



Legislative Council of Tasmania
Select Committee Inquiry into UTAS
Parliament House
HOBART TAS 7000

29 August 2022

Dear select committee members

Thank you for creating this opportunity for the public to comment on the University of Tasmania's (UTAS) governance and decision-making through an investigation into their 1992 Act. It is a timely decision and I hope the outcome of this inquiry will require the university to be more accountable to the people of Tasmania.

I am a UTAS alumni, former public servant and bureaucrat and, more importantly, a long-term rate payer of the City of Hobart with a deep commitment to Tasmania and its uniqueness. I am also a member of the Save UTAS Committee (SUC). The question you are probably asking is why am I lodging a submission to this inquiry from the perspective of a rate payer? And how does UTAS's governance and decision-making affect me?

As a rate payer, I first became aware of UTAS's plan for a wholesale campus relocation to the CBD through their development application to partially close a lane in Melville Street to create a parklet. This demonstrated UTAS was operating without social licence for the people of Hobart and instead working out of self-interest to achieve their own agenda. From this experience I further investigated how it was possible for UTAS to have so much influence. I am now better informed and have arrived at the conclusion the University of Tasmania Act 1992 enables UTAS through the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor and the University Council to operate in a largely autonomous fashion with little to no accountability to any level of government for their actions. In fact, the opposite seems to be true: UTAS is being enabled by the Hobart City Council and the State Government.

To save time, I will briefly summarise the things I have researched and the points I would like to make as I am sure these facts will be presented by others in their submissions. I am happy to provide further clarification if required. My submission and beliefs have been informed by:

1987 Dawkins report:

- which led to the introduction of HECS fees and a reduction in federal funding
- resulted in public universities needing to generate their own income stream to remain viable
- resulted in universities moving from an academic model of operation to a business model with the employment of more corporate entities than academics
- a heavy reliance on the international student market (Australia's third highest service industry export)

- the outcomes of decades of funding challenges, changes to management structures, reliance on income generation to fund research and programs, establishing a competitive edge to attract students, achieving high scores on international ranking tables and risk of reputational damage and more recently the pandemic have created for UTAS, and all public universities, significant challenges to compete in the public university space
- despite these financial challenges, some universities have thrived and have found other ways to secure their long-term financial security without sweeping staff cuts, loss of programs, casualisation of the workforce and wholesale sell-off of assets; philanthropy has been the path chosen by Melbourne University
- results of the 2019 NTEU staff satisfaction survey created a very gloomy picture of staff perceptions of university management
- I have read numerous opinion pieces from academics and media articles from various sources, and all seem to arrive at a similar conclusion, the public university sector is in trouble and the time has come for the Federal government to intervene, review and address the funding model and governance of universities in Australia.

The University of Tasmania Act 1992 (the 1992 Act)

- prior to amendments made to the Act in 1992, UTAS could not sell land as the land on which the campus is built was gifted to them by the people of Tasmania and could only be used for the purposes of higher education
- at the time this amendment was made, I doubt anyone thought UTAS would ever consider selling/leasing their entire Sandy Bay campus and turning it into a 2700 dwelling micro-suburb
- aside from the sale of land, the make-up and appointment of members to the University Council have also changed; currently the council has 13 members and there has been a significant decline in representation from academics
- As a member of SUC, I have also become aware of operational aspects of the University Council that give me cause for concern:
 - people are appointed rather than elected, including the student representative, giving rise to potential 'stacking' of the council by the VC
 - minutes of meetings are kept secret and not publicly available, therefore decisions made that impact on the City of Hobart are not open for public comment
 - council members are restricted from speaking publicly on the issue of relocation and sale of the Sandy Bay campus
 - the accountability requirements back to the state government are minimal and I understand UTAS is often late in providing reports
 - the council is not required, through any act of parliament, to seek ministerial approval for proposals and actions; actions which directly impact on the residents of Hobart
- the secrecy, powers and lack of scrutiny of the University Council's actions and decision-making must be challenged.
- decisions made without proper scrutiny and approval by an appropriate authority such as the relevant minister of the day is reprehensible
- decisions made by the University Council, enabled by the statutes of the 1992 Act, are having far-reaching impacts on the people of Hobart; business owners, workers, rate payers

have had little to no opportunity to provide feedback through any proper, open and transparent consultation process

- the establishment of an 80 strong, highly curated panel of people who can only contribute ideas as to how the relocation takes place but not criticise the move is a classic example of how the 1992 Act is being used to serve the self-interest of UTAS, and the University Council is complicit because the 1992 Act basically says they can take whatever action they need to achieve their aims
- the 1992 Act must be amended to increase UTAS accountability to protect the assets gifted to them by the people of Tasmania, to consider the impact decisions made by the University Council have on the wider community and to make the role of State Government more visible in this process; their actions are not restricted to Hobart, the same has happened and is happening in Burnie and Launceston
- currently UTAS is using hundreds of thousands of tax-payer dollars to spruik their ill-considered move to the Hobart CBD and in my view, as a rate and tax payer and contributor to their funding, it is not an appropriate use of funds

Role of the Hobart City Council (HCC)

- it would appear the genesis of relocation began with previous vice chancellors with the support of previous HCC mayors (one now employed by UTAS to spruik relocation) and has been in the pipeline for a decade or more
- the current VC and HCC Mayor have simply continued to push the rhetoric
- it has taken the formation and activities of SUC and the investigations of Rob Valentine and Meg Webb to draw attention to the actions of UTAS and the HCC
- without these challenges, the community and many rate payers of the City of Hobart would be none the wiser; as previously stated, as a rate payer, I was not aware of the full extent of UTAS's proposals until I started doing my own research
- UTAS has stamped their footprint in many HCC initiatives:
 - **Elizabeth Street (Midtown) Streetscape Project**, located opposite to UTAS accommodation buildings; HCC meeting minutes claim this is a success, my personal observations conclude it is an abject failure – dead foliage, rarely used and mostly in shade
 - **The Hobart Central Precinct Plan Discussion Paper**, HCC name up UTAS relocation as a key strategic target and go so far as to say, they will 'support' and 'facilitate' relocation; what other entity private or public would be given this level of support?
 - **30 Year Greater Hobart Plan**, a plan lacking in detail and evidence which suggests a population growth of 60,000 for Greater Hobart and 34,000 new dwellings with a ratio of 70:30 infill housing to urban sprawl; medium to high density housing in the CBD will further add to the congestion if UTAS relocate
 - **City Deals**, the first iteration of this deal only included UTAS STEM, subsequent iterations changed to include complete relocation and abandonment of the CBD campus; question is why?
 - **E-scooter trial**, this fits with both the HCC and UTAS narrative that into the future the city will be car-free; question is, will Hobart ever be car free? And in the meantime, as e-scooter users carelessly park their discarded scooters all over the city, every other user of the footpaths pays the price

- The current 1992 Act enables the University Council to forge these partnerships; I'm not saying all partnerships are bad, rather, I am questioning where Tasmanian's voices are in these decisions – people's voices matter – with no accountability UTAS can do as they please
- What is lacking in all these proposed initiatives is consideration for the following:
 - What is the big picture? UTAS has been reactive to public criticism and seem to change plans on a whim in response to these criticisms
 - What is a sustainable population for the City of Hobart? Is there any peer-reviewed evidence to suggest what this figure may be?
 - How do UTAS's plans fit with other projects of significance such as the proposed AFL Stadium and the proposal to relocate the Antarctic Division to Macquarie Point? If all these proposals go ahead, what will be the impact on the City of Hobart and rate payers?
 - How do we overcome the insurmountable traffic congestion issues without a commitment to a city bypass?
 - How do we address the parking shortfalls that will be created by the proposed relocation and wholesale sell-off/leasing of Sandy Bay?
 - What is the timeline? How long will the city be tied up with construction, lane closures, building delays? Hobart is a small city, development of this scale has the potential to create chaos for decades to come
 - What are the risk mitigation strategies if UTAS changes their mind midway through this relocation?
 - Why is UTAS claiming this move is a 'consolidation' rather than 'relocation'? The term 'consolidation' is values-laden and biased. They are not consolidating, many of the existing UTAS facilities in the CBD have been there for decades and have never been on the Sandy Bay campus

Conclusion

To bring this back to the 1992 Act. The Act in its current form, is not meeting the needs of the Tasmanian people. It is enabling UTAS to be secretive, autonomous and with little accountability (much like the strategies employed by McKinsey & Co – notably the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor are former employees). Without open and transparent dialogue with the Tasmanian people, UTAS and the University Council are at risk of creating reputational damage to the university's name and the state of Tasmania. Their actions are not in the best interest of rate payers; we will be the ones to pay the ultimate price when the city is congested, and many small businesses are closed and replaced with a plethora of cafes and bars. I feel there is more at play here and the public is being kept in the dark and I also believe it will be important for this inquiry to follow 'the money'. UTAS has substantial resources which have enabled them to purchase many CBD sites at prices significantly over the value of these properties; where has this money come from?

Further, the claims UTAS is making to support relocation can all be challenged:

- It will not make university study more accessible; the biggest barrier to access is the completion of Year 12 and attaining an entry level ATAR score
- It will not invigorate small business; business owners state it is a bad idea

- It will not contribute to the local economy; students are low-income earners and I wonder if many staff will chose to work from home as new office spaces in the CBD will be a combination of open plan and 'hot desking'
- UTAS already has a sustainable campus at Sandy Bay which they have let deteriorate, why create chaos through demolition and replacing buildings; their own report suggests up to 60% of their current buildings at Sandy Bay are in 'good' to 'fair' condition
- Their proposed new chapter for Sandy Bay will see a micro-suburb with no plans to address parking shortfalls and traffic congestion
- UTAS already has a beautiful green campus comprising sports grounds, gardens and bushland; none of this will be coming to the CBD – instead there will be potted plants and synthetic lawn

One hopes the outcome of this inquiry will be a revised University of Tasmania Act that restores accountability to the people of Tasmania.

Thank you for this opportunity.

