



DRAFT SHAPINGSEQ 2023 UPDATE

September 2023

University of the Sunshine Coast submission

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Executive Summary

The University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC) is pleased to provide a brief submission on the draft South East Queensland Regional Plan update – ShapingSEQ 2023 (the Plan).

UniSC commends the Government for updating the Plan in response to Queensland’s population growth and subsequent housing pressures and also for recognising the underpinning role of infrastructure in the accompanying draft SEQ Infrastructure Supplement.

While UniSC welcomes the new 20 per cent target for social and affordable housing, we believe the lack of focus in the Plan on student accommodation is a missed opportunity for both relieving pressure on affordable housing supply and ensuring the State leverages the economic and future workforce benefits of the expected increase in domestic and international university students.

We therefore urge the Government and local councils to consider additional planning scheme changes and financial incentives that will encourage developers and education providers to build more purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA), supported by public and active transport networks to university campuses and between PBSA sites and campuses.

Recommendations

- 1. The Queensland Government undertake a student accommodation study to determine current constraints and opportunities to increase the stock of purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) in relevant locations across South-East Queensland.*
- 2. The Queensland Government and South-East Queensland councils consider options to further incentivise developers and education providers to build more purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) to reduce demand on the affordable housing market and help accommodate the expected increase in domestic and international university student numbers over the next two decades.*
- 3. The Queensland Government and South-East Queensland councils consider opportunities to improve public and active transport connectivity to university campuses and between current and planned purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) sites and university campuses, particularly where these are located in Regional Economic Clusters.*
- 4. The Queensland Government update page 108 of the draft South East Queensland Regional Plan under the ‘Strathpine–Brendale–Petrie Regional Economic Cluster’ description to reflect that UniSC’s Moreton Bay campus is currently operational and not ‘Future’.*

1. Introduction

The University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC) is pleased to provide a brief submission on the draft South East Queensland Regional Plan update - ShapingSEQ 2023 (the Plan).

We commend the Government for updating the Plan in response to Queensland's continued population growth and subsequent pressure on housing availability and affordability. We also welcome the accompanying draft SEQ Infrastructure Supplement to ensure homes are well serviced by transport and key infrastructure like hospitals, university precincts and schools.

UniSC would welcome the opportunity to elaborate on any aspect of our submission. If this is of interest, please contact Jason Mills, Head of Government Relations on jmills3@usc.edu.au or 0415 950 619.

1.1 UniSC overview

UniSC was founded by its community in 1996 after Sunshine Coast residents campaigned for locally provided tertiary education opportunities. As the first greenfield university to open in Australia since 1975, we have helped unlock the innovation, productivity and potential of our regional communities through the contributions from our alumni, our 17,500 current students and our increasing research capability and impact.

Consistent with our mission to improve access to higher education in underserved locations, UniSC has strategically expanded our footprint into more regional communities, encompassing five campuses from Moreton Bay to the Fraser Coast. We collaborate closely with all levels of government, regional leaders, industry, and other partners to ensure our programs, research and support services align to create greater opportunities in all the areas we operate within.

On the world stage, UniSC is recognised by The Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings as a global leader in climate action, clean water sanitation, life on land, and life below water. This ranking comes alongside the Australian Research Council's recognition of UniSC as a producer of world-class research in 26 speciality areas, including environmental science, medical and health sciences, neuroscience, technology, and psychology.

2. Student accommodation as part of the affordable housing mix

2.1 Increasing higher education demand

The Australian Government's Higher Education Review (Australian Universities Accord¹) Interim Report² (the Report) notes that 90 per cent of new jobs created over the next five years will require a post-school qualification, with over 50 per cent requiring a bachelor degree or higher. The Report suggests that by 2050 approximately 55 per cent of all jobs will require higher education qualifications.

To meet this future workforce demand, the Report estimates Australian universities will need to enrol an additional 300,000 Commonwealth supported students by 2035 and an additional 900,000 by 2050. The Report also posits that reach these targets around 60% of these additional students will need to come from low SES backgrounds, 53% from regional and remote areas, and 11% would need to be First Nations students.

As has been widely reported, the strong return of international university students over the last 2-3 years is adding pressure to Queensland's housing supply challenge, particularly in the affordable housing market. In the period from January-June 2023, there were around 94,000 international students studying in Queensland, an increase of 41 percent compared to the same period last year³.

¹ <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord>

² <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord/resources/accord-interim-report>

³ <https://www.education.gov.au/international-education-data-and-research/international-student-numbers-country-state-and-territory>

2.2 Implications for housing supply

The forecast growth in domestic university students over the next two decades, combined with the rapidly increasing numbers of international students, has significant implications for Queensland's housing supply strategies. When you also consider that in 2021 Queensland had the lowest proportion of persons aged 15-74 with a Bachelor degree level or above⁴, there is a tremendous opportunity for our State to reap the future workforce benefits by significantly increasing the number of students attending university.

The priority thus becomes ensuring students who require accommodation, particularly international students, have somewhere suitable to live, a challenge more acute in the regions where suitable student accommodation can be limited. An increasing proportion of UniSC's students are enrolling from outside of our campus regions and international students currently make up about 10 per cent of our total student body. Lack of access to affordable and suitably located accommodation with good public transport links to the campus is increasingly becoming one of the key reasons UniSC students do not accept an enrolment offer, particularly for our international students.

As is well understood, university students compete for the same lower cost rental accommodation that is challenging the broader community in Queensland. While UniSC welcomes the Government's recent tax incentives to encourage more Build to Rent (BtR) developments, we believe there is a clear argument for the Government and local councils to further incentivise developers and education providers to build more purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) on or close to existing and new university campuses. According to the Property Council of Australia, without PBSA, an estimated 16,500 additional renters in Queensland would be competing for private rental properties⁵.

PBSA incentives could include a review and change of planning scheme zones in desirable locations near to universities, reduced infrastructure charges, removing taxes like foreign investor fees and introducing specific planning instruments such as a development code for student accommodation, to expedite planning approvals.

3. Improved public transport for university campuses and student accommodation

Despite the updated draft Plan noting universities are key contributors to Regional Economic Clusters, UniSC notes that public transport links to university campuses (for students and staff) and between student accommodation and campuses are often deficient, with all of the related impacts that creates for the road system.

Given the significant number of students and staff who travel each day to and from university campuses, most of whom rely heavily on road or in some cases poor public transport options, UniSC would like to see greater consideration in the Plan of university campus public transport needs. This also includes the planning and delivery of high quality, dedicated active transport links, to take advantage of the rise in e-bikes and micro mobility devices.

Similarly, we encourage the Government to consider improved public transport options to service existing and planned locations with high proportions of student housing, including PBSA sites. Students who reside in local accommodation rely heavily on public transport systems and rarely own private vehicles.

⁴ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/education-and-work-australia/latest-release>

⁵ <https://www.propertycouncil.com.au/submissions/submission-to-the-inquiry-into-the-worsening-rental-crisis-in-australia>