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Submission Newcastle University Proposed City Campus

I am an ex student of Newcastle University. My long years of study and very regular contact with the University gives me a mature view on the future of the Institution. I have also had firsthand experience with several other Universities and as a student and senior staff member in the TAFE system.

One of the key underlying threads of all that experience is that there are a couple of key principles that override every course, seminar or casual lecture provided by Newcastle University.

These principles are:-

- Efficiency is paramount.
- The environment is a very high priority.
- Time is a very finite resource for students.
- Cost minimisation is prudent both to the organisation and to the student.
- Outcomes must be maximised.

When I apply these key principles to the concept of establishing a Campus in the old Newcastle CBD I get a resounding fail on all counts. Let me explain each in some detail.

1. Efficiency is paramount.

Having a campus in multi locations in close proximity is certainly highly inefficient. Some examples are:-

- Lecturers tutors and support staff cannot be maximised or utilised to the fullest.
- Support facilities like libraries, the student union, recreation facilities, the student bookshop and even the cleaning equipment cannot be maximised and require duplication (and or use of smaller less efficient solutions).
- Splitting some resources eg specialist computer software, can make the provision unviable resulting in both the main Campus and annexe Campus both missing out on the resource.
- The failure to achieve a critical mass results in second rate provision and the generation of other serious issues. Eg reduced bus frequency to the Campus limits student access and creates a parking issue.

2. The environment is a very high priority

Education institutions are businesses and whilst course material encourages work skills, production practices and enterprise operation to minimise environmental harm the University Campus should not be exempt from the key principles.

Some examples of how the CBD Campus throws the environmental principle out the window include:-

- Students travelling longer distances than necessary use extra fuel, congest roadways and public transport. With residential growth of the future being very much higher West of the Callaghan Campus and with these areas having a demographic more likely to house university students, it is dead set crazy to have these students travelling extra distances to the old CBD. There is more logic in constructing a new Campus in Maitland (or appending Tocal to the University).
- The Main Campus has lots of spaces, common areas, community areas, sporting and recreation facilities, roadways and pathways. Duplication of some or all of these is negative to the environment at both the construction phase and at the operational phase.
- Heating, cooling and the like place strains on the environment. It is very important that the waste is minimal. Spare space and duplication is a major source of waste.

3. Time is a finite resource for students

Most uni students particularly in more advanced courses are in the workforce, have families and a host of constraints that make their course loads high pressure. Wasting time and money travelling becomes a real issue. I understand this first hand because I have been in this position.

Examples of issues include:-

- A student who lives at say Fletcher and works at say Thornton simply does not have the time or money to travel past the Callaghan Campus to the Civic Campus.
- The lack of critical mass causes low frequency on buses and trains. Low frequency can mean waits of 60 minutes or longer for each trip.
- Lack of critical mass can mean that existing bus services may even be cut due to underutilisation. No effective transportation can mean huge time penalties.
- I personally withdrew from a Master Degree in Industrial Education simply because the travel was excessive.

4. Cost minimisation is prudent for both the University and the Student

The cost of operating the University and the cost for the students in these uncertain times must be carefully considered. The establishment of a Campus in the old CBD would not seem to be prudent for the following reasons.

- The location of a Campus in a locality that should be more highly priced than the Callaghan Campus location will force the students into paying higher rent, greater travel expenses, significant parking costs and paying a premium for services etc
- A major proportion of the students will have to drive past the main campus to get to the Civic campus as they reside and or work to the west of Callaghan. This travel is extremely wasteful in terms of time and money not to mention the huge environmental cost of wasted fuel etc.
- Many potential students will simply not be able to enrol due to the time waste of additional travel.

- Campus costs in the CBD without doubt must be much higher, grant funds less productive and the net value for dollar spent significantly lower.
- CBD Campus has land capital costs rates and other fixed costs that would be an additional expense over having additional facilities at Callaghan.
- The relative lack of involvement of Newcastle University in distance education urgently needs investment and can result in significant enrolment gains without the physical demands of face to face.
- The “cash cow” of overseas students is now dry with funding from that source no longer flowing as in the past.
- The continuing expansion of TAFE into higher level courses (and potentially degree courses) combined with greater “recognition for prior learning” arrangements has important cost benefits to students however major cost and revenue loss factors to the University.
- The increase in the status of Newcastle University may mitigate some issues.

5. Outcomes must be maximised

The University to follow its teaching practices must be very sure that its mooted Campus in the City Centre of Newcastle clearly reaches the standards of excellence in all respects.

The proposal must be of clear and demonstrable benefit to at least four major groups. They are:-

- The University of Newcastle
- The students of the University
- The economy and business activity of the Lower Hunter and beyond
- The community as a whole

From the points above I fail to understand how the CBD campus could possibly be of benefit to either the University itself or the students of the University.

The location of the city campus activity at Callaghan (or Maitland or Tocal) would clearly strengthen the economy and business activity via the critical student mass taking the activity to a higher level, by spreading the University funds further afield and by a major

contribution to a new and diverse economy. There has been no information to document the gains to be achieved from an expanded city Campus.

There is little evidence that the community as a whole will benefit greatly by having 4000 students in the City Centre.

The often touted thought that the Legal precinct would be a good ally and partner to the University Law studies will now not materialise as the proposed Law Court precinct is only a pittance of what was originally proposed and from evidence available will not even expand the current provision. With the majority of Court and Legal activity for the region now located and continuing to move elsewhere that concept has now evaporated.

The government and community has invested heavily in the University of Newcastle. These funds were solicited on the basis of enhancing the Callaghan Campus. Recent activities include Warabrook Station and major accommodation funding. To proceed with the City Campus would seem to reduce the benefits of this expenditure.

The University has many units and research projects that have a real connection with the community. The Tom Farrell Institute is one example. That connection is strengthened and given credibility from being located on the headquarters campus.

As you can tell from my submission I am very concerned that the City Campus for the University of Newcastle is in major conflict with the institutions' teaching principles.

Building a campus that is:-

- Educationally unsound
- Environmentally unsound and financially unsound
- Financially unsound

is simply ill-conceived and a reflection on the quality of management.

Slapping up a university building as part of a "revitalisation strategy" is sheer folly and the University and grant providers should simply walk away.

With the upturn in the CBD economy and the completion of grouting the site should turn a handsome profit to the University of Newcastle.

Whilst the building has some architectural merit it is not appropriate for Newcastle's Civic precinct.

The building together with its grant funds should be redirected to the Callaghan headquarters campus.

The building should be erected in a central prominent location and placed on top of a five story car park. That would give the main campus a fantastic focal point, some first class educational facilities and solve the Universities car parking issue.

I am also very concerned that the University is being manipulated by many vested interest groups. I put it to you that organisations like Newcastle City Council, The Hunter Development Corporation and developer lobby groups are constantly espousing the virtues of the City Centre Campus to promote their own ventures and proposals including the removal of the rail line.

I ask that Newcastle University as an organisation and its planners rethink the proposal to establish a major City Campus.

Further I ask that you consider consolidating the Callaghan Campus by returning the current CBD activities to the headquarters campus.

If you choose to continue with the City Centre Campus then I believe it is time for the University to issue some clear statements clarifying their position and explaining how the proposal is consistent with the institutions key teaching principles. I believe also the proposal needs to be placed on hold until such time as all the transport, parking, housing and other essential infrastructure items are fully documented and committed together with a commitment that they will be fully in place before one student or staff member sets foot into the building.