# 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  $\sim$  only 3% of city workers don't shop in the city)

### Frequently asked questions

Where is the data and plans to support the move? Will the University being in the city have a negative impact on city traders?			~
researc	ove will bring up to 8,500 students and 1,500 staff into the cir <u>th by Urbis</u> 🗗 found that, in a typical week, virtually all city w er cent reported buying nothing.	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	
	The average city worker spends over \$10,000 staff moving to the city, that's an extra \$15 m cafes, restaurants, hairdressers and retail sto students.	nillion spent at small businesses in the area -	
the em		dents and staff living and working in the city, contributing to reports, the majority of local traders support our move and	
The mo	ove will revitalise several empty sites as teaching, learning, re	esearch and service hubs. These include the:	
For	restry building (which was vacant)	<ul> <li>Webster's site (containing a long-disused building)</li> </ul>	
	eedom building (after the franchisee decided not to new the lease)	<ul> <li>McCann's building (after a local business was seeking improved premises).</li> </ul>	
<ul> <li>K&amp;l</li> </ul>	D site (after the business closed)		
The mo	ove will transform these unused buildings into a sustainable ts the whole community.	, contemporary precinct that takes the city forward and	

### Source: https://www.utas.edu.au/about/campuses/southern-transformation#fags

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

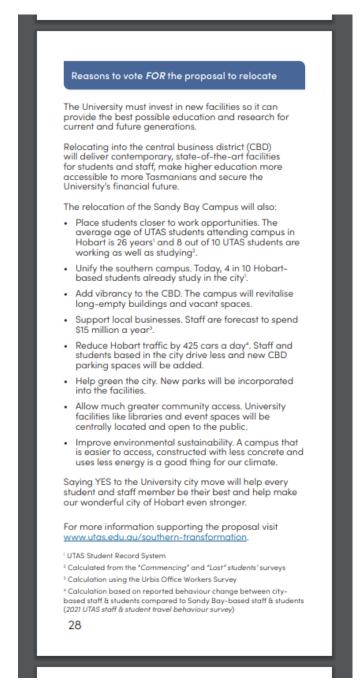
#### 2. Advertisement in The Mercury

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



The footnote references :Urbis City Workers Survey, 2019". This suggests that UTAS partipated 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

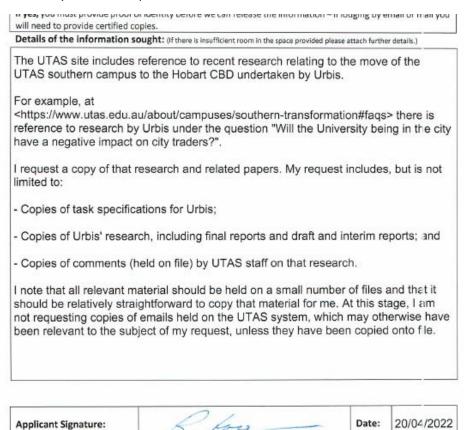


Source: <u>https://www.tec.tas.gov.au/local-government/elections-2022/pdf/cs/hobart-city-2022-lg-cs.pdf</u>

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.



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 <u>prior</u> 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: <u>https://urbis.com.au/office-workers-survey-2019/</u>. 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 thirdparty 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 millon 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\_r etail\_success.aspx

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