

UTAS' \$15 million a year claim – detailed analysis

(updated 15 January 2023)

Variations on the \$15 million claim

1. UTAS Website

The following text has been appearing on UTAS' website from, at least, March 2022 (and probably from much earlier): [I now think this changed through time and there was somewhere a reference to an ~ only 3% of city workers don't shop in the city]

Frequently asked questions for our community

Where is the data and plans to support the move?

Will the University being in the city have a negative impact on city traders?

Traders will receive a significant positive benefit from having all of the Southern Campus in the city.

The move will bring up to 8,500 students and 1,500 staff into the city, adding vibrancy and economic activity. [Independent research by Urbis](#) found that, in a typical week, virtually all city workers buy something before, during or after work. Only three per cent reported buying nothing.

The average city worker spends over \$10,000 per year at nearby businesses. With 1,500 staff moving to the city, that's an extra \$15 million spent at small businesses in the area - cafes, restaurants, hairdressers and retail stores. And that doesn't even include students.

Already, a diverse range of businesses have opened to cater for students and staff living and working in the city, contributing to the emergence of the vibrant Midtown precinct. Contrary to some reports, the majority of local traders support our move and the principles that underpin it.

The move will revitalise several empty sites as teaching, learning, research and service hubs. These include the:

- Forestry building (which was vacant)
- Webster's site (containing a long-disused building)
- Freedom building (after the franchisee decided not to renew the lease)
- McCann's building (after a local business was seeking improved premises).
- K&D site (after the business closed)

The move will transform these unused buildings into a sustainable, contemporary precinct that takes the city forward and benefits the whole community.

What will happen to city businesses when the University is on holiday?


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


In March 2022, the internet link at "independent research by Urbis" only linked to Urbis' homepage at: <https://urbis.com.au/> It was subsequently changed to link to a page seeking participants for the 2019 Urbis Office Workers Survey at: <https://urbis.com.au/office-workers-survey-2019/>. As of 15 October 2022, this remains the link.

There is no statistical data on the page and I have never received any indication from UTAS that it participated in Urbis' 2019 office workers survey. (see UTAS' response to my RTI Application below)

2. Advertisement in The Mercury

This advertisement appeared on 28 August and 3 September (and probably on other dates).




Alison Watkins
Alison Watkins AM
Chancellor,
University of Tasmania

Say Yes to the Uni city move – let's make Hobart an even better place to live, learn and work.

The world has changed significantly in the past 35 years since I studied at the University of Tasmania. In the last three decades, government funding for university students has fallen by over two thirds.

The way university students learn has also changed.

They are older – our average student is 32 – and 80% of them are balancing work and study. To be successful, students today need accessible and flexible education they can fit into busy lives.

Technology means students now can get lecture content online when and where it suits them – and most do – so we focus on providing in person learning through small group pracs and tutorials.

The Hobart city move means we can provide our students and staff **with the modern, purpose-built facilities they deserve** that are more energy efficient and suitable for people of all abilities.

Today, 4 out of 10 of the University's Hobart-based students are **already studying in our city buildings.**

Consolidating into the city means all our students and staff will have a modern, accessible university, bringing the University together **in a total area comprising just 4% of the CBD.**

And it will **make higher education more accessible** to more young Tasmanians.


Importantly, the move will also **add vibrancy to our city.**

Local small businesses will benefit, with our staff alone **forecast to spend \$15 million a year.**

There'll be on average **425 fewer cars on the roads every day²** because we know our students and staff based in the city drive less. Plus, we'll be adding more city car parking spaces.


As your University Chancellor, **I commit to a University city move that helps every student and staff member be their best and makes our wonderful city of Hobart even stronger.**

So that's why I'm asking you to...

Say  to the Uni city move.

Learn more at utas.edu.au/southern-transformation

SOURCES: 1. Urbis City Worker Survey, 2019; 2. Travel Behaviour Survey, 2021.

UNIVERSITY of
TASMANIA 

ESSENTIAL

The footnote references :Urbis City Workers Survey, 2019". This suggests that UTAS participated in the survey. Again, I note that I have never received any indication from UTAS that it participated in Urbis' 2019 office workers survey.

3. Tasmanian Electoral Commission, *City of Hobart: Local Government elections & elector poll*

Reasons to vote *FOR* the proposal to relocate

The University must invest in new facilities so it can provide the best possible education and research for current and future generations.

Relocating into the central business district (CBD) will deliver contemporary, state-of-the-art facilities for students and staff, make higher education more accessible to more Tasmanians and secure the University's financial future.

The relocation of the Sandy Bay Campus will also:

- Place students closer to work opportunities. The average age of UTAS students attending campus in Hobart is 26 years¹ and 8 out of 10 UTAS students are working as well as studying².
- Unify the southern campus. Today, 4 in 10 Hobart-based students already study in the city¹.
- Add vibrancy to the CBD. The campus will revitalise long-empty buildings and vacant spaces.
- Support local businesses. Staff are forecast to spend \$15 million a year³.
- Reduce Hobart traffic by 425 cars a day⁴. Staff and students based in the city drive less and new CBD parking spaces will be added.
- Help green the city. New parks will be incorporated into the facilities.
- Allow much greater community access. University facilities like libraries and event spaces will be centrally located and open to the public.
- Improve environmental sustainability. A campus that is easier to access, constructed with less concrete and uses less energy is a good thing for our climate.

Saying YES to the University city move will help every student and staff member be their best and help make our wonderful city of Hobart even stronger.

For more information supporting the proposal visit www.utas.edu.au/southern-transformation.

¹ UTAS Student Record System
² Calculated from the "Commencing" and "Lost" students' surveys
³ Calculation using the Urbis Office Workers Survey
⁴ Calculation based on reported behaviour change between city-based staff & students compared to Sandy Bay-based staff & students (2021 UTAS staff & student travel behaviour survey)

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Source: <https://www.tec.tas.gov.au/local-government/elections-2022/pdf/cs/hobart-city-2022-lg-cs.pdf>

Here the footnote has changed significantly to "Calculation using Urbis Office Workers Survey", with no date provided. This is an interesting, and I believe, highly significant change (see below). It has not, however, led to any change in the link provided on UTAS' website (see 1 above).

UTAS' reponse to my Right to Information Application

I submitted a Right to Information (RTI) application for "Urbis' research and related papers" on 20 April 2022. This is my detailed request.

<small>If yes, you must provide proof of identity before we can release the information - if lodging by email or mail you will need to provide certified copies.</small>
Details of the information sought: (If there is insufficient room in the space provided please attach further details.)
<p>The UTAS site includes reference to recent research relating to the move of the UTAS southern campus to the Hobart CBD undertaken by Urbis.</p> <p>For example, at <https://www.utas.edu.au/about/campuses/southern-transformation#faqs> there is reference to research by Urbis under the question "Will the University being in the city have a negative impact on city traders?".</p> <p>I request a copy of that research and related papers. My request includes, but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Copies of task specifications for Urbis;- Copies of Urbis' research, including final reports and draft and interim reports; and- Copies of comments (held on file) by UTAS staff on that research. <p>I note that all relevant material should be held on a small number of files and that it should be relatively straightforward to copy that material for me. At this stage, I am not requesting copies of emails held on the UTAS system, which may otherwise have been relevant to the subject of my request, unless they have been copied onto file.</p>

Applicant Signature:		Date:	20/04/2022
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At first, UTAS advised me that my application was refused under section 12(3)(c) of the *Right to Information Act 2009* (Tas). Refusal of my application under this section would have required UTAS to have made a decision prior to receipt of my application to release the very information that I was seeking within 12 months from the date of my application. I was left with an impression that UTAS held material by Urbis, including a UTAS-commissioned report relevant to the proposed Hobart CBD move, that it intended to release.

Then, after I requested evidence of that prior decision through a separate RTI application, UTAS informed me that:

“Urbis is a private research consultant and the report referred to in [my Urbis Research RTI application] was not a University of Tasmania commissioned report. Due to intellectual property law if [sic] the University is not able to make this report public.”

This time I was left with an impression that UTAS had a copy of an Urbis report, but that it held no rights with respect to that report, raising questions whether it contained any UTAS commissioned content at all and, therefore, whether the report was relevant to Hobart in any way.

In response to an internal review application, UTAS said something different again:

“In relation to your query on application 4 (the Urbis research [sic] a copy of the research referred to can be obtained by contacting Urbis directly via contact details at the bottom of this webpage: <https://urbis.com.au/office-workers-survey-2019/>. The estimate referred to by the University that the average city worker spends \$10,000.00 per year can be calculated from publicly available figures reported on the same website.”

As I noted above, the link here directed to me what is in effect an advertisement for participants in a survey rather than a source for the “over \$10,000 per year figure”. For this, I was directed to “publicly available figures reported on the same [Urbis] website”, without provision of a direct link to this. (Why not?)

The only reference I have, so far, found on the Urbis website to the \$10,000 figure comes from an advertisement for participants in the 2017 Urbis Office Worker Survey, in which it is stated:

“The [2013] survey found that nationally, each office worker spent close to \$10,500 per annum on retail goods and services while they were at work. **The level of expenditure varied quite substantially by capital city and type of location.**”[my bolding]

https://urbis.com.au/app/uploads/2016/12/MPE1-XXXX_2017-OWS_Flyer_final1.pdf

In a letter to me of 8 December 2022 about various matters, written I believe at the suggestion of the Ombudsman’s office after I have requested external review, UTAS largely reverted to an earlier line:

“As previously advised to you, UTAS was not in a position to release via assessed disclosure or to actively disclose “the Urbis report” ...because this report was not commissioned by UTAS. The Urbis research is a commercial product and sold to multiple clients by a third-party business for a fee.”

Conclusion

UTAS has constantly changed link/text of its footnote reference to Urbis and its statements about Urbis to me.

I believe that UTAS’ “\$15 million a year” and “over \$10,000 [each] per year” figures have no relevance to UTAS staff moving to the Hobart CBD and that UTAS’ continued use of these figures constitutes, at least, a misleading and deceptive claim.

Possible sources used by UTAS for its \$15 million claim

https://urbis.com.au/app/uploads/2016/12/MPE1-XXXX_2017-OWS_Flyer_final1.pdf

https://www.propertycouncil.com.au/Web/Content/News/National/2014/Office_workers_ensure_retail_success.aspx

<https://www.smartcompany.com.au/finance/economy/did-you-know-you-spend-11-000-each-year-while-at-work/>