

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY



Western Sydney University's feedback on the Western Sydney Aerotropolis Plan

3 March 2020

Since the Western Sydney Airport was confirmed in 2014, Western Sydney University undertook extensive measures to not merely support – but drive – Government's job and innovation targets related to this project. This included making major infrastructure, research and curriculum alignments in support of the Airport. As part of its 'Western Growth' strategy, the University rolled-out a transformational campus network across Parramatta, Liverpool and Bankstown to enhance education and research expertise, and maximise local, national and global impact¹. Western Sydney University was also the first university to release a comprehensive Airport strategy. The strategy, entitled *Flight Path*, details the University's long-term commitment to maximising the social, cultural and economic benefits of the Airport².

The Multiversity

In progressing this aim, Western Sydney University has partnered with the NUW Alliance (the University of Newcastle, UNSW Sydney and the University of Wollongong), to develop a STEM-based 'Multiversity' in support of knowledge job and economic growth commitments at the Western Sydney Aerotropolis. The Multiversity, specialising in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), will have strong links to precincts, local industry, tailored vocational education and training, and STEM-focused schooling.

Among other research programs, Western Sydney University will host the Australian Centre of Excellence in Food Innovation. This Centre will create an industry-led national powerhouse in food science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Food-STEM), enabling the NSW Government to deliver on Objective 2.5.2(a), that is, to "provide a world class agribusiness precinct that will deliver fresh and value-added Australian food production from farm gate to the global market" (as outlined on page 22 of the Development Control Plan).

A networked approach to boost skills and jobs

The *Aerotropolis Plan* considers the infrastructure, jobs and skills needed to deliver, sustain and capitalise the Aerotropolis and broader economic and population growth across the Western Parkland City. However, Western Sydney University urges this planning and development framework to be critically contextualised in a holistic regional milieu. The Plan must look beyond the geographic and statutory parameters of the Aerotropolis and engage existing and planned health and education precincts in Western Sydney, such as those identified by the Greater Sydney Commission, including Campbelltown, Liverpool, and Penrith, plus Westmead in the Central River City. This would affirm the Aerotropolis as the planned anchor for the Western Parkland City, while strategically building

¹ Western Sydney University's *Western Growth* strategy is available here:

<https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/western-growth.html>.

² Western Sydney University's *Flight Path* strategy is available here:

https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/1506671/VICE3616_Flight_Path_Decadal_Strategy_v06a_web.pdf.

and leveraging a wider knowledge network to encourage a cross-fertilisation of skills and innovations.

For example, the page 14 reference to the Greater Penrith to Eastern Creek Investigation Area states that planning for the Aerotropolis will complement other focus areas in Western Sydney. This area contains mixed-use and employment centres that are long established. The Quarter, Penrith's Health and Education Precinct established more than 10 years ago, should be acknowledged in this reference. This precinct is not a new growth area but an established jobs and skills focal point. Integrating the Aerotropolis into wider regional contexts will boost skill and job-generation across NSW more broadly. The NSW Innovation and Productivity Council contend collaboration is associated with a 70 per cent increase in the likelihood of new world innovation. In light of this, the Aerotropolis Plan's 'Productivity Principles' – particularly Objective 2: 'High-value jobs growth is enabled, and existing employment enhanced' (refer to page 9), should be amended to acknowledge other existing, planned and emerging centres.

The Aerotropolis is projected to deliver 200,000 knowledge jobs under the Western Sydney City Deal, by catalysing new and emerging industries, such as advanced manufacturing, aerospace and defence, high-tech freight and logistics and agribusiness (refer to page 4). The associated 30-minute city model, on the basis of the Plan, will see fewer residents commuting out of the region for work and leisure. Thus, the NSW Government needs to plan for greater diversity of jobs to be delivered as part of these large-scale changes, including those across health, education, research and tourism.

One of the ways to achieve this is to work strategically with universities, for, an educated population is an important enabler of future growth as it develops the region for high-value jobs. As the Australian Bureau of Statistics data has contended, the share of employment in skill level one occupations (requiring a university education) increased from 23 per cent in 1988 to 32 per cent in 2018. The data makes a compelling case for a growing reliance on degree attainment as a pre-requisite for employment, particularly if we are to reap the productivity benefits of technological innovations (of which universities' innovation and entrepreneurship help drive). Universities provide the skills for people to compete and flourish in an increasingly complex and fast-changing labour market, and are themselves major employers³. And, as Universities Australia data has revealed, provide a 4.5 return on industry investment in university research.

Western Sydney University's expansive campus network spanning a number of Aerotropolis Edge Cities, including Werrington, Kingswood, Campbelltown, Liverpool and Parramatta, all have planned public transport infrastructure within 30 minutes of the Aerotropolis core. This affords a highly-skilled network of 48,500 students, 3,600 staff and 200,000 alumni in close geographic proximity to the Aerotropolis. With this kind of skills and capability in the region, the NSW Government is able to draw on existing local talent to realise public commitments made under the Western Sydney City Deal, including the University's direct and critical assistance in the delivery of 200,000 knowledge jobs. Further, this human capital is critical to actualising Western Parkland City projects more broadly – including Government's Skills Exchange program to successfully construct, delivering and operationalise the Western Sydney Airport and Aerotropolis. Therefore, the timing of staged development in the Aerotropolis of job-generation must be considered in a holistic regional context.

With reference to the economic and development activation of the Aerotropolis, Western Sydney University notes the higher education sector's status as Australia's leading services export. This globally scaled opportunity needs to be more actively pursued within the Aerotropolis and surrounds, particularly given the exceptionally high proportion of international foundational tenants committing to establish at the site.

³ Western Sydney University, for example, employs approximately 3,500 people.

Targeted resourcing and regulatory assistance is required at the NSW and Commonwealth Government level to better stimulate and support the attraction of international students to the proposed 'Multiversity', in which Western Sydney University is a partner. These measures need to be complemented by concessions at the Commonwealth Government level to allow the Multiversity to support domestic student enrolments above and beyond the existing cap on government funded enrolments. The spatial area of the Western Sydney City Deal area affords a jurisdiction across three levels of government, in which such concessions can be piloted, implemented, and evaluated.

Without policy and regulatory action in this key area, the capacity of Western Sydney University – alone and as a member of the Multiversity – to support Government's objectives for the Aerotropolis will be limited.

Connecting the region

The Aerotropolis Plan needs to acknowledge that city-shaping services relate not only to rail but services of higher frequency, speed and volume linkages between cities and centres that shape locational decisions of residents and businesses. The mention of rapid buses is strongly supported, along with a recognition of the benefit of 'the orbital' (refer to page 36). Further to this, identification of a tunnel connection through Penrith's Health and Education Precinct to the T1 is strongly supported, as outlined on page 37. The rapid bus route along Fifteenth Avenue to Liverpool and Bankstown is supported.

Cultivating an innovation-focused economy

The transformational nature of the Aerotropolis and Western Parkland City can be elevated by better aligning Western Sydney's efforts to transition to an innovation focused economy. While there are efforts to address innovation within specific thematic areas, such as aerospace and defence through the planned Advanced Manufacturing Research Facility, there is a prevailing omission of a broad-scale, multi-sector approach to support the growth of the start-up economy in Western Sydney. The NSW Government should consider introducing comparative support to the scale that has been undertaken in Sydney CBD, that is, at a value of \$35 million. This is in addition to further investment in the planned Start-Up Hub at the Sydney Central train station which is set to deliver approximately 40 times more funding than Western Sydney currently receives. This profound funding imbalance is more than unfair; it severely impedes the success of the Aerotropolis.

Of the funding that has been given to Western Sydney to boost the innovation economy, such as Federal Government support to develop a Western Sydney University-hosted start-up and tech-SME incubator, 'Launch Pad', this has proven remarkably successful. For example, two years ahead of schedule, Launch Pad generated 400 knowledge jobs, generating \$150 million to the regional economy and supporting over 130 start-ups. Demand for more space at Launch Pad is exceptionally strong, even more so now that the site is understood as being connected, via a station, to the St Marys—Western Sydney Airport rail link.

Western Sydney as a region houses approximately 160,000 SMEs (the highest concentration in Australia), over 8,000 manufacturing companies (with a long history of innovation and exports), has a globally connected multicultural population and, demographically offers a young, vibrant and increasingly well credentialed current and future workforce. By not aligning a well-structured and resourced start-up support program to the Aerotropolis development, Australia will be missing a generational opportunity to harness the substantial economic development benefits available in job creation, investment attraction and technology development. This is an unmatched opportunity to optimise the profile and potential of the Western Parklands City as a global hub.