UTAS Council meetings

A full time Chief Executive, with supportive senior staff, is well placed to exercise a strong - if not dominant influence - on other Board members, who operate on a part-time basis. The hand of the Chief Executive will be strengthened if they have the support of the Chair.

Other factors that may strengthen the influence of the Chief Executive include late circulation of Board papers, poor quality Board papers, insufficient time for, or frequency of meetings, and failure to maintain appropriate scrutiny on issues through a well-structured agenda.

These are potentially issues that all Boards need to address, but private sector companies are governed by Corporations Law and are accountable to shareholders. Government Business Enterprises will generally be subject to scrutiny by government agencies and are answerable to shareholder ministers. In the name of autonomy and independence, the university sector has largely been freed of controls, but UTAS appears to operate with more freedom than other universities.

As I previously suggested, it may be reasonable for there to be an obligation for UTAS Council members to show that they have satisfied their “Obligation for care and diligence” under s11A. of the 1992 Act through, for example, a signed declaration when major issues (appropriately defined) are considered.

Executive pay and transparency

Note 4.5 on page 66 of UTAS’ Annual Report 2021 provides a figure of \$934,000 for UTAS Council and directors fees.

Note 20 on page 85 sets out remuneration of UTAS Council Members in bands and the salary bands of executive officers.

In 2021 UTAS had six executive officers paid over \$420,000, including two paid over \$660,000.

The relationship between these notes and figures is obscure.

I believe that it would be reasonable to ask:

- To what extent are executive officers salaries being supplemented by directors’ fees?
- Does the payment of directors’ fees to executive officers create any potential for conflict of interest?
- Are performance bonuses being paid to executive officers? If so, are they included in the salary bands?
- Are performance bonuses being paid for performance of tasks relating to the move of UTAS to the Hobart CBD and/or the redevelopment of the Sandy Bay campus?
- Have salaries, performance bonuses and directors fees been increased for 2022?

Public Relations Campaigns

Another legitimate area of inquiry would be the cost to UTAS of consultants and advertising used to mount public relations campaigns in support of the CBD move, including the latest substantial campaign. How is this expenditure being funded?

The Rathjen-Hickey Plan

For its meeting of 30 May 2022, the Hobart City Council released a large package of papers (the Package) detailing its relationship with UTAS:

hobart.infocouncil.biz/Open/2022/05/CO_30052022_ATT_1642_SUP_EXCLUDED.PDF

I have worked through these papers and compared them to the redacted extract of UTAS Council Minutes, which UTAS provided to me under the RTI Act, and which it also published at:

https://www.utas.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1591161/University-of-Tasmania-Council-minutes-extract-Hobart-City-Move.pdf

It is an interesting question as to when wholesale, as distinct from piecemeal, relocation of UTAS into the Hobart CBD really crystallised as a UTAS/HCC objective.

The Memorandum of Understanding for 2015-2018 between UTAS and the HCC seems to have largely envisaged the continuation of piecemeal moves (Package, pages 247-57).

Putting aside developments on the STEM building, by late 2016/early 2017, it was however the clear intent of Vice-Chancellor Rathjen and Lord Mayor Hickey to substantially relocate the southern campus of UTAS to the Hobart CBD.

In late 2016, Vice-Chancellor Rathjen invited the HCC to participate in the UniverCities conference and to visit the university cities of Freiburg and Cambridge.

In an agenda paper prepared for the HCC's Special Governance Committee Meeting of 24 October 2016 (the Package, pages 421-32), Tim Short (an HCC executive) recommended that the HCC join UTAS in the trip, and made the following statements:

"2.2 On balance, this report suggests the invitation is worthy of consideration given that UTAS has a clear desire to move into the inner city."

"4.4 The conference was suggested by the Vice Chancellor because of UTAS' clear intent to move more of its campus into the inner city."

"4.5 The Vice Chancellor is clearly wishing to engage the Council in a discussion about what it means to have UTAS based in the inner city and how Hobart can best position itself to take full advantage of being a University City."

"4.14 It is clear that UTAS is on a definite pathway to relocate into the inner-city."

The joint UTAS/HCC trip went ahead and there is extensive treatment of the trip in the Package. Following the trip, Lord Mayor Hickey wrote the attached letter to Vice-Chancellor Rathjen (also in the Package, pages 468-69). This sentence is particularly telling:

"Firstly, I wanted to assure you that the Council is completely committed to and shares UTAS's aspirations to move into the inner city." (Attachment 2)

A major question in all this is to what extent Vice-Chancellor Rathjen was operating under authority from the UTAS Council.

Judging from the censored UTAS Council Minutes that I have, it appears that the UTAS Council did not begin serious consideration of relocation until August 2017. In this case what Tim Short was writing about wasn't really UTAS' position, it was Vice-Chancellor's Rathjen's position.

With Vice-Chancellor Rathjen having such a clear agenda by late 2016, the extent to which he shaped the UTAS Council's thinking on relocation is an open, and very interesting, question.

There is also an issue of whether the state government was kept informed of what might conveniently be called the Rathjen-Hickey plan as it evolved. Certainly, UTAS' annual reports for 2016 and 2017 are silent on this matter. I am currently waiting on papers from the Department of Premier and Cabinet, requested through an RTI application, and they may reveal more.



LORD MAYOR'S OFFICE
TOWN HALL
MACQUARIE STREET
HOBART
TASMANIA

Professor Peter Rathjen
Vice-Chancellor
University of Tasmania
Sandy Bay TAS 7005

Via Email: Vice.Chancellor@utas.edu.au

Dear Professor Rathjen

I wanted to take this opportunity to write to you on a number of really positive matters for the City and UTAS.

Firstly I wanted to assure you that the Council is completely committed to and shares UTAS's aspirations to move into the inner city. The continued positive news regarding the STEM project is one of the most genuinely exciting prospects this city has faced in decades.

At its Council meeting of the 6th February the Aldermen received a report from Aldermen Briscoe, Burnet and the General Manager on their recent attendance at the *UniverCities* conference in Budapest as well as the study tour to Freiburg and Cambridge with your team. To say they came back enthused would be an understatement. As a result of this meeting the Council resolved:

- That the MOU between our organisations should be reviewed with the intent to strengthen its strategic nature
- To hold discussions with you to seek UTAS's partnership in undertaking a significant socio-economic analysis of the University's move into the City
- As the City commences the process to develop a new future vision for Hobart that we engage UTAS as a strategic partner in developing this vision.

Furthermore the Council wishes to make a submission to the pending Australian Government's Smart Cities and Suburbs program, again which we believe could be greatly enhanced by UTAS's involvement particularly around a transport based project

Finally I thought you would also be interested to know that the Council has agreed to participate in the European Unions 'Twin Cities urban Sustainability' project and it is possible that we may be paired with either Freiburg or Copenhagen. I will keep you informed of progress in this regard.

Cont.../

CITY OF HOBART

GPO Box 503, Hobart Tasmania 7001 • Telephone: +61 3 6238 2705 • Email: lord.mayor@hobartcity.com.au

-2-

I cannot think of a more positive time in this city's history and in this environment of *City Deals* at a national level, your continued vision, partnership and participation in Hobart's future is critical. I would appreciate it if you would give some thought as to who best within UTAS can assist in the socio-economic analysis and advise me accordingly.

Yours sincerely



Alderman Sue Hickey
LORD MAYOR

Tuesday 7 March 2017



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News Tasmania

University of Tasmania considers shifting from prime Sandy Bay site

THE University of Tasmania says it faces a tough decision about whether to stump up \$600-700 million to refurbish 50-year-old buildings at the Sandy Bay campus — or to seek options elsewhere.

NICK CLARK

🕒 2 min read July 19, 2017 - 6:50PM

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University of Tasmania Vice Chancellor Professor Peter Rathjen.

Tasmania

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THE University of Tasmania says it faces a tough decision about whether to stump up \$600-700 million to refurbish 50-year-old buildings at the Sandy Bay campus — or to seek options elsewhere.

It comes as southern Tasmanian mayors believe young people from their council areas are disadvantaged by the difficulty of travelling to Sandy Bay, with several openly supporting a potential CBD shift.

Vice chancellor Peter Rathjen said the buildings at the existing campus were not fit for purpose and a decision would have to be made “quite quickly”.

“The big decision will be whether the University reinvests at Sandy Bay in which case it will be there for another 50 years or whether it chooses to build new facilities elsewhere which gives the opportunity to do something different,” Prof Rathjen said.

“Many of the buildings at Sandy Bay are not fit for purpose for a University of our calibre, and they need to be replaced by buildings the calibre of the Menzies Institute or the IMAS Institute.”

But he said no decision had been made and it was matter for the University council.

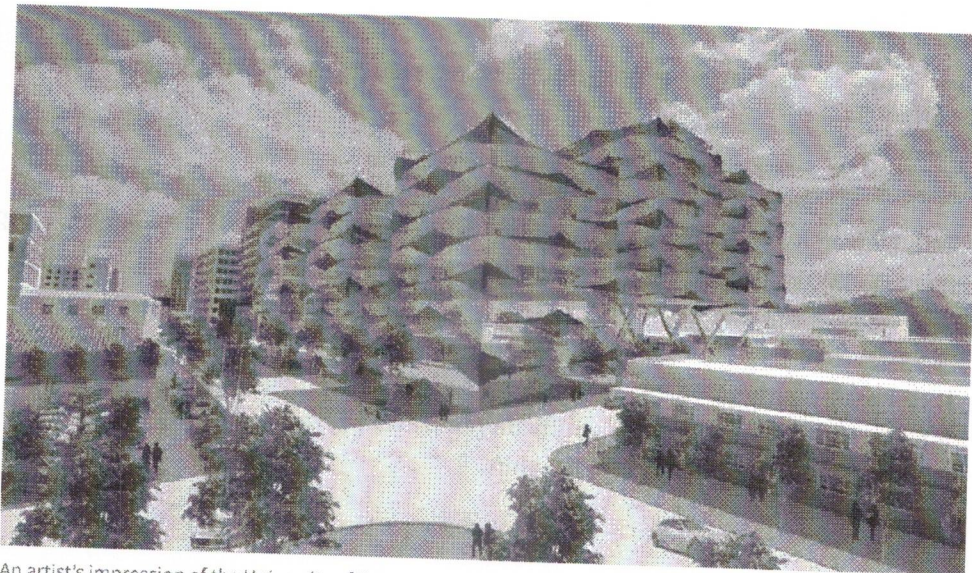
Prof Rathjen’s revelation comes as momentum builds for a \$400 million STEM centre in the CBD as the centrepiece of a Hobart City Deal with the Federal Government, as revealed by the *Mercury*.

MORE: OUR CITY OF INNOVATION

The Southern Tasmanian Councils Association (STCA) is believed to be close to indicating support for the STEM project as southern Tasmania’s major development priority — ahead of the \$490 million replacement Bridgewater Bridge.

STCA spokeswoman Sue Hickey said Brighton, Clarence, Derwent Valley, Huon Valley and Sorell councils had backed the concept of a move after a recent briefing from Prof Rathjen.

If approved, it would see a significant portion of the university’s footprint shifted from Sandy Bay into Melville Street.



An artist's impression of the University of Tasmania's proposed STEM precinct on the corner of Argyle and Melville streets in Hobart. Image: UTAS

Sorell mayor Kerry Vincent said a wider central city CBD campus would mean students would be able to catch one bus to the university, rather than transfer to a second bus to travel to Sandy Bay.

“That would cut a fair bit off travelling time and give students more time for study and other activities,” he said.

Ald Hickey said a CBD campus would open the door to private investment into student accommodation, give more impetus to a light rail project to Glenorchy and unlock land values along the rail corridor.

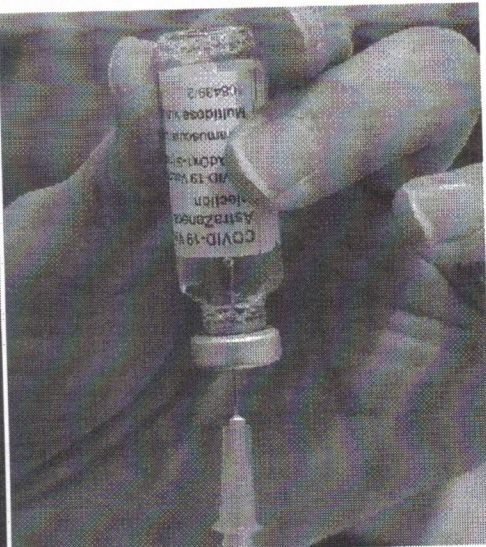
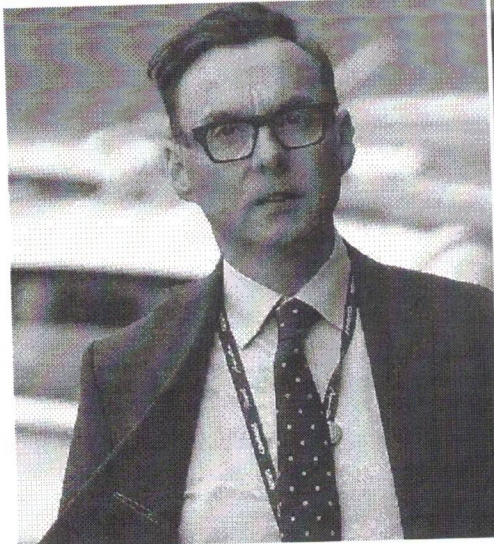
UTAS already has the Medical Science Precinct, the Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies, 430 units of student accommodation in Melville St and has the \$96 million Hedberg Performing arts centre under construction in Campbell St.

As revealed in the *Mercury*, the STEM centre has received a significant boost, with a study by the Nous Group finding the project would be a catalyst for improved statewide educational and economic outcomes through a Tasmania Innovation Network which would link with nodes in Burnie and Launceston.

Franklin MP Julie Collins said the STEM relocation was a significant opportunity but Liberal Senators had failed to deliver one new project in the Federal Budget.

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The unvaxxed have become the unmasked. Unvaccinated teachers will return to work on Monday

Professor Rufus Black
Vice-Chancellor
University of Tasmania
By email: Vice.Chancellor@utas.edu.au

Dear Professor Black

Misleading Comments on ABC Radio Interview with Mel Bush

On 14 July 2022, you were interviewed by Mel Bush on ABC radio:

<https://www.abc.net.au/hobart/programs/mornings/rufus-black/13973126?fbclid=IwAR3mDHt3ugA9nWB5iS4N9IZn1XVjl04GAsJm88XsN6fzpBGdCj68XCODsM>

Later that day, I wrote to you about misleading statements made by you in that interview ([Attachment A](#)).

On 18 July, you replied briefly to one aspect of my letter, relating to UTAS Council Minutes, stating that:

“I would like to confirm that my account [to Mel Bush] was factually correct. This is so because the University did receive your RTI application and did publish the University minutes as they relate to decision-making on the move to the city. The information that was redacted was consistent with the exemptions in the RTI Act.” ([Attachment B](#)).

This is an answer to a question that Mel Bush did not ask.

Prompted by your reply, I have listened to the interview again. Not only do I reaffirm my view that your statements relating to the UTAS Council Minutes of 4 April 2019 were misleading, but there are also a number of other issues I now wish to raise with you. I attach a partial transcript of the interview ([Attachment C](#)).

UTAS Council Minutes

At its meeting of 5 April 2019, the UTAS Council:

“approved the business case which supports the ‘City-Centric Campus’ model [over the Distributed Model, which would have retained a split campus between the CBD and Sandy Bay] as a basis for future development of the University’s southern campuses.”
https://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1591161/University-of-Tasmania-Council-minutes-extract-Hobart-City-Move.pdf

Mel Bush asked you whether the Minutes from that meeting had been published. You indicated that the Minutes had been released under the *Right to Information Act 2009* (RTI Act) and placed on UTAS' website. This was not "factually correct" as you assert. What had been released to me (as the RTI applicant), and published, in respect of the UTAS Council meeting of 5 April 2019 was a redacted extract covering only Agenda Items 6.1 to 6.6.

To make it clear, Mel Bush was asking about the Minutes, not a redacted extract of the Minutes, perhaps 10% of the Minutes, of the meeting of 5 April 2019. At the least, you should have qualified your answer to Mel Bush, if indeed you knew what had been released/published. If not, it might have been better to say this in your letter to me, rather than circumvent the issue.

Under my RTI application, what I sought from UTAS were copies of the full Council Minutes from 1 January 2015 to 24 March 2022 (the date of my application). I sought the full Minutes because, as I stated to UTAS a number of times, I believed all agenda items (such as student enrolments, staff and student attitudes and UTAS' finances) were potentially relevant to a decision to relocate UTAS' southern campus, and that the Minutes were of considerable public interest. What I received instead was someone's subjective and narrow interpretation of agenda items that were relevant to the decision to relocate (a small part of the Minutes), and that with redactions, some of which appear arbitrary.

On a related matter, I am aware that in an email to Lord Mayor Anna Reynolds of 25 March 2022, you asserted that "Specific minutes from this [the 5 April 2019 UTAS Council] meeting remain commercial in confidence as **do all** the University Council agendas and minutes". (my bolding)

I advised the UTAS Legal Office on 27 April 2022 that "given its general nature, this assertion is simply not sustainable and is thoroughly misleading." My view was reinforced when I received the redacted extract of the UTAS Council Minutes. Little of the information provided in the extract could be regarded as exempt from disclosure on any of the grounds available under the RTI Act, let alone when subjected to the public interest test. Will you be writing to Lord Mayor Reynolds to correct your assertion?

I will shortly request an external review by the Ombudsman of UTAS's decision on my RTI application.

The decision to leave the Sandy Bay campus

Mel Bush asked you whether, at its 5 April 2019 meeting, UTAS' decided to "move completely" from Sandy Bay. Your answer was "yes" and you suggested that this had been clearly set out in a number of places at the time.

UTAS' own media release *Southern campus decision* of 5 April 2019 includes the following statements:

The decision today was based on the analysis of two options: a **city-centric model** and a **distributed model**, in which the University's city operations would remain and the Sandy Bay campus redeveloped onto a smaller, more sustainable footprint.

....

A city-centric model would see the University remain involved with Sandy Bay as a home to some recreation facilities and specialist research and teaching spaces, along with student accommodation.

I will shortly lodge a RTI application seeking a copy of the relevant UTAS Council agenda paper that details the two options fully, along with other agenda papers relevant to relocation. These papers are essential to inform community debate and I look forward to UTAS being as responsive and transparent as possible.

If, on reflection, you believe the UTAS Council did not decide to “move completely” from Sandy Bay at its 5 April 2019 meeting, can you please point me to the entry in the redacted extract of the UTAS Council Minutes where this decision was made.

Consultation

Mel Bush asked you about consultation undertaken by UTAS prior to the 5 April 2019 decision. She also asked you about a survey undertaken by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) about relocation. You indicated that the NTEU survey was “small” and compared it unfavourably to UTAS’ own consultation, which you had described earlier in the interview as very substantial. You also indicated that details of UTAS’ consultation process were “all in the public information that we’ve got there on our website.”

My understanding is that the NTEU survey involved around 200 members of UTAS’ southern staff, with a 48% response rate. This is not a small survey; and the response rate was good. I attach a copy of the results of this survey, published in March 2019 (Attachment D).

With regard to UTAS’ consultation prior to the 5 April 2019 decision, I have been informed by participants that it was presented in a one-sided way, a view echoed in Attachment D. I have also been informed by participants in the UTAS focus groups (a total of 72 people) that the focus groups were hostile to relocation. I do not accept these views unquestioningly. In order to inform community debate, I have been seeking details, including consultants’ reports, of the consultation process under the RTI Act since 12 April 2022. Following UTAS’ repeated refusals of my RTI application, I have sought external review by the Ombudsman.

I have read the material on consultation on the website thoroughly and it is either very general or refers to periods other than that immediately before the decision of 5 April 2019. UTAS provided me with a summary of the consultation undertaken in in late 2018/early 2019, after refusing my request for internal review of my RTI application (Attachment E). My RTI application seeks the detailed documentation that sits behind this and I consider that the integrity of UTAS’ consultation processes will be in question until such documentation is freely available.

Planning processes for Sandy Bay

Mel Bush asked you whether the UTAS Council has authorised the building of private residences on the Sandy Bay campus site. In your response, you indicated that the UTAS Council “had to respect the city process”, which required a planning scheme amendment first. This is somewhat

ambiguous. I seek your confirmation that the UTAS Council has indeed given in principle authorisation for the building of private residences, subject to amendment approval processes.

Oberon Court

In your interview with Mel Bush you indicated that Oberon Court was 90% occupied. I am attaching photos of Oberon Court taken by Judy Tierney around the time of your interview with Mel Bush (Attachment F). Can you please provide the occupancy rate for Oberon Court and the two residences in the Hobart CBD, as at 18 July 2022?

The Rathjen Plan

I wish to raise a matter with you that was not part of the Mel Bush interview. For its meeting of 30 May 2022, the Hobart City Council released a package of papers that make it clear that your predecessor – Vice-Chancellor Rathjen – was committed to moving the UTAS into the city by late 2016. It is equally clear from reading the redacted extract of the UTAS Council Minutes, that by its meeting of 11 August 2017, the process leading to the decision of April 2019 was well in train. At its meeting of 10 November 2017, the UTAS Council:

“approved the development of a masterplan business case for a Hobart CBD campus and the future use of the Sandy Bay campus, so an informed decision can be made about the future of the southern campus.”

And

“approved the development of a detailed financial and socio-economic analysis as part of the masterplan business case for a Hobart CBD campus and the future use of the Sandy Bay campus, with the analysis to include a comparison against a realistic alternative.”

I note that you succeeded Vice-Chancellor Rathjen in office on 1 March 2018, but that thereafter the process towards the decision of April 2019 seems to have proceeded rapidly, and without interruption. I would have thought that for such a major decision for UTAS, Hobart and, indeed, Tasmania, you might have undertaken your own appraisal of the Rathjen plan. Can you please inform me whether this was the case and, if so, did you submit any documents, as a consequence, to the UTAS Council?

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely



Robert Hogan

Canberra

Email: harveyr35@aol.com

9 August 2022

Professor Rufus Black
Vice-Chancellor
University of Tasmania
By email: Vice.Chancellor@utas.edu.au

Dear Professor Black

Misleading Comments on ABC Radio Regarding UTAS Council Minutes

I am writing to you in regard to what I consider misleading comments that you made on ABC radio this morning in your interview with Mel Bush.

In this interview you indicated that the Minutes of the 5 April 2019 meeting of the University of Tasmania (UTAS) Council, which approved the 'City-Centric Campus' model, had been provided to a Right to Information (RTI) applicant (although the term used in the interview was FOI, I believe). You also indicated that the Minutes had been placed on the UTAS website.

I am the RTI applicant concerned and what you said is simply not correct.

I lodged an RTI application for the (full) UTAS Council Minutes from 1 January 2015 to 24 March 2022 on the latter date. UTAS' decision of 27 May 2022 regarding my application reworded my request, without my agreement, and provided me with a heavily redacted extract of the Minutes. A copy of this is what was placed on UTAS' website: [University-of-Tasmania-Council-minutes-extract-Hobart-City-Move.pdf \(utas.edu.au\)](https://www.utas.edu.au/University-of-Tasmania-Council-minutes-extract-Hobart-City-Move.pdf)

In line with UTAS' general approach to the Minutes, the section relating to the 5 April 2019 meeting was a heavily redacted extract (covering only agenda items 6.1-6.6), rather than the full Minutes of the meeting (copy of this extract at Attachment A). For such an important decision for UTAS, Hobart and Tasmania's future, this is a paltry record.

I lodged a request for internal review of UTAS' initial decision on my RTI application with you on 27 June 2022 and am currently awaiting a response (Attachment B). I believe you should immediately release the full UTAS Council Minutes as requested, including for the meeting of 5 April 2019, with only such redactions as are absolutely necessary. I intend to shortly lodge an RTI application for the agenda papers for the 5 April 2019 UTAS Council meeting and, in the interests of better informing public debate, suggest you also release these now. As UTAS Council Minutes generally only record decisions, agenda papers are required to make sense of the Minutes, as well as providing the bases on which decisions were made.

On a related matter, in answering questions on the 5 April 2019 UTAS Council decision, I believe that you may have left listeners with the misapprehension that the Council agreed both to a total move to the Hobart CBD and redevelopment of the Sandy Bay campus on that date. As you know, the decision to redevelop the Sandy Bay campus was not made until 2021. You may wish to take action to correct this misapprehension.

I believe that you made a number of other comments in your interview that, at the least, would have left listeners with serious misapprehensions. I will leave others with more knowledge than me on the issues concerned to raise these with you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Hogan", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Robert Hogan

14 July 2022

Email: harveyr35@aol.com

Robert Hogan

By email: harveyr35@aol.com

Dear Robert

Thank you for taking the time to write to me regarding my radio interview with Mel Bush.

I would like to confirm that my account was factually correct. This is so because the University did receive your RTI application and did publish the University minutes as they relate to decision-making on the move to the city. The information that was redacted was consistent with the exemptions in the RTI Act.

I suggest that you review the information on the University's Southern Transformation website to assist you with any further queries that you have. Here is a link to this website: <https://www.utas.edu.au/about/campuses/southern-transformation#faqs>

Thank you again for writing to me about this.

Yours sincerely



Professor Rufus Black
Vice-Chancellor

18 July 2022

Office of the Vice-Chancellor

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[utas.edu.au](https://www.utas.edu.au)

Partial Transcript of Mel Bush (ABC) Interview with Rufus Black

Source:

https://www.abc.net.au/hobart/programs/mornings/rufus-black/13973126?fbclid=IwAR1AOh7Kcj2sSR16nhjHDfeT3rwh_TRKNqIuh1ggzpxkQmraMn9qj-wr4LY

....

Mel Bush

When, Rufus Black, did the University Council authorise the total relocation of the Sandy Bay campus into the city?

Rufus Black

In 2019 was when that, was when that, decision was made.

Mel Bush

And did the decision support the move completely, the complete move of the Campus?

Rufus Black

Yes, yes. That's, I mean that people would remember back then, you know, in *The Mercury* and other places, there are kind of the picture of all the different parts of that, all the different parts of that move. You know, very clearly kind of set out. We ran a kind of consultation room for a considerable period; set out both sides of that. And then we actually held back then a community summit, a large multi-day community summit with representatives from right across the community, exploring what it would be and giving us really good guidance about what it would take. We then went on and developed again, with wide consultation, an urban development framework in order to shape the city moves. So this next round of consultation we're doing is actually part of what has been quite a long journey of consultation, but it really matters to keep hearing from people in Hobart. So that we ensure this doesn't just create great, great, teaching and research facilities, but adds amenity to the city.

Mel Bush

And in terms of that meeting that you held back into 2019 that you're talking about, the decision, have the minutes from that been published?

Rufus Black

The um, which?

Mel Bush

Of the University Council.

Rufus Black

I think we've released those under a freedom of information request relatively recently.

Mel Bush

And how many members of the University Council were at the meeting at the time, which was in Burnie, I believe?

Rufus Black

Yes, I can't recall the exact number. There was a full, it was a full Council, a full Council meeting. All Council members were there at the time.

Mel Bush

And where were those minutes published?

Rufus Black

Um, ah, it's a good question Mel. I'm not sure where they've ultimately, ultimately, ended up but look, if you go to our website you'll find the kind of very extensive documentation around all of the different aspects of the move and the decisions, decisions around it.

Mel Bush

And you've confirmed that there will be an educational component that's going to remain in Sandy Bay as part of the master plan. When will you be able to confirm or announce what faculties or faculty will remain on [Sandy Bay]?

Rufus Black

We haven't, we haven't said anything specific is remaining. Consultation is about actually listening to staff, about as we consolidate all of our research and teaching in the city. What are the best locations for any particular parts of facility, we noticed that, we know of course the sporting facilities are staying there. We have flagged as part of that conversations an innovation hub that would be there.

....

Mel Bush

Have you been surprised by the internal and external pushback against the redevelopment of Sandy Bay, the sale of the Sandy Bay campus, and the move into the city?

Rufus Black

People are passionate on both sides of that, both sides of that, both sides of that question. People love their city, they want a better city and that's really what we're working to do is to make sure that we hear those concerns and that what we do creates not just great research and teaching facilities, but actually adds amenity to, amenity to, the city.

....

Mel Bush

....But can I ask you first Rufus Black were the academic staff, the students and the professionals consulted before the motion to move the campus was taken?

Rufus Black

Yes. So we had a very substantially, so there's back in 2019 we had an entire room set aside with all of the material about the both sides of that discussion. We have hundreds and hundreds of staff and students visit that, a wide range of feedback. We actually ran, ran, detailed surveys on what people

thought about all the different aspects of the, aspects of the, argument. So a really extensive process which was very open. So you know, big, big involvement.

Mel Bush

And has the University Council expressly authorized the University to build those 2700 [sic] dwellings for private residence?

Rufus Black

No. The University Council has to respect the city process, which is to apply for a planning scheme amendment and that's what we've paused, those. In order to apply for planning scheme amendment you have to provide a picture of the kind of things you might do with it, and we've paused that process.

....

Mel Bush

Should, Rufus Black, the relocation of the campus, the complete relocation, should that be paused until the legislative inquiry into the provisions of the University of Tasmania Act until that's completed?

Rufus Black

No, that's an inquiry into our governance, governance structure. It's not an inquiry into the move.

....

Mel Bush

And just another quick question for you. This texter says 75% of the NTEU members on your staff oppose the move into the city. How would you respond to that? Are you aware of those numbers?

Rufus Black

So that was, that was, a small survey the NTEU did back in back in 2019 of southern staff. The much larger survey that we did of staff indicated very interestingly, that staff who are already in the city were significantly majority in favour, of the, of the city move; and staff on Sandy Bay were not so much in favour of, the city, the city move. So, same set of questions, same evidence in relation to it. So a lot of it had to do with, you know, what was, your lived, what was your lived experience. So actually, it's much more diverse, richer picture of where people are at. And a lot of it has to do with what their, experiences, experience has been.

Mel Bush

And when was that survey done?

Rufus Black

So that was done in 2019 as an integral part of that consultation process that we did, where we asked people on all of the different criteria for the city move, what they thought, and where they, and where they concluded, and that's all in the public information that we've got there on our website.

Mel Bush

And back to what's happening in the city and, those, those assets that you have already how much of that is accommodation?

Rufus Black

Well two, two of those pieces are, currently, currently accommodation.

Mel Bush

Okay, and how full are they?

Rufus Black

Ah, they're well full. Yes. It's a really important thing we, we, in terms of looking after the housing in the city ensuring we are housing students as you know is a critical part of helping the overall housing stock situation in in Hobart. So yes, our accommodation is, is happily well occupied.

....

Mel Bush

And when you say well occupied, what do you mean by that?

Rufus Black

I mean 90%, 90% is well occupied.

....

[after being asked about Invermay]

Rufus Black

It's showing what is possible when you actually put a university in the heart of the city. You make it more accessible to a much wider range of people and for a much wider range of purposes that adds amenity; it's exactly the kind of thing that Hobart, cities, need life, vibrancy, access to high quality educational facilities for the whole community.

Mel Bush

And Oberon Court, can we just talk about that for a moment, near the Sandy Bay site; well resourced, potential homes. What's happening with Oberon Court at the moment?

Rufus Black

I'm not sure what the question is, sorry Mel.

Mel Bush

So, so with that site, Oberon Court, is that open potentially to being able to house people from the community?

Rufus Black

Well, it's used for housing students.

Mel Bush

And that is full?

Rufus Black

I was advised it's sitting about 90% also.

....

[in regard to the 80-person panel]

And I think Mel this is part of a continuing process. It's not a starting again. That group will see the huge amount of work that's come from, from, all of the previous consultation as a starting point, so that they can see all the work that's happened to date. And people are very welcome to visit our website to see all of that.

....

NTEU Survey of Members- Southern Campus Move

Report for Prof Rufus Black, Vice-Chancellor, University of Tasmania

22 March 2019

Background

The NTEU surveyed our southern-based members to gauge their opinions on the proposed relocation of UTAS operations into Hobart vs redevelopment of the Sandy Bay campus.

The take-up was very good (48% response) indicating the importance of the issue to our members.

Respondents were asked to indicate their degree of support for the City-Centric or the Distributed options (in the same terms as presented in the UTAS displays and materials). They were also asked where they were currently based and invited to provide further comment.

Results

Asked to choose between the City-Centric and the Distributed model, the outcome was stark (75% Distributed; 16% City-Centric; 9% Undecided/Indifferent).

For staff working at Sandy Bay (who comprised $\frac{3}{4}$ of the responses), the preference was slightly more skewed (81% Distributed; 12% City-Centric; 7% Undecided/Indifferent).

For the smaller number of staff working other than at Sandy Bay, the numbers were closer, but not too much (56% Distributed; 28% City-Centric; 17% Undecided/Indifferent).

The open-ended comments provided by members were illuminating. The responses were measured against the statement "*The City-Centric model is preferred over the Distributed model*", > 70% of respondents did not favour the City-Centric model, while < 10% were positively disposed to the City-Centric approach (see Graph 1).

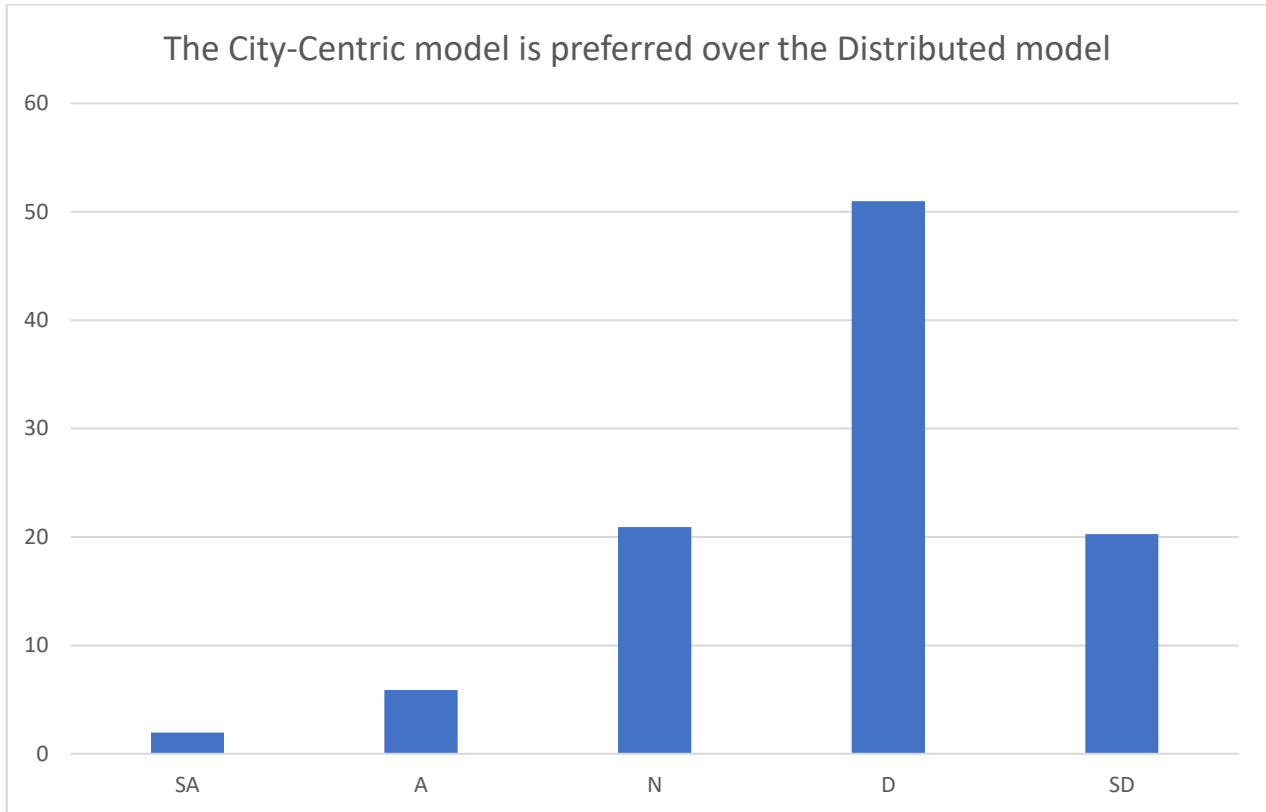
The comments were categorised against 13 emergent themes (detailed description of themes in Table 1). In order of decreasing frequency, the 7 most common themes were:

1. Traffic congestion (vehicle and pedestrian) plus public transport inadequate
2. Parking in city – availability and cost
3. Concerns about buildings - open plan fears; new buildings may not be fit-for-purpose; a series of office blocks doesn't make a campus
4. Identity of Sandy Bay campus will be lost
5. Loss of green space
6. Staff and students will operate in a set of silos
7. The consultation process was not genuine

Only 4% of the comments expressed support for the City-Centric model, although 7% of the comments acknowledged that many buildings at Sandy Bay need redevelopment.

Graph 1

(SA - Strongly Agree; A - Agree; N - Neutral; D - Disagree; SD - Strongly Disagree)



Graph 2

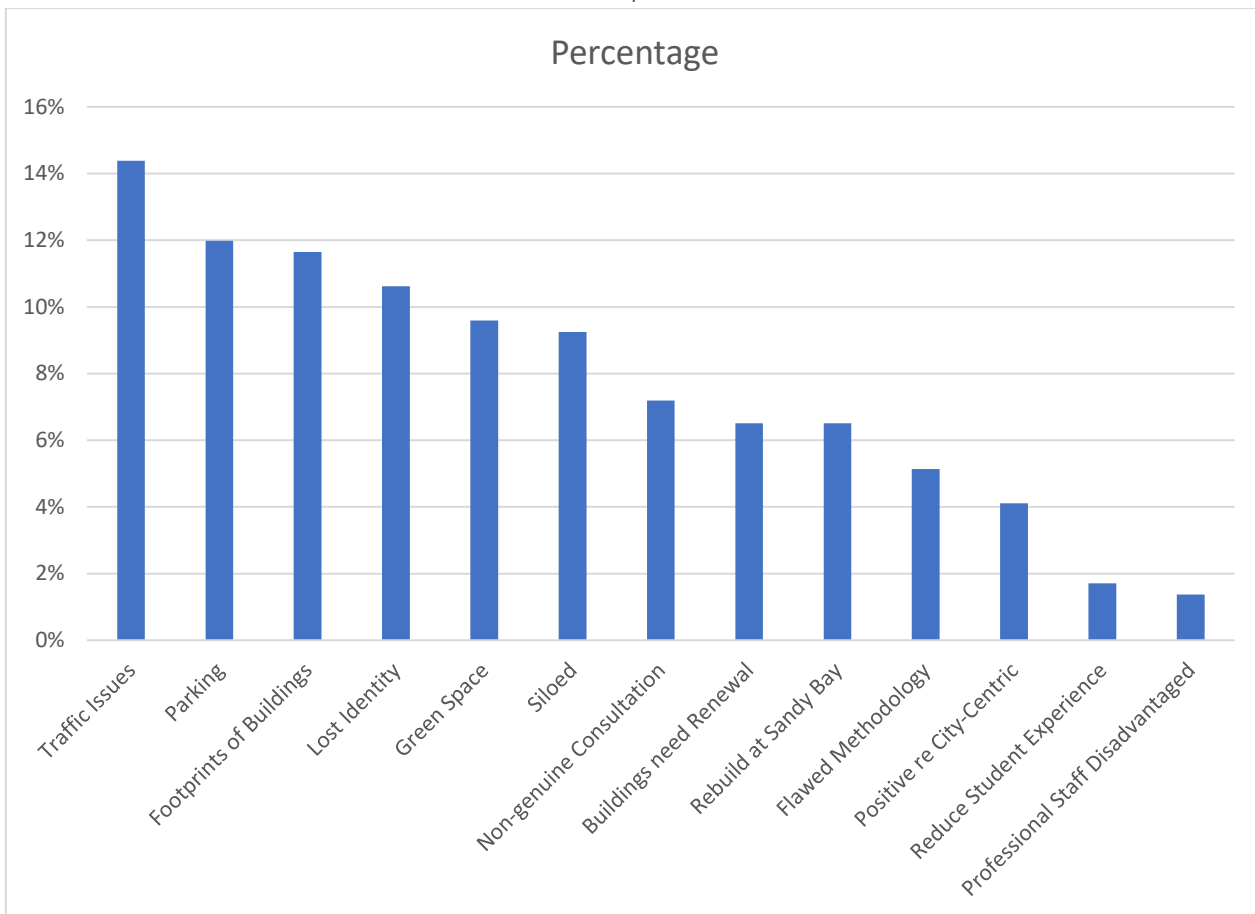


Table 1 – Emergent Themes

1	Parking; cost, lack of availability in CBD
2	Exacerbation of traffic congestion, inadequate public transport system, disagreement that City-Centric model (CCM) would lead to increase use of public transport; city pedestrian congestion.
3	Outcome is pre-determined, consultative process is not genuine.
4	Siloed from other staff and students; students siloed from each other.
5	Flawed methodology used in reports; biased.
6	Sandy Bay Campus has an identity and a sense of place; CCM will lose 'essence' of a University
7	Sandy Bay Campus has abundant and/or quality green space; green space will be limited/non-existent in CCM
8	Concerns with physical footprint of CCM; open plan concerns; concerns new-builds won't be fit-for-purpose; CCM will a series of office blocks and not a campus; disagreement that locating buildings near each other will create precinct.
9	Agreement that facilities do need to be improved and updated
10	Disagreement that new builds are more cost effective; concerns that process has already wasted significant time and resources; Sandy Bay buildings have been deliberately run-down over previous years; new builds aren't environmentally friendly.
11	Concern for locations of professional staff units; CCM will detrimentally impact the link between professional staff/professional units and Colleges/academic units.
12	CCM will overall reduce the student experience.
13	Positive comments on CCM.

Comments

The following are a selection of comments made in the survey:

- *The impact on traffic and parking may well be disastrous!*
- *As someone who lives beyond the reach of public transport, parking will remain a major issue for me.*
- *Is the city going to build any more multistore carparks? Where are they going to build them? I think it is wishful thinking to expect staff to stop driving and catch the bus or buy a bike.*
- *Commute is longer as the city has become more congested. A city-centric model may work in other cities, however the public transport infrastructure in Tasmania is insufficient to enable this model in Hobart.*
- *Who decided we no longer need above Churchill Ave? If we are a university then all such serious matters ought be discussed/voted on by/with academic staff. If we are a corporate body and no longer a university then please keep going as you are - but don't expect the community to be impressed long-term. This conversion ought have begun 2 years ago, and secret-squirrel decisions like this (above Churchill) are disingenuous and make one wonder seriously about the authenticity of this current process.*
- *I found the presentation to be biased in favour of moving to the city. When I looked at the source documents, they seemed to be working to a brief favouring the city option, and then to compound this, information presented in the studio theatre/online seems to have been "cherry picked" from those documents in favour of the city option.*
- *Working in the city is a great experience.*
- *The presented data was biased and seemed totally at odds with all the place-based rhetoric.*
- *Getting rid of the Sandy Bay Campus is basically finishes with the fell of a university where people from different faculties mix and meet. The city Centric will never give that feel, it will basically destroy the feel of a University.*
- *Further fragmentation of the campus...is to the determinant of the University. It loses its focus.*
- *[A city-centric model will] enhance a silo between colleges.*
- *I am so disappointed that we have no choice and yet university management continues to act as through we do.*

- *I get the feeling from the presentations I've heard that management is strongly biased towards the City option and perhaps is just going through the motions asking people's opinions. I think we would end up with the City option regardless of what people really want.*
- *Building has clearly been allowed to run down for years. The uni has wasted so much money in recent times which could have been used to repair the campus. I think closing sandy bay is the WORST decision I've experienced at UTAS in the last 15 years.*
- *Students keep telling us that if we move into the city then there is less reason to come to this university.*
- *Personally I love our green campus near the bush.*
- *An overly fragmented university will lose its sense of identity and prevent students from different disciplines interesting and leaning from one another.*
- *[when visiting Sandy Bay Campus] I often sat at Lazenby's and was amazed and impressed at the student interactions there. This is something our MSP students do not get.*
- *I am not completely against working in the city but I am worried about the lack of green spaces in city campuses.*
- *This campus [Sandy Bay] has history, is aesthetically pleasing. It is perfect and UTAS should not be moved into the city to create further traffic issues.*
- *It is better to keep and update the Sandy Bay Campus, there is excellent public transport, and it has an important sense of place.*
- *I do not appreciate being told that the management is completely open to a genuinely open discussion about the future of campus locations, when it is not. I feel insulted that the management can make us believe that.*
- *We have a beautiful campus at Sandy Bay, a city-based campus would be a complete loss.*
- *I would argue that having a central meeting place – eg a cafe or bar or dining space (Lazenbys the uni staff club or the ref/bar) is much more likely to create a sense of community. But that is still not collaboration.*
- *IF the bus services could be fixed, why is the public transport to Sandy Bay not better?*
- *There is also the environmental impact of selling off the vast amount of natural habitat on the sandy bay campus above cFriday, 22 March 2019hurchill ave.*
- *The obvious point is this – the buildings on SB were built in the 60s to 80s. They are at the end of the first life – to abandon them and just rebuild something else somewhere else is the height of environmental wastefulness.*
- *The research commissioned showed that students overwhelmingly want to stay on the Sandy Bay campus – they just want the buildings to be better and for the online services (MyLO help services etc) to be adequate. There is no enthusiasm for a city uni in the commissioned report. Why has this not been reported? I personally feel great despair about this decision and the way it is being made. I am not a fan of fake consultations*
- *I'm against the move into the CBD precinct. There are a range of reasons. One is the attractiveness and symbolism of a campus-centred institution. The campus [Sandy Bay] itself has rich symbolic resonances for these students, and this should not be underestimated.*
- *Students overwhelmingly have expressed their desire to retain the Sandy Bay campus. It is better for mutual enrichment for all faculties and centres to be co-located.*
- *Retain the Sandy Bay campus, refurbish or build new as needed, and gradually as opportunity arises bring those elements already dispersed back.*
- *We don't need to move into a jungle of concrete to do better work. Provide staff with nice workplace facilities at Sandy Bay taking advantage of the natural bush setting and nearby water views.*
- *How are the building going to be redesigned to facilitate a healthy working NON-OPEN plan environment?*
- *The idea of a move into the city is based on a 'thought bubble' of the last VC. I can think of no university that would choose to move in the city when it has a campus this good.*
- *While it is obvious that the University is being driven by financial gain for a City-Centred model (funds from sale of sandy bay properties + potential State/Commonwealth funds for city deal)- the distributed model is clearly integral to a place-based university (the feedback from cascading conversations). Disregarding this feedback by pushing for city centre model will highlight to all the 'fake' nature of University consultation processes. The city deal is not in the best interests of students, staff or Hobartians – it is very good for University bank balances and corporatised higher education.*

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.