



Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the inquiry into:

**Rural and regional access to secondary and tertiary education opportunities.**

The University of Notre Dame Australia operates three campuses, two in Western Australia and one in New South Wales. Two of the campuses are in major cities and one is in the remote location of Broome in the North West of Western Australia. The Broome Campus offers undergraduate courses in Aboriginal Studies, Education and Nursing as well as postgraduate courses in Aboriginal Studies and Education. The Campus is also a Registered Training Organisation and offers a number of Vocational Education and Training courses which provide Indigenous and non-Indigenous students with pathways into Higher Education degree courses.

There are a number of issues which impact on students who study on a remote or regional campus. In no particular order of priority, we would note them as follows.

## **1. Transport**

Many students who travel to the Broome Campus are confronted by excessively high transport costs for either fuel or airfares. The distances travelled are much greater than in metropolitan areas. For instance, the two closest population centres to Broome are Port Hedland 600 km away and Derby 220 km.

The availability of public transport is also a concern. If students do not have their own vehicle they require access to either airlines or a regional bus service such as *Greyhound*. Students from remote communities need to drive over unsealed roads in a 4WD vehicle or charter a plane.

Away From Base funding is essential to assist students to cover costs of transport, particularly those travelling from remote communities.

## **2. Technology**

More and more education is reliant on online learning. This is dependent on Information Technology infrastructure which is not always available or is unreliable in remote locations. If it is available the cost of internet connection and communications can also be a barrier to a student's ability to access online learning.

## **3. Accommodation**

All students who attend university or vocational training away from home require accommodation. The cost of this can be high, particularly in areas where students are competing with those seeking accommodation in areas where there has been a resources boom. This also impacts on the availability of rental accommodation.

#### **4. Austudy/Abstudy**

To cover their living expenses students find they need to gain employment to supplement their Austudy payments. Often students need to carry only a 50% study load to allow them to earn sufficient finances to support themselves. This then effects their Austudy payments as they are required to student full time to receive financial assistance.

For those Aboriginal students receiving Abstudy, their families are often reliant on this payment to provide for the families food and accommodation needs in their communities. However, these students must also pay costs associated with undertaking further studies.

#### **5. Course Offerings**

The smaller numbers of students attending a regional campus limits the range of courses that can be offered on the campus. This, in turn, further limits student numbers and course offerings.

#### **6. Regional Loading**

Notre Dame believes that the current Regional Loading for university campuses is inequitable. For this reason the University strongly supports Recommendation 16 of the Bradley Review of Higher Education.

##### *Recommendation 16*

*That, after further consideration of current problems with regional provision, the Australian Government provide an additional \$80 million per year from 2012 in funding for sustainable higher education provision in regional areas to replace the existing regional loading. This should include funding to develop innovative local solutions through a range of flexible and collaborative delivery arrangements in partnership with other providers such as TAFE.*

#### **7. Access to Higher Education**

The Broome Campus is in a region of very low participation rates in higher education. The University believes that participation rates in higher education for people living in the Kimberley must be increased towards the targets established by the Bradley Review. Notre Dame supports both Recommendation 2 and Recommendation 4.

##### *Recommendation 2*

*That the Australian Government set a national target of at least 40 per cent of 25- to 34-year-olds having attained a qualification at bachelor level or above by 2020.*

##### *Recommendation 4*

*That the Australian Government set a national target that, by 2020, 20 per cent of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level are people from low socio-economic status backgrounds.*

## **8. New Approaches to Regional Higher Education**

Notre Dame strongly supports initiatives flagged by the Bradley Review which will focus Government on access to education for remote regions. The University supports Recommendation 18.

### *Recommendation 18*

*That the Australian Government initiate a process with key stakeholders to determine the needs of outer metropolitan and regional areas for higher education and the best ways to respond to those needs.*

However Notre Dame does not support Recommendation 17 of the Bradley view. It is the University's position that local campuses in the region are more likely to meet the needs of the local people.

### *Recommendation 17*

*That the Australian Government commission a study to examine the feasibility of a new national university for regional areas and, if the study indicates that a new national regional university is feasible, the Australian Government provide appropriate funding for its establishment and operation.*