

# Centre of Excellence in Agricultural Education

## Community update | August 2023

### Project overview

In 2020 planning began for a new Centre of Excellence in Agricultural Education to be co-located at the Western Sydney University Hawkesbury campus. Following detailed planning and design, initial construction works commenced in 2022. However, very heavy and sustained rain that year affected construction works, and resulted in groundwater being trapped below the land surface of the school site. Testing 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 are working closely with them.

### Current situation

We are actively working to identify an alternative site for the Centre of Excellence in Agriculture Education. We are undertaking testing and preliminary work to determine the long-term suitability of possible sites as a Centre of Excellence in Agricultural Education.

We understand the school community's concern with the process, but we need to ensure that any site chosen is not just suitable for now, but will continue to be able to provide the best education and resources for students in the long term.

### Next steps

Once we have identified an alternative site, a new State Significant Development Application will need to be lodged as part of the statutory planning process.

We are working with TAFE to ensure that students have suitable facilities for the 2024 school year, including space for additional students. Facilities will continue to be provided at Richmond High School.

The well-being of students is our primary concern and we are working to ensure continuity of education for students enrolled in the Centre of Excellence in Agriculture Education.

We will keep you updated as the project progresses.



## 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 work
- 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.

### Why are investigations into a new site taking so long?

We need to ensure that any site chosen is suitable not just for now, but for the long term. This includes testing of soils and groundwater, ensuring the site can accommodate the buildings, resources and open space requirements needed to provide an agricultural and STEM education.

### 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.

### 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 "[Centre of Excellence in agricultural education](#)"

