



Submission from the Dickson College Board on the Towards 2020 Proposal

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Executive Summary

Dickson College has been operating for thirty years as a very successful Senior Secondary College. Its student population includes mainstream and special educational programs. These are wide-ranging, preparing students for further education at university, TAFE or elsewhere, for employment in the community, and for adult life. The College has long been concerned with the whole development of its students, and this concern is reflected in the interesting and challenging range of its programs. The College model has proven to be highly successful, as it provides students the opportunity to develop their own responsibility and self-management, and the great majority achieve this more effectively than those in a conventional Year 7-12 setting.

Student numbers at Dickson College will continue to rebound, and will not be adversely impacted by the planned Gungahlin College, which will serve its own burgeoning region. Dickson College should be marketed to Canberra and the nearby NSW region, as an essential component of a full public education offering for the primary, high school and college years.



The College is integral to the North Canberra community, and its closure would have significant negative impacts on that community. The current educational links with many organizations would be displaced. The disruption to many would be great, and for those with fewer resources and no facilities for private travel, the negative effects would be very substantial.

Finally, there is no good financial justification for the closure of the College. It is a substantial operating institution, with well-managed infrastructure for which further cost efficiencies are in hand. To replace it with equivalent facilities elsewhere, would be a profligate waste of public monies,

1 Introduction

- The Board’s submission has been developed in the context of wide-ranging discussions within the Dickson College community – public meetings, various group meetings, P & C meetings, informal discussions.
- In its submission, the Board has sought to concentrate on some key matters affecting Dickson College, noting that consideration of the same issues as well as other implications of the *Towards 2020* proposal, are addressed by other related parties in separate submissions.
- The Board is particularly mindful of, and distressed by the fact that the *Towards 2020* proposal has already dearly cost the educational community in the ACT. Parents, staff and community members, have spent very considerable time in dealing with the inadequate argument and justification underpinning the *Towards 2020* proposal. The whole issue has diverted energies and time that would otherwise have been put to far better educational purposes.

2 Educational Strengths and Future for Dickson College

2.1 Particular educational strengths of Dickson College:

- Its wide-ranging educational programs, with substantial curriculum choice
 - For students seeking entrance to university
 - For students choosing paths to further vocational training and careers
 - For students seeking to enter employment directly on completion of Year 12
 - For non-mainstream students
- Some outstanding programs
 - for talented sports persons



- in theatre (now holding industry accreditation, and with new facilities)
- In music (also holding industry accreditation, and with new facilities)
- In hospitality (also holding industry accreditation, and with new facilities)
- In provision of languages other than English (LOTE)
- Humanities programs for gifted & talented e.g modern, ancient and medieval history – students able to do a double major and in future Global Relations
- Student-centred learning, encouraging students in self-direction and independence
- The inclusiveness of all students in its programs, as an integrated College
 - covering mainstream years 11-12,
 - the Foundations for Independence Program (FIP),
 - the Supporting Individuals Through Education Program (SITE), and
 - the SIEC (Secondary Introductory English Centre)
- A climate of renewal
 - In the educational programs
 - In leadership (for example, some 11 of 14 Executive staff are recent appointments)
 - In the physical environment.

2.2 Significance of the College model –

- The research and analysis of the 2005 College Review was extensive, its discussion of issues broad, with its major conclusions that the separate College System worked well for most students, but that greater attention to, and support were required, for students in the transition from year 10 to Year 11. This is not an argument for reverting to the Year 7-12 model; it is an argument for greater links from Year 10 to Year 11, and for greater “pastoral” care and career guidance.
- The Government commissioned a Reference Group to advise on the recommendations of the Review Report. The overwhelming majority consensus of the Reference Group supported the separate College model, and the recommendation of increased transitional care and support.
- See also Richard Sweet’s paper of Aug 16th, 2006 *Education, training and employment in an international perspective*. Sweet argues that “senior high schools or campuses also make a more adult learning environment possible, and discipline and attendance policies can be tailored to suit the needs of older adolescents.” Importantly, he identifies that retention rates



in year 12 are higher in the ACT and Tasmania, which have adopted separate upper secondary institutions”.

- Following the introduction of the College system in the ACT in 1976, retention rates in Year 12 in the ACT rose by 10% over the following six years, in contrast to the rest of Australia which had not adopted separate upper secondary institutions, and whose retention rates remained relatively stable.
- Tasmania has progressively adopted separate upper secondary institutions, starting from the Hobart College in the early 1960s. By the early 1990s, its eight Colleges had some 70% of Tasmania’s Year 11 students. In 1992, the national average of apparent Year 12 retention rates was about 76%, with Tasmania’s about 60%. By 2003, the national average was at the same 76%, and Tasmania’s had climbed to 76% - a dramatic improvement.

2.3 Demographic Change, Capacity and Enrolment Patterns

- Enrolment Patterns
 - ⊖ Despite the threatened closure of Dickson College at the end of 2008, 272 first round letters of offer were sent out this year. Last year 249 were sent out. This represents an increase of 9%.
 - The *Towards 2020* proposal argues that among other things, it seeks to reverse the trend of recent years towards private sector education. It is interesting that of the first round letters of offer, 17% went to students currently attending non-Government schools. In 2005, the proportion sent to such students was 9%.
 - These figures support the view that Dickson College as a public educational institution is seen as increasingly desirable.
- Demographic Changes in North Canberra
 - The statement in the *Towards 2020* proposal (page 6) that “there is now a growth in the population of young families as people move back to live closer to Civic”, is supported by ABS data as well as anecdotal evidence. This trend is consistent with what has been reported across most of the larger cities in Australia. It is not simply the newly-partnered behind this trend, for it includes families with teenagers.
- The impact of a new College for Gungahlin
 - Many of the members of the College Board have lived in Canberra for many years, and have observed rapid population growth in new regions. At times, one might wonder where all the new residents come from! Given the current rate of growth in Gungahlin, and the proposed central location of its new College, it is highly likely that it will be readily filled by students from that region, with some drawn from across the western and northern border in NSW. It is unlikely that its presence will adversely impact Dickson College



enrolments to any significant extent, and that any losses will be more than compensated by increased enrolments from the local area, and from the eastern boundary with NSW.

2.4 Marketing North Canberra Public Education

- The Dickson College Board notes the existing collaboration with Campbell and Lyneham High Schools, and strongly supports more extensive collaboration and program integration across the three campuses.
- There is the potential to extend this “public education package” to include the primary school years, to provide a comprehensive product to offer the North Canberra community, and to market it accordingly.

3 Social Significance of Dickson College

3.1 The College Community

- A major concern is the effect of the College’s closure on the students (and their families) who would be local, as well as those who travel from elsewhere to reach the College. The Board has heard from many families about the huge strain the closure of Dickson College would impose on them. These include not only the costs (which are out of reach for a number of families) involved in getting students to another college, but also the impact it would have on the educational outcomes for their children. Many parents have stated that they would not be able to attend parent/teacher evenings or other after hour’s functions at the school, as they as parents do not own a car.
- Teaching and support staff would also be affected, through wholesale re-deployment, and in some cases, perhaps loss of employment. While change and turnover are normal, such wide-sweeping change and disruption obviously affects so many more people.
- The College has an inclusive culture of long standing, and forms a major part of the local community.
- The loss of over 600 students plus staff would have a negative impact on local business, not only because of their direct use of services, but the indirect effect of there being less reason for people (such as parents) to come to the Dickson area.

3.2 Links with the Community

Dickson College has over time built up strong educational links with many local business's and other education service providers. These include links with

- the ABC and Southern Cross TV;
- The Street Theatre



- Bearcage Productions
- the CIT campuses
 - at Reid (hospitality, IT and hairdressing) and a Flexible Learning Centre (where students can study such things as Business Administration), as well as Art and Design
 - at Bruce (Science, Building and Construction, Sport and Media)
- the ANU,
- and the AIS.

3.2 The Local Community and Social Justice

- Socio-economic status of North Canberra
 - Effect of closure of Dickson College on access to senior secondary education for students of families of lower socio-economic status:
 - Eg no private transport
 - Parents unable to get to parent-teacher meetings, and school events
- Impact on local business
 - A local College increases commercial activity for local businesses, which in turn increases the opportunities for the community to gather and mix.

3.3 The Territory Plan

The Board notes the following excerpts from the current Territory Plan:

“Dickson should enhance its cohesive community where people of mixed age, income and cultural backgrounds will value its history and will be safe and settled. Dickson will provide a range of quality, environmentally sustainable residential areas that will retain a leafy ambience. The business, government and community sectors will be vibrant and progressive, providing a variety of employment, education shopping and leisure choices, serving as a hub, both for the locals and people from the surrounding region.” (page 25 Dickson Neighborhood plan)

“Approximately 14.9% of the population of Dickson are between the ages of 15 to 24. By the year 2010 North Canberra is forecast to overtake North Tuggeranong and South Belconnen to become the region with the largest number of youth. This trend is expected to continue due to Dickson's close proximity to Central Canberra and the many services, employment opportunities and easy access to the inner-city lifestyle that this suburb provides.” (page 6 Dickson Neighborhood Plan).

(Source: Chief Ministers Department: available at: <http://www.cmd.act.gov/demography/youthreport/index>: accessed 29/05/03)



In the light of this planning, the board is at a loss to understand why it was even imagined that Dickson College should close. The claim that the future presence of Gungahlin College would supplant the need for Dickson College, ignores the rapid growth of the Gungahlin region, as well as the vigorous renewal of North Canberra.

4 *Dickson College and Financial Considerations*

The Dickson College Board's Finance Subcommittee has presented a separate submission, detailing a range of financial improvements that have been initiated prior to the release of the *Towards 2020* proposal, as well as other cost saving measures that have been identified as part of a continuing improvement program. Those initiatives and measures are therefore not reproduced here.

However, there is a major financial issue that appears to have been largely ignored across the whole of the *Towards 2020* proposal. It concerns the inherent cost in establishing a successful operating institution, the intrinsic value that investment, and the cost of replacing it. In other words, it concerns the major cost of change.

- Dickson College is a successfully-operating institution. The financial arguments presented to support the *Towards 2020* proposal, have not taken into account the significant costs of the changes proposed for the College's programs, students and staff.
- Any institution is far more than the building in which it is housed. Integral to any successful educational institution are teams of highly trained and experienced staff, with effective working relationships, procedures and systems. Critical to success are high motivation, mutual confidence and support, and strong aspirations. None of these have been developed without substantial effort, and therefore substantial cost. These essential components of Dickson College cannot be transposed without cost (and perhaps some loss) to another institution (such as the proposed Year7-12 Campbell High School). None of these costs, (let alone the impact on students, their families, staff, and the wider community), have been reflected in the financial justification behind the proposal to close Dickson College.
- The financial argument has been apparently limited to a simplistic model of "bums on seats". Little thought had been given to the costs of setting up or supporting alternative facilities (such as at Campbell High School), and any work on these costs has not been placed in the public domain.



5 Conclusions

Dickson College operates very successfully, with a wide range of educational programs. Enrolments are rebounding, as is the population of North Canberra. The College should not only be retained, but strengthened with further links to its “feeder” high schools, through them to their primary schools, with the whole “product” supported by a long-overdue marketing campaign by the Government in support of public education.

The College model in particular should be emphasized as one of the ACT’s great strengths in public education. It is a successful feature, differentiating itself from private education, which largely follows conventional 7-12 structures.

The College operates cost-effectively in delivering its educational programs. Some additional funds should be allocated to the College to support its plans for further operating cost-efficiencies. To replace its facilities in another site, would be highly expensive, and waste the existing valuable infrastructure.

Finally, the College is integral to the local community. There are many socio-economic reasons that the College should be retained, and strengthened.

For educational, financial and social reasons, Dickson college should be retained.

Attachments:

Att A: Resolutions from P & C Communities

- Dickson College P & C
- Lyneham High School P & C
- Campbell High School P & C
- Majura Primary School P&C

Att B: Letters of Support

- Campbell High School Board
- Turner Primary School P&C



Attachment A

The Dickson College Board and P & C held a meeting on Monday August 14, 2006 to discuss the Towards 2020 document and its impact on public education in North Canberra. The meeting passed the following resolutions:

1. This meeting strongly supports the highly successful ACT Year 11-12 College model.
Passed unanimously.
2. This meeting strongly supports the continuation of the Dickson College student community which includes a Year 11 and 12 mainstream college program, Secondary Introductory English College (SIEC) for 7-12, Foundations for Independence (FIP) for 11 and 12 and Supporting Independence through Education (SITE) for 9 and 10 programs.
Passed unanimously.
3. This meeting strongly supports the continuation of the present North Canberra Year 7-10 model of Campbell High School and Lyneham High School.
Passed unanimously.
4. This meeting strongly rejects the proposed Year 7-12 model for North Canberra sited at Campbell High School or any other location.
Passed unanimously.
5. This meeting concurs with the Lyneham High School Board and P & C's motion of support for the continuation of the Year 7-10 structure for Lyneham High School.
Passed unanimously.
6. This meeting recognizes and support the continued role of Dickson College as a resource which enables community activities including:
 - Monday night: Indoor Soccer in Gymnasium
 - Tuesday night: Taekwondo in Hall
 - Wednesday night: YMCA disabled soccer – Gym
 - Thursday night: Taekwondo in hall: Tai-chi in Gymnasium
 - Cooking for disabled

In addition we have hosted the following groups over the last year:

- Canberra City Soccer
- Emmaus Christian School – Science labs



Attachment A (cont)

- Irish dancing
- Act Ethnic Schools Association – Hall
- Rosary Primary School – Hall
- Vietnamese Community in the Act – Hall
- ACSSO – Hall
- Lyneham High School – Computer Labs, The Anthill Theater, Weights room, classroom facilities, Hall and Canteen
- Majura Primary School – Science Labs

We are currently in negotiation with Catholic University to possibly use our Science Labs for their new Nursing course. They would access the labs between 4 and 9.30pm i.e. after college hours.

The P & C also run an evening college on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings.

- Dickson College is also an Evacuation Centre for ACT

Passed unanimously.



Attachment A (cont)



LYNEHAM HIGH SCHOOL

Goodwin Street LYNEHAM ACT 2602
Tel: (02) 62056399 Fax: (02) 62056411
ABN: 74 393 059 607

The Lyneham High School Board and P & C held a combined meeting Tuesday night, 1 August, to discuss the Towards 2020 vision for education in the ACT. In particular the meeting was called to address concerns that Lyneham High School may become a 7 – 9 high school. The 7 – 9 idea is outside of the Towards 2020 proposal, but had been relayed by the Education Minister in a number of forums. The Minister's assurances on ABC radio Tuesday morning that Lyneham High School had full self-determination on this additional issue are acknowledged. The meeting passed the following resolutions:

This meeting and the results of the school wide parent survey overwhelmingly supports the maintenance of the 7-10 structure for Lyneham High School.
Passed unanimously.

This meeting overwhelmingly supports the existence of Dickson College as a stand alone year 11 and 12 school and as a pathway for Lyneham High School students.
Passed unanimously.

This meeting supports the further development of the excellent transitions initiatives from Lyneham High School to Dickson College, as recommended by the College Review tabled Feb '06.
Passed unanimously.

This meeting is dismayed that the Toward 2020 plan has impoverished the educational opportunities for the students attending inner north Canberra schools, many of whom come from a lower socioeconomic group.
Passed unanimously.

This meeting expresses its lack of confidence in the planning process, the community consultation process and is concerned about the divisive nature of the Toward 2020 proposal.
Passed unanimously.

Gary Bulluss
Board Representative

Jo Dixon
P & C President



Attachment A (cont)

Campbell High School P&C

At the Campbell HS meeting on Thursday the following motions were passed:

- 1 This meeting strongly supports the highly successful ACT Year 11-12 College model.
- 2 This meeting strongly rejects the proposed Year 7-12 model sited at Campbell High School.
- 3 This meeting strongly supports the continuation of Dickson College including year 11 and 12 mainstream college program, Secondary Introductory English College (SIEC) for 7-12, Foundations for Independence (FIP) for 11 and 12 and Supporting Independence through Education (SITE) for 9 and 10 programs.
- 4 This meeting supports an education model in North Canberra of two Year 7-10 high schools and one senior college, administered in closer cooperation than the past.



**MAJURA PRIMARY SCHOOL P&C Association
WEDNESDAY 6 SEPTEMBER 2006**

Motion:

- *The P&C of Majura Primary School supports the ACT College system and opposes the proposed closure of Dickson College*

Put forward by Darlene Cox

Seconded by Cathy Franz

Unanimously supported by the meeting