

SUBMISSION TO
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE
ON PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND REGIONAL SERVICES
INQUIRY INTO INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE DEVELOPMENT
OF AUSTRALIA'S REGIONAL AREAS

By

Jim Harvey
Dean: University of South Australia, Whyalla Campus

Introduction

Rural and regional universities play a central, though generally under-valued role in regional development. We contribute significantly to the educational economic and social-cultural dimension of our regions. We are major employers; we are significant consumers of local goods and services and we add considerable value to the development of our regional infra structure and human service development.

Summary of Submission

- 1. Regional University Campuses are major (yet frequently under-utilised and under-resourced) contributors to regional economies, regional development and regional employment ie we provide competitive advantages for regional cities and their regions.**
- 2. Regional Australia is not gaining maximum benefit from the rapid growth in and the opportunities provided by information technologies and the associated knowledge-based and knowledge-management industries.**
- 3. Changes in Government funding policies (eg Austudy, Abstudy, HECS and regional development) have reduced the ability of regional universities to maintain or increase their contribution to regional development and its associated improved employment outcomes.**

Some Facts About Whyalla Campus

- 1. Number of Students: 900**
 - 80 are Enrolled Nurses working in regional and remote area hospitals who are able to stay at home and in their important jobs while they study for the Bachelor of Nursing
 - 40 are locally-sourced Engineering students who are employed by BHP (BHP acknowledges the benefits of locally sourced professional staff to the stability and adaptability of its work force.
 - 15 are Aboriginal and Islander

- we also have 30 students enrolled in a State Government funded IT Pathways project.
- 9 PhD students – focus: regional issues

Regional Universities Make a Major Contribution to Arresting the Rural - Metropolitan Migration of Young People.

2. Number of Employees: 70 teaching and administration, 10 South Australian Centre for Rural and Remote Health
They generate \$3 million in salaries which are spent in Whyalla.
3. Over 70% of our students are in either full or part-time employment. This represents another 600 members of the labour force.
4. In 1998 the Campus generated nearly \$1 million in revenue outside its DETTYA Funding (\$530,000 of this was through the newly established South Australian Centre for Rural and Remote Health).
5. The Campus's research performance has increased significantly and the Campus has taken on Regional focus for its teaching, research and consultancy activities. In 1999 a PhD program commenced with this focus.
6. In 1997 the Campus won a National Award for its International activities – Best Assistance for a project which trained Chinese Taxation Officials. As a consequence to this, 10 Whyalla students are currently studying Business and Computer subjects in a regional University in Hubei Province.

Examples of Recent Research and Consulting Projects

- 1998 Rural Industries Research Fund grant to study how broadacre farmers take up new information technologies (\$30,000)
- 1997 Rural Women's Access to Legal Services - Consultancy (\$30,000)
- 1997 Australian Post-Graduate - Industry Grant, Digital Control Systems in the Steel Industry.

Universities Do More Than Teach

We provide an important service to regional industries and regional development.

- ABS Regional database is located on the Campus
- Business Centre brings real life support to SME's – currently \$250,000 worth of regional projects.

It Has Been Estimated That Regional University Campus's Contribute 5 Times Their Revenue Value to Their Regions (ie there is a multiplier of 5 times) **Whyalla Campus Contributes \$20 - \$25 million.**

Relevance to the Standing Committee's Terms of Reference

Factors that contribute to the disparity in employment levels between different regions and also between regions and capital cities, as well as the continuing high levels of regional unemployment:

- rural and isolated students tend to have generally lower levels of access and participation in higher education than all other groups (with the exception of Aboriginal Australians). A higher education = higher employment levels. As at 31st March virtually all the Campus's graduating students for 1998 were employed. Most stayed in the region.

Barriers include:

- limited subject choice and generally poorer Year 12 outcomes of secondary education (this impacts on students ability to enrol in engineering, computer and information science and the applied sciences - areas of major significance to rural and regional industries eg. Mining, aquaculture, information and communication, science and engineering)
- increased costs of higher education and the impact of changes to Austudy, HECS and Abstudy have had a significant impact on the participation of rural and regional students - especially those already employed. This compounds the tendency for knowledge-based industries to be increasingly city-based. Difficulties are also experienced in attracting and retaining knowledge-based and knowledge management professionals eg doctors, lawyers, information technologists and academics.

The costs of providing regionally-based knowledge-based industries and facilities are higher than for our metropolitan counterparts. No acknowledgment of this in funding formulae eg. Regional universities. Our 80 Nursing students are spread across an area greater than that covered by the State of New South Wales. Yet we receive the same funds to support them as we would if they were living in Adelaide.

Campus Responses:

We have become active in responding to the education and training needs of local and regional industry restructuring

- active memberships of and involvement in Regional Development committees eg Whyalla Economic Development Board, Spencer Regions Area Consultative Committee
- assistance with the development of successful community-based applications for RTIF funding Note: Regional Educational institutions are precluded from applying for these funds - despite our active involvement and highly developed expertise
- development of industry-approved country-based pathways for beyond the farm gate training for farmers and other regional Small Medium Enterprises (SME's). This involved Department of Primary Industry, TAFE, the ITAB and the University of South Australia: Whyalla Campus (completed March, 1998)
- development of enterprise education for young people through new Diploma and Degree in Business and through participation in E-Team projects
- development of a Business Centre which will provide services to SME's in the region and also on-going 'real world' experiences for Campus students and staff (May 1998)
- development of training and research activities for rural health (South Australian Centre for Rural and Remote Health) and Human Services (Centre for Rural and Remote Area Research)
- establishment in 1998 of a node of the National Renewable Energy Cooperate Research Centre - with associated employment generating effects as enterprises are spun-off through business incubators in renewable energy, water recycling, resource recovery and earth technologies (mid 1998)
- establishment of IT Pathways Project which has provided Information Technology training for 30 regional students.

Specific Projects linked to Regional Development

1. The IT Pathways Program

Currently the Campus in collaboration with the Spencer Institute of TAFE is providing IT training for 29 locally-sourced students (ages 18 – 46 years). The Project replicates a similar program funded by the State Government and which operated in the northern suburbs of Adelaide. Current funding is \$150,000.

Outcomes:

Actual	2 students in full-time employment (prior to completion) 2 graduates of Campus's Bachelor of Computer and Information Science employed as full-time tutors (6 months)
Anticipated	19 successful completions by December 1998. Students available to support regional IT uptake. 1 participant has established an IT Business.
Problem	The current program is funded based on metropolitan assumptions re proximity, travel etc. Further development of the program across the region (eg Port Augusta, Port Lincoln and Port Pirie) will require considerably greater expenditure on off-Campus delivery to smaller numbers of students. Without appropriate levels of funding which acknowledge the additional costs of delivering programs across an area equivalent in size to the state of NSW, further development is constrained.

2. Mining Education

Again, the University Campus and the Spencer Institute are actively and successfully pursuing collaborative training activities in an industry of major significance to our region and our State. The Campus has a long history of supporting BHP-Steel. More recently, we have established telelearning centres at Roxby Downs, Port Pirie, and Coober Pedy. These position the Campus to provide mining education at the local level

Mining Pathways Project

Federal and State Government financial support to enable the further development of regionally and frequently workplace delivered education and training will be essential.

3. Renewable Energy

Whyalla Campus has recently been granted a node of the Renewable Energy CRC. We are currently involved (with Whyalla City Council) in a feasibility study for the Solar Oasis Project: utilising state of the art parabolic solar power generators (developed by ANU) which also provide salt and desalinated water as by-products.

The Campus Dean Chairs Whyalla Eco Development Board's Sustainable Energy Target Group.

The Campus also provides solar monitoring data to CSIRO.

Summary

This submission has been developed to demonstrate the central role played by Whyalla Campus of the University of South Australia in regional development. It also documents specific projects which are making significant differences to the economic viability of one of Australia's most depressed regions.

A J Harvey
Dean
Whyalla Campus
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