

Sydney University looks west for new campus space

The Sydney Morning Herald, Eryk Bagshaw and Melanie Kembrey

1 April 2016, 9.31am

The greater Parramatta corridor is firming up as Sydney's next big education battleground as universities and colleges look to stake their claim on the booming student market in the western suburbs.

The education industry's interest in the stretch of land between Westmead and Sydney Olympic Park has been piqued by the construction of a 22-kilometre light rail line that will link the suburbs with each other, as well as with Parramatta and Strathfield.

Western Sydney University is looking to establish a campus in the Sydney Olympic Park complex and has nearly finished constructing a new Parramatta city campus, while the University of Sydney this week revealed plans to build a new multidisciplinary campus that will further add to its base at Westmead.

A University of NSW spokeswoman confirmed the Kensington institution had looked at collaborations in the innovation and health sectors in the area, but said it was too early to provide any more detail.



Sydney Olympic Park is poised to be the next education super centre.

Education institutions have long relied on transport connections to give them the edge over their rivals, and the past decade has seen aggressive lobbying from the University of Sydney, Macquarie University, Western Sydney University and UNSW for better services to their campuses.

The Sydney Business Chamber's western Sydney director David Borger said the light rail line, construction of which will start in early 2019, had the potential to create a "knowledge corridor" between Westmead and Sydney Olympic Park.

"It has the potential to become a significant knowledge corridor where there are knowledge-based businesses and more and more young people changing the character of the area."

One particular site, the Sydney Olympic Park complex, is expected to renew its push to attract more education providers in a revised masterplan due to be released later this year.



An artists's impression of the light rail line at Rydalmere.

Western Sydney University vice-chancellor Barney Glover said the park could become a centre for international education with the potential for a multi-university campus, such as Victoria's proposed "Australian Education City".

Sydney Olympic Park, he said, would transform over the next decade, providing education providers with a once in a lifetime opportunity.



Australian Education City's ambitious plan for public land in East Werribee, Victoria.

"We see Olympic Park becoming a centre for international education in quite a significant way," he said. "We are well advanced now in planning for an Olympic Park learning centre".

The area is already home to The Australian College of Physical Education, the NSW Institute of Sport, Charles Sturt University Sydney and Indian multinational S.P. Jain School of Global Management.



An artist's impression of the light rail at Sydney Olympic Park.

Sydney Olympic Park Authority chief executive Alan Marsh said the former home of the 2000 Olympics lent itself to sports science, hospitality and sports medicine faculties and would be made more attractive by the improved transport connections.

"We will certainly be actively talking to [universities] and showing them what we do have to offer," Mr Marsh said.

"The bones are there. When you think of our location we have very accessible. We are located right in the middle of the two great CBDs, Sydney and Parramatta."

On the opposite end of the corridor, both Sydney University and WSU want to expand their campuses in the health precinct Westmead.

On Thursday, the University of Sydney outlined a renewed push into the region through the release of its 2016-2020 strategic plan.

Vice-Chancellor Michael Spence said the university would bolster its Westmead operations and increase its engineering and business presence by building a \$500 million "multidisciplinary campus" with 4800 extra students.

"We don't regard ourselves as competitors with WSU," Dr Spence said. "We are both institutions that are trying to serve Sydney".

Professor Glover, who is also the chairman of Universities Australia, said that every NSW university was in the business of actively recruiting.

"It's a competitive environment but that is a good thing," he said.

While all the state's universities look to expand their presence, Professor Glover said that uncertainty around the federal government's higher-education policy and future funding meant that universities were more resistant to investing in physical infrastructure.

"When there is policy uncertainty, it does make it more challenging for universities," he said.