

Centre of Excellence in Agricultural Education

Project update | April 2023

Project overview

A project is underway for the Centre of Excellence in Agricultural Education to be co-located at the Western Sydney University Hawkesbury campus. The Centre of Excellence in Agricultural College will be used as a state-wide resource delivering world-class agricultural and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education.

The project will deliver:

- 5 science labs
- 10 general learning spaces
- 5 practical activity teaching areas
- covered outdoor learning areas
- dining hall, conference space and canteen
- administrative building
- general and staff parking facilities
- short-term accommodation facilities
- green house
- agricultural sheds, plots and facilities
- landscaping
- bicycle storage

Progress summary

The construction of the new Centre of Excellence in Agricultural Education has been impacted due to the heavy rainfall and flooding experienced in NSW and parts of Western Sydney last year. The rainfall has resulted in groundwater being trapped below the land surface of the school site. We have conducted investigations to inform the best way to manage the drainage of the groundwater and have found elevated PFAS levels in the water source. PFAS is the acronym for per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances, a group of over 4000 chemicals which have been used worldwide since the 1950s. After further testing we have determined that the elevated PFAS levels on the site cannot be practically remediated for the facilities required of an agricultural school.

The Department of Education has notified the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and we will work closely with them on next steps.

Next Steps

Identification of an alternative site for the Centre of Excellence in Agricultural Education within the University of Western Sydney campus is underway. Once we have identified an alternate site, a new State Significant Development Application lodgement will be required as part of the statutory planning process.



Frequently asked questions

What is PFAS?

PFAS is the acronym for per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances, a group of over 4000 chemicals which have been used worldwide since the 1950s.

- PFAS are most commonly found in non-stick cookware, stain-resistant upholstery and carpet, water-resistant clothing, some photo-imaging applications, such as X-ray films and some firefighting foams and products that resist grease, water and oil.
- People are exposed to small amounts of some PFAS in everyday life, through food, dust, air, water and contact with consumer products that contain these compounds.

While there is no conclusive evidence PFAS causes any specific illness in people, concern has been raised due to its persistence in the environment.

What is the statutory planning approval process?

School Infrastructure NSW requires development approval to build the new high school. The formal process of gaining this approval is called the statutory planning approval process. The Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) is responsible for managing the assessment and determination of the statutory planning application for this project because it is a State Significant Development (SSD).

An SSD is a development of particular significance to the people and state of NSW. The approval process for an SSD is different to that of other types of development. It involves requesting the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARS's) and then preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in response to these requirements.

What are the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs)?

The SEARs are the set of terms by which the DPE will assess the application for development approval for a new high school. The SEARs ensure that the impacts of the project are properly described and understood, by advising the studies that need to be included as part of the project's State Significant Development (SSD) application to gain development approval.

How can I get involved?

We are committed to working together with our school communities and other stakeholders to deliver the best possible learning facilities for students. Your feedback on this project is important to us.

For more information, questions, or to make a comment, please contact us on the below details or visit the project webpage by searching "Centre of Excellence in agricultural education" on schoolinfrastructure.nsw.gov.au.

