

# SAYING NO TO UTAS'S MOVE TO THE CBD IS GOOD FOR EDUCATION AND FOR HOBART

IT'S TIME FOR UTAS MANAGEMENT TO LISTEN TO THE  
COMMUNITY AND VALUE THE UNI CAMPUS FOR  
CURRENT STUDENTS AND FUTURE GENERATIONS,  
WRITES ANGELA BIRD

LIKE the UTAS Chancellor Alison Watkins, about 40 years ago I finished school and knew I wanted to be a teacher and chose to study at UTAS in Hobart.

I grew up in Devonport on the North-West Coast and neither of my parents went to university.

Education was important in our family and as the eldest I was the first to head to Hobart and to uni.

During my first year I lived at Ena Waite College in Bathurst St, along with about 40 other women from all over Tasmania.

Since graduating I have lived and worked in a range of communities, firstly on the North-West Coast and for the past 33 years in Hobart, unlike the chancellor who lives in Melbourne.

As an educator, I have a very different vision of the future of UTAS, to that presented by Chancellor Allison Watkins in her Talking Point (The Mercury, August 31) and wholeheartedly refute her claims.

**RELOCATION VERSUS CONSOLIDATION:** While the chancellor says UTAS is 'consolidating', it is in fact fragmenting and creating more city silos. The Sandy Bay campus encourages the cross fertilisation across faculties. It's calm, picturesque, with plenty of space to wander and talk.

The schools or faculties in the city and precincts, are there for a reason. They just don't mix with each other. Those on the Sandy Bay site do or did before UTAS started prematurely decanting to rented office space. The Art School and Performing Arts were never on the Sandy Bay site. The Menzies Centre opened in 2013 close to a teaching hospital for practical experiences. The Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies, which was federally established, makes sense being on the waterfront.

However, these are silos with absolutely no connection to each other.

**FUNDING:** UTAS annual's report shows it has adequate funds, and could if they had chosen to, have fully maintained and refurbished the Sandy Bay campus. In UTAS's

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own published estimation, 60 per cent of its buildings are in 'good' or 'fair' condition. Interestingly those housing the two faculties moving first – Business and Law – are both described by UTAS as in 'good' condition. So why as a priority, isn't it moving those in poor condition?

**SANDY BAY CAMPUS CONDITION:** Despite what the chancellor says, Sandy Bay is fit for purpose. Many facilities are relatively new, with new chemistry labs, a new glass house, a refurbished Law building. Surely it's the responsibility of building owners to maintain them, but UTAS has not done this. Imagine if all Tasmanian schools were not maintained or upgraded. State-of-the-art facilities are in Sandy Bay and where they aren't they could be. Money spent on buying, building and refurbishing CBD buildings should be spent on Sandy Bay.

What is proposed for the Forestry building and the Law Faculty in particular is far inferior to their current facilities. The floor space for all faculties will be greatly reduced, there will be no room for expansion, staff will be in open offices with limited teaching spaces. Face-to-face learning is declining and will continue to do so if UTAS has its way.

I know school leavers and they are used to and need an in-person experience for social contact and wellbeing. We're already losing them to universities providing this option. The drop out and dissatisfaction rate in this cohort has never been so high.

**STUDY IN THE CITY:** When the chancellor says, "already, four-in-10 Hobart-based students study in the city" the question should be how many of these students are unnecessarily in rented CBD accommodation in the KPMG and Vodafone buildings, when they could be housed in perfectly good UTAS owned accommodation in Sandy Bay?

The simple fact is numbers have been inflated, city students will be more fragmented and faculties that have worked together will find it harder to connect.

**CARS:** The chancellor's claim there will be less driving is not based on fact. Of those who travel by car, most will still travel by car. Those who don't go to the CBD now, such as those from Kingston, Sandy Bay, Mt Nelson, Taroona, Huon and Channel, will all have to go into the CBD mostly by car. All those travelling to the CBD will have to find somewhere to park. Most parking limits are two hours, yet free in Sandy Bay streets. So this will add significantly to parking stress and cost, not decrease it.

**ACCESS:** The biggest barrier to university entrance for school leavers in Tasmania, not even mentioned by the chancellor, is gaining an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) and completing year 12, not distance.

It is a far more complex issue than buses and distance. Trust me, as a former school principal I'm fully aware of those barriers.

It's time for the chancellor to listen to the community and value the university campus for current students and future generations.

**Angela Bird is a UTAS alumni, former principal of Kingston High School and had 40 years with Department of Education.**