

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee**  
**Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities**

**Introduction**

The Australian National University (ANU) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities. ANU plays a special role in its immediate geographical region and in providing broader access to higher education opportunities for rural and regional students across Australia. *The Australian National University Act 1991* (Cth) at section 5(2) provides that, in the performance of its functions, the ANU “must pay attention to its national and international roles and to the needs of the Australian Capital Territory and the surrounding regions.”

Expanding educational access in rural and regional areas will be key to meeting the Australian Government's new participation targets, given the underrepresentation of rural students at university (only about 18 per cent of 18 to 20-year-olds from rural and regional areas attend university, compared with 25 per cent for metropolitan areas: *The Australian Higher Education Supplement*, 17 June 2009). ANU commends the Government for aspiring to a goal of 40% of Australians aged 25 to 34 years holding a qualification at Bachelor level or above by 2025. Such commitments are central to the nation’s long-term prosperity. If the objective is to be achieved, however, the participation and completion rates of students from rural and regional areas will need to increase significantly.

Although the Inquiry is considering secondary and vocational and technical education as well as higher education, the comments that follow are restricted to the higher education system.

**Reponses to the Terms of Reference**

***(a) The financial impact on rural and regional students who are attending metropolitan secondary schools, Universities or TAFE***

In 2009, ANU estimated the minimum annual costs of students attending the University who live away from home as follows:

Accommodation	\$8320*	per annum	\$160 per week
Food	\$6240	per annum	\$120 per week
Photocopying	\$1092	per annum	\$21 per week
Transport	\$1040	per annum	\$20 per week
Entertainment	\$1456	per annum	\$28 per week
Phone	\$1560	per annum	\$30 per week
Incidentals	\$1040	per annum	\$20 per week
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$20,748.00</b>		

\* Based on the lowest rate of on campus self catered accommodation; noting that ANU residential fees are significantly lower than their major metropolitan equivalents.

***(b) The educational alternatives for rural and regional students wanting to study in regional areas.***

Students wishing to undertake higher education and continue to reside in their region face a number of difficulties.

Regional universities tend not to offer the range of courses and academic programs that many universities located in large metropolitan centres can offer. Thus a student wishing to continue to reside in a regional area and attend university there may be severely restricted in the sort of academic program, and consequently career, s/he is able to pursue.

The ANU is responding to this issue in two ways. The University is currently developing agreements with partner universities in rural and regional areas to make some ANU subjects available for credit towards awards undertaken at the partner institutions, to help provide greater breadth and depth in certain discipline areas. Students in these partner institutions will also gain easier access to ANU educational programs through the establishment of articulation arrangements and joint degree programs.

The University is also working to establish a Foundation Degree in partnership with two regional universities. Foundation Degrees were developed in the UK in 2001 to address the need for widening participation in higher education and anticipated future skills deficits. Foundation Degrees are stand alone higher education qualifications. Their intention is to develop both skills and knowledge and produce graduates who can contribute at a high level in their workplace.

Foundation Degrees consist of a mixture of academic courses and courses formulated and assessed in the workplace. All courses, including the workplace based ones, are credit bearing. They specifically target the needs of a local industry or employer. Subject to the availability of Government support, ANU intends to establish Foundation Degrees with partner universities in regional Australia that respond to the educational needs of local students and the skills needs of local employers. Graduates of Foundation Degrees will have guaranteed acceptance into ANU Bachelor degree programs with full academic credit.

***(c) The implications of current and proposed measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas.***

The changes to student income support announced in the May 2009 Budget, taking effect from January 2010, should generally benefit students residing in rural and regional areas, many of whom come from low SES backgrounds. A single student with no dependents on maximum Youth Allowance who relocates to undertake study might be eligible for the \$371.00 per fortnight in Youth Allowance; \$74.00 a fortnight in rent assistance and can earn up to \$400 per fortnight without reduction in Youth Allowance. Combined with the new Start-up and Relocation Scholarships as an automatic entitlement for eligible Youth Allowance recipients, such a student would have an income equivalent to the income estimated by ANU required for a student to live independently, if very modestly.

While not all students will be eligible for the maximum levels of support assumed in this scenario, nonetheless the student income reform package should improve the level of support available to low SES students, many of whom reside in rural and regional Australia, who genuinely need public support to access educational opportunities. In the case of ANU, it will assist more disadvantaged students to access an ANU education by facilitating relocation to Canberra and providing living support while away from home.

***(d) The short and long term impact of current and proposed government policies on regional university and TAFE college enrolments.***

In the May 2009 Budget the Government announced a number of measures to support regional Universities, including structural adjustment funding.

Structural adjustment funding will encourage and enable universities to form new partnerships, and help regional universities work with metropolitan institutions, and vice versa. In the case of the alliances ANU is establishing with a number of regional partners, these will result in enriched subject offerings for students (both regional and metropolitan) and expanded pathways to a greater range of degree options. This might encourage students to continue to reside in their regional base for some significant part of their studies, rather than have to move straight out of school to a metropolitan university to gain the program of their choice, and hence could produce a rise in enrolments at regional universities.

Such collaborations will also enable regional universities to increase their research profiles by facilitating collaboration with staff in more research-intense universities through 'hubs and spokes' arrangements.

***(e) The adequacy of Government measures to provide for students who are required to leave home for secondary or post secondary study.***

ANU commends the Australian Government for establishing the new of Relocation scholarships in the May 2009 Budget. These scholarships will assist with the costs associated with relocating to pursue higher education for those students with insufficient family means who have to move away from home to get to university at all, or to access the course of their choice. In combination with other student support measures announced in the Budget, they improve significantly on existing policy frameworks and represent a fairer and more equitable system.

***(f) The educational needs of rural and regional students.***

Quite often, secondary students residing in rural and regional areas lack access to the educational support available to students in metropolitan areas. Key to addressing this is creating new entry pathways into university for rural and regional students. ANU believes that a Foundation Degree program, as outlined above, will help achieve this, noting that students who complete such a program will gain access with standing into several Bachelor degree programs. Also, a well-developed Foundation Degree program will increase the skill base of the rural and regional workforce and help sustain regional communities.

Lifting the educational aspirations of young people early on in rural and regional areas is also critical if they are to gain a desire to pursue further education. Recognising this, the ANU has established a Regional Partnerships Program whereby undergraduate students visit secondary schools in the regional centres surrounding the ACT and on the NSW south coast as Community Ambassadors. These ANU students work with both school students and teachers and their presence enables the secondary students to gain an understanding of higher education. School students in rural and regional areas simply do not get the same opportunities to interact with universities as do their city peers. In order to engage students from low SES and rural and regional backgrounds, the ANU is working to encourage them, in the early years of high school, to consider university education when they leave school.

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