

INQUIRY INTO FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NSW TERTIARY EDUCATION SECTOR

Organisation: Blacktown City Council

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24 September 2020

The Hon Mark Latham MLC
Committee Chair
Portfolio Committee no 3 – Education
Parliament of NSW
SYDNEY 2000
portfoliocommittee3@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Attention: Madeleine Foley

Dear Ms Foley

Re Committee Inquiry into Skills and Tertiary Education

Thank you for providing Council with the opportunity to make a late submission to this inquiry.

The future of tertiary education is important to Blacktown Council as this sector is expected to contribute greatly to transformation of the Blacktown Central Business District and support our large base of local industries and services. Our growing population deserves high quality and locally based tertiary facilities.

If you would like to discuss this matter further, contact Ms Donna Savage, Project Director and Liaison, telephone [REDACTED]

.Yours faithfully

[REDACTED]
Tony Bleasdale, OAM

Mayor

cc: The Hon. Courtney Houssos MLC
Mr Stephen Bali, Member for Blacktown

Mayor of Blacktown City

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Inquiry into the future development of the NSW tertiary education sector



Terms of reference (a) and (b)

- (a) Tertiary education's economic development role, especially university campuses and Country University Centres (CUCs) in regional NSW;
- (b) The mission of NSW universities with a particular focus on the role of universities to serve specific geographic communities;

Establishing a university in the Blacktown CBD is a key part of an overarching Council strategy to transform the Blacktown CBD. Council recognises that the presence of a university campus (ACU Blacktown) will provide local economic, social and community benefits. Not only does the CBD location of the campus optimise use of existing NSW Government infrastructure and services (bus/rail interchange/ teaching hospital/TAFE), it is close to where students live and work. As at 2016, over 18,000 university students live in Blacktown City. Over 54,000 university students lived within 30 minutes' travel of Blacktown City centre, while 123,000 students lived within 45 minutes' travel.

Universities and other tertiary institutions are very important to local economic development in metropolitan Sydney. This is especially the case in Western Sydney where only 18% of all Sydney based university places are located. Shorter travel times, convenient access by public transport and links to other services and amenities reduce the geographical burdens and barriers that many western Sydney students face.

Blacktown CBD is the capital of the Blacktown City which currently serves approximately 400,000 residents. This population is expected to expand to 612,000 by 2041 according to the Department of Planning, Infrastructure and Environment (DPIE) estimates. A multi-faculty university in the Blacktown CBD will transform the area. The announcement of Australian Catholic University (ACU) has resulted in many organisations fast tracking hotel development, student accommodation hubs and increased business activity in the CBD.

Improving our community's socio-economic level, their access to quality health and education institutions is paramount. Blacktown City has 50% of the population born overseas, a significant indigenous population and many people accessing social housing. It is essential that a comprehensive university be located in Blacktown. This will improve Blacktown residents' opportunity for access to education, as well as achieve a 30-minute city strategy for resident tertiary students.

Council expresses concern that short-term interests may override the long-term needs of the area. Council population is expanding rapidly. Growth is anticipated to average over 10,000 additional residents per year for the next 20 years. The population of Blacktown is likely to exceed that of the entire state of Tasmania by mid-2030s.

To ensure that education opportunities keep pace with population growth, it is essential that land to be set aside to accommodate the growth. Over the past few years, at least 4 school sites across Blacktown LGA have either been reduced or completely sold by the NSW Government. The discussion on TAFE privatisation and reduction of courses could also result in the three TAFE sites being reduced or consolidated. Council believes there ought to be better scrutiny or public discussion within the local area prior to a decision being made to sell any planned or existing educational facility.

Council requests the Committee to consider:

1. Improving tertiary education opportunities for Blacktown and western Sydney residents.
 - a. More tertiary education places should be provided locally (within Blacktown and western Sydney) to address the geographical disadvantages of western Sydney residents.
 - b. That the NSW Government could offer targeted support to universities and other tertiary institutions delivering higher education in areas of community need such as outer-metropolitan, low-SES and disadvantaged communities; recognising the broader socioeconomic benefits delivered to local communities through increased higher education access.
2. Retaining all existing tertiary education facilities within Blacktown and grow these facilities and provide new ones (at least) proportionate to population growth.
 - a. NSW and Federal government policies should support this.
 - b. NSW and Federal government funding should support this.
 - c. Given the social and economic contributions universities make to local communities, the policies of both NSW and Federal Governments should require that disposal of these types of land is subject to detailed community consultation in conjunction with a demographic analysis of existing and future demand for tertiary education and site characteristics.
 - i. The strategic value of sites (proximity to population growth and access to transport and other services, either existing or planned) must be considered.
 - ii. This community consultation ought to be undertaken by the local Council to ensure the general public are aware and a transparent process has been undertaken.

Terms of reference (f)

- (f) The quality of campus life and student freedom of expression;

Whilst Council is working towards establishing a vertical university campus in the Blacktown CBD, it recognises that a university must provide much more than teaching spaces.

The experience of a university student in Blacktown CBD will involve interaction with the surrounding CBD businesses, services and amenities, including those operated by Council.

The campus will be inclusive, welcoming both students and the general public into the shared spaces.

The campus will also extend beyond the CBD, and satellites sites (including Health and Sports Sciences at Blacktown International Sports Park) will also be readily accessible by train and active transport.

Blacktown was in a unique position where its weakness became its strength. The lack of a substantial commercial buildings coupled with the fragmented property ownership created an opportunity for Council (being a significant and owner of underdeveloped CBD land) to embark on a process to see which University would be interested in connecting with the local community and what offerings both academic and collaboration it could make.

This process began in 2015 and was completed in 2019 with ACU announced as Council's collaboration partner. Since the announcement, ACU has completed its student information centre and is now refurbishing parts of 22 Main Street Blacktown. The ACU Blacktown Campus will commence operation in 2021.

A range of courses including teaching, nursing, sports science, allied health, business and law are available for the 2021 academic year. The range of course offerings is expected to expand in future years.

Council and local representatives have worked collaboratively with ACU making introductions to schools, businesses, community groups to build relationships and embed the university into the community. It is important in a community where there has been a paucity of tertiary education opportunities that the local residents will have not only the opportunity, but also the confidence and aspiration to undertake tertiary education.

Council requests the Committee to consider:

3. Ensuring that the tertiary student life/experience is not diminished in vertical universities.
 - a. Vertical universities need to have a strong connection to the surrounding community and access to a suite of various services and amenities. The campus experience needs to extend beyond the building. The alternative form of campus (to extensive open spaces) must be an integral part of and provided to vertical universities.
 - b. Universities should be required to demonstrate that this 'full' University experience is being provided in vertical universities.

Terms of reference (h) and (j)

- (h) The current levels of coordination and/or support provided to NSW universities by the NSW Government;
- (j) The appropriateness of current NSW legislation regulating, overseeing and enabling tertiary education;

Council is actively exploring the potential for facilities designed to be shared by ACU and Council. We expect some operational/construction cost savings and greater interaction between the students and Blacktown residents. The university campus will be a place where our residents feel welcome.

The challenges for growth Councils across western Sydney as well as regional areas is to allow reasonable access to a wide variety of courses within the financial constraints of the universities.

As described above, Blacktown City local government area population will exceed the state of Tasmania by mid-2030s. Blacktown is the size of a state population but currently has no access to comprehensive university courses within its borders. Apart from Council, there has been no appetite demonstrated by the State Government to explore a comprehensive university offering in Blacktown, which will be by far, the largest populated Council in NSW and potentially the fourth largest in Australia.

The State Government's current focus is on Badgerys Creek and Westmead with the assumption that *people of Blacktown are prepared to travel*. If we truly believe in the notion of a half hour city, then why are Blacktown City residents forced to travel approximately an hour to access tertiary education with no plan by the State to change this?

People of Blacktown City often come from single income households. They also juggle many other competing needs of supporting the family and all the ancillary family activities such as sport, art or academic pursuits. This makes long distance travel to a university for classes more troublesome. The long travel times are an impediment on family and study time.

Universities locating in Westmead and Badgerys Creek are receiving some Government subsidies whilst ACU is completely funding their location to Blacktown from its own reserves.

The challenge for many universities that leave their core location is that “shop-front” style campuses in various regional or outer metropolitan centres need to focus on high profit margin courses. In this commercial environment, courses such as social science and performing arts are unviable and are not part of course offerings. The benefit to the residents of Blacktown of ACU coming to our City is that ACU has the wherewithal and opportunity to develop a multi-faculty campus. We understand that this is possible via cross-subsidisation of courses.

Council requests the Committee to consider:

4. Optimising use of existing infrastructure and services (local and state and federal) and secure state and federal government funding to improve infrastructure.

- a. Council supports ACU's submission to the inquiry that;

The NSW Government could invest in university infrastructure projects, recognising the social and economic contributions universities make to NSW and local communities, and the returns on investment. In Victoria, for example, the state government has committed to provide \$350 million through a Victorian Higher Education State Investment Fund, to support Victorian universities with capital works, applied research, research partnerships, and assist in boosting Victoria's productivity and economy.

- 5. NSW Government ought to develop a plan for university course offerings across regional and western Sydney to ensure access opportunities are provided to a wide range of fields of study. This is needed to ensure that market forces do not cause an unintended consequence of reduced course offerings
 6. Ensuring ongoing and growing opportunities for tertiary students studying in Blacktown to secure local vocational experience.

Council notes the difficulties experienced this year in providing 'hands on' training. It supports ACU submission that the government support high-quality simulation facilities complement physical workplace experiences.

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 7. Local Government should be able to share facilities with the university sector to improve operational efficiencies and to expose our residents to university life and tertiary education possibilities.
 - a. State and Federal policies should support and contribute to this
 - b. Review the Local Government PPP guidelines to enable innovative arrangements like this with the tertiary education sector.