

A university for Blacktown

Blacktown City Council (Council) is seeking to attract a university to Blacktown's city centre. The university campus is one of the many transformational projects taking place in Blacktown.

Council envisages 5000 students in the first iteration of the university, with a view to expand based on demand. A number of sites available in the area make it viable to expand the university to 30,000 students. However, the initial goal is a "pop-up" university of 1000 students by 2020, and a full university with two faculties and 5000 students from 2023.

Although this is Council's vision for an educational institution in Blacktown, we will be open to suggestions from universities during the expressions of interest (EOI) process.

Blacktown will be calling for expressions of interest during September and would like to sign a memorandum of understanding with its chosen partner university in 2019.

Business case

The business case for establishing a university campus in Blacktown's CBD is strong:

- **Strong market demand** – 32 per cent of Sydney students live within 45 minutes of Blacktown; we are a well-connected city, by rail and road – a true 30-minute city; access to an untapped market; a new campus and state-of-the-art facilities is attractive to students, most notably, international students; and our affordable housing market is also attractive to students.
- **Business commitment to placements and research** - Our local businesses will collaborate with a local university to provide opportunities, including work placements, research opportunities, and jobs. These businesses are telling us they require more qualified workers for roles and research across logistics, manufacturing, engineering and IT.
- **Specialised industry opportunities** - Blacktown's significant sports infrastructure, including the Blacktown International Sportspark, and Blacktown hospital (soon to be the third largest hospital in NSW) can provide the right university with unique offerings to its students.
- **A CBD location with room for campus growth** – Warrick Lane is a new development next to Blacktown train station, and we believe this will be the best option for a university – although there are several. Students will enjoy the benefits of studying in a CBD, surrounded by new and existing amenities. Blacktown City Council has four other sites available to the successful university – whether for the first (and only campus) or to offer a distributed urban campus opportunity.
- **Culturally diverse** – Blacktown is home to 182 languages. This is not only attractive to international students, but local students looking for a unique experience and the opportunity to make the community their own. This may also encourage international students to add to the community by bringing new ideas to the environment.
- **A transformed CBD** – Blacktown City Council is undertaking a number of transformational development projects that will modernise the CBD and provide the opportunity for Blacktown to become *The Talented City*.
- **Support from all levels of government** - We have been working with local and federal governments to garner support for a university at Blacktown.

Strong market demand in Western Sydney

Capturing potential

In 2016 there were 54,000 students within 30 minutes by public transport of Blacktown's CBD, this increases to 123,000 for a 45-minute trip. This represents 32 per cent of Greater Sydney's students. By 2046, this will increase to 88,000 students within 30 minutes by public transport, and 185,000 within a 45-minute trip. This represents 34 per cent of Greater Sydney's students.

A university in Blacktown has the potential to capture a large portion of these students, now and in the future; it will also provide fair and equitable access to university education for all students wishing to attend, who may be hindered by location.

The delivery of services near students' homes is therefore exceedingly important. Currently, local students are attending university and leaving the Blacktown CBD to do so. If there was the opportunity for them to study in Blacktown with a short travel distance, it is likely they would.

Filling the education gap and meeting demand

Council has significant insight into education gaps and demand from residents, providing our partner university with an informed understanding of the market.

Council has identified degrees with higher participation than the State average within: engineering (particularly automotive, manufacturing and mechanical); education; and welfare services.

Council has also identified areas where participation from Blacktown residents in attaining training is far below the NSW average, being: IT; health services; architecture and building; and agricultural and environmental studies.

Our partner university can feel confident that there is a market for these educational services in Blacktown.

Blacktown has strong manufacturing and logistics credentials, with a history of excelling in these fields; business leaders have expressed interest in supporting courses that would continue to strengthen these industries.

Reduced travel times and costs

Currently, the majority of university places are clustered around the Sydney CBD, with most Blacktown residents traveling over 45 minutes to access higher education.

A university campus in Blacktown has the potential to reduce travel time and the associated cost of travel by university students residing in Western Sydney. It would also increase leisure time and overall quality of life while boosting University staff and student productivity. Reduced travel times also reduces the resources required to travel, reducing negative environmental impacts. It will also take pressure off the train and road networks.

Attracting international students to Blacktown City

International student enrolment is vital to the success of a modern Australian university. Blacktown can attract international students.

Blacktown is connected, diverse, and affordable, with the selected university also having the option to build and provide student housing on or near the campus.

Migrants are drawn to Western Sydney due to its affordability and cultural diversity, and a university in Blacktown could be more appealing to new Australians living in Greater Sydney, due to its location at the heart of the Sydney basin.

International students also highly value modern amenities, which will be offered by the new campus and complemented by the other transformational projects in Blacktown.

Business commitment to placements and research

Enhance research and development – partnering with local enterprise

Research funding and the ability for a university to produce sound research is directly related to rankings, which BCC acknowledges is one of the biggest factors considered by students choosing a university. One way to improve research capabilities is to partner with local enterprise.

Many universities across Greater Sydney, Australia and around the world have established partnerships with private enterprises. These partnerships can involve internships for students to gain professional experience and provide local businesses with skilled labour. Partnerships can also assist in the research and development of new ideas, products and practices, fostering innovation across different industries.

Current strengths in health, manufacturing and logistics, as well as Blacktown's emerging niche advanced manufacturing businesses, could provide initial opportunities for partnerships for a university, and research and development in health services, engineering, logistics and manufacturing.

Council has held discussions with local businesses, including 3M, Arnott's and Green's General Foods. These local businesses are telling us they require more qualified workers for various roles, including across logistics, manufacturing, engineering, IT, and research.

These businesses are committed to supporting and sponsoring research and collaboration with a university in the Blacktown local government area. This has laid the foundation for negotiating financial backing for a range of activities: from research and innovation projects, to work experience and internships, and graduate programs for alumni.

According to Universities Australia, 16,000 companies that partner with universities generate \$10.6bn in revenue from the collaborations. The study by Cadence Economics found companies receive a return on investment of \$4.50 for every dollar invested in research with a university.

Industries

Blacktown has a strong and enduring manufacturing and industrial heritage.

Within the LGA, there are: 123,000 jobs; 19,300 local businesses; and a gross regional product of \$15.6 billion.

The top industries in the Blacktown LGA are:

- agriculture, forestry and fishing;
- mining;
- manufacturing;
- electricity, gas, water and waste services; and
- construction.

Specialised industry opportunities

Sports offering

Blacktown's significant sports infrastructure, including the Blacktown International Sportspark precinct and the proposed International Centre for Training Excellence, could also provide synergies with a university campus specialising in sports sciences. Additionally, it could provide facilities for a university with strong extra-curricular commitments.

Health offering

One of Blacktown's transformational projects is the substantial investment in Blacktown hospital. There is opportunity to partner with the hospital to develop work-ready graduates, for both allied health and medical professions.

A CBD location with room for campus growth

While we believe the best option for a university would be at our Warrick Lane location, given its location in the middle of the CBD and easy access to transport and amenities, there are multiple land options available in Blacktown CBD for a campus. We have five potential sites available to a university, including the option of a distributed urban campus.

In terms of the transport and infrastructure options, Blacktown is easily accessible through public transport and is close to major intercity highways. Good connectivity is particularly important as there are 54,000 higher education students living within 30 minutes by public transport from Blacktown CBD. Blacktown LGA also provides affordable housing options and the housing stock is set to nearly double over the next 25 years.

A range of complementary campus sites are also available in Blacktown City to enable greater scope for partnerships and accommodate future growth.

Affordable area

Housing affordability is at an all-time low in Sydney. Blacktown's property market is well below the median price of the rest of Sydney, especially around areas in Sydney's east that are home to many Sydney universities. For example, the median weekly rents of eastern Sydney university suburbs are at least \$190 more expensive than comparable Blacktown accommodation.

Council is also willing to work with the partner university to provide land for residential development.

Culturally diverse

Build on and increase social activity, vibrancy and amenity

In Blacktown, diversity in all its forms is valued and embraced. There are people from 188 different birth places speaking 182 languages. Over a third of population speaks a language other than English. People and cultures thread seamlessly together to form an energised, inspired and thriving community. Everyone is invited to participate, no matter their age or background.

A university in Blacktown has the potential to build on Blacktown's existing cultural diversity. Over one third of the Blacktown LGA's population was born overseas and this means the university has the potential to act as a 'home away from home' for international students who share a cultural background with Blacktown residents.

A diverse learning environment has the potential spark new lines of investigations and discovery by converging new ways of thinking. By thinking differently to their peers, university students at Blacktown will begin to think laterally and ask new questions, encouraging progress and innovation.

A transformed CBD

Transforming Blacktown

Council is committed to a number transformational projects across the Blacktown LGA. These include:

- Blacktown university project;
- the Warrick Lane development;
- Blacktown International Sportspark - International Centre of Training Excellence;
- health precinct rejuvenation;
- renewal of Council offices;
- Riverstone Town Centre Master Plan;
- Animal Rehoming Centre; and
- St Bartholomew's Cemetery redevelopment.

Council is undertaking these projects to revitalise the CBD and fulfil its vision of Blacktown. The education precinct is designed as the transformational project to catalyse the CBD, encouraging more growth for Blacktown.

Blacktown CBD and the Western Sydney Boom

Council is committed to capturing the potential of the new boom and shift towards Western Sydney. Blacktown is in a central position, with existing infrastructure and access already in place to accommodate growth. Blacktown locals are proud of their diversity and community-mindedness, and proud of the talent produced across a range of industries. Blacktown has begun to undertake a number of transformational projects to create jobs, growth, and progress, bringing people to Blacktown and reinvigorating the town centre.

There is sufficient demand for a university in Western Sydney, as it is home to 37 per cent of Greater Sydney's student population but provides only 18 per cent of university places. This demonstrates there is a viable market in Western Sydney.

There have been recent and significant commitments in tertiary education in Western Sydney - the recently developed Western Sydney University campus in Parramatta City Centre, along with University of Wollongong and Western Sydney University in the Liverpool strategic centre. However, Blacktown is unique in that it has transport, roads and amenities already in place to support new development.

Government support

Western Sydney is a focal point for government investment and development, with several NSW and Federal initiatives currently in place to facilitate the growth of the region. Some of these initiatives include:

- The Federal Government will invest \$2.9 billion in major infrastructure upgrades.
- The Greater Sydney Commission (GSC) has named Greater Parramatta to the Olympic Peninsula as one of the priority areas for 2017/18.
- Further development of the Westmead health and education precinct, such as improving transport accessibility and connectivity.
- The GSC is looking to support the transition of the Westmead precinct to become an innovation hub with more knowledge-intensive jobs.
- One of the NSW Department of Planning and Environment's priorities is the North West Growth Area. The Department is looking to:
 - plan for an additional 20,000 dwellings and facilitate the supply of 18,000 new homes by 2021, and 33,000 new homes by 2026;
 - balance the needs of a growing population with opportunities for employment and recreation; and
 - identify and coordinate the delivery of infrastructure to support housing and employment growth.
 - Improve transport accessibility and connectivity throughout the area.
- The Western Sydney Stadium is currently under construction and is set to open in 2019. The new stadium will create approximately 600 to 900 jobs once operational and is set to bring major economic benefits to Western Sydney by attracting tourists and Sydneysiders from other regions.