



## Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities

### Submission by Deakin University

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### ***A note about Deakin University:***

*Deakin University was established in Geelong in 1974. Initially, its aim was to provide educational opportunities for people who had missed out on accessing higher education upon leaving school; many of its programs were offered by distance education. Since then it has merged with the Warrnambool Institute of Advanced Education to form a Warrnambool Campus (1990) and with Victoria College (1991) bringing with it several metropolitan locations which have now been consolidated as the Melbourne Campus at Burwood. The University now has four Campuses: its head office at the Geelong Waterfront Campus; its foundation Campus – the Geelong Campus at Waurn Ponds; the Melbourne Campus at Burwood; and the Warrnambool Campus. The initial focus on distance education has now been replaced by a commitment to flexible education.*

*In 2008 enrolments at Deakin were as follows:*

| Campus/Mode                    | 2008          |               |
|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
|                                | EFTSL         | Enrols.       |
| Melbourne Campus at Burwood    | 14,782        | 18,168        |
| Geelong Campus at Waurin Ponds | 3,751         | 4,423         |
| Geelong Waterfront Campus      | 1,786         | 2,080         |
| Warrnambool Campus             | 903           | 1,069         |
| Off Campus                     | 3,888         | 10,607        |
| Off Shore                      | 479           | 786           |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>25,589</b> | <b>37,133</b> |

*The University's core commitments include commitments to:*

- *rural and regional engagement;*
- *continuing education and life-long learning;*
- *equity and access for individuals and groups who might not otherwise enjoy the benefits that flow from participation in higher education.*

*Deakin University's Strategic Plan is entitled Delivering Effective Partnerships. The goal for rural and regional engagement, as set out in Delivering Effective Partnerships is:*

*To advance the interests and aspirations of communities in rural and regional Australia, with a particular emphasis on Geelong and Western Victoria, by developing distinctive, lasting and beneficial education, research, economic, social and cultural partnerships, and providing knowledge, expertise and resources that will contribute to the life of those communities.*

## **Submission**

Deakin University has previously written to the Chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport suggesting that the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry be revised to include consideration of rural and regional students attending regional universities at a distance from their home. Failure to consider this group would be most regrettable.

The following alternative wording was put forward to replace the introductory paragraph of the Terms of Reference:

An assessment of the adequacy of Government measures to provide equitable access to secondary and post-secondary education opportunities to students from rural and regional communities attending metropolitan AND REGIONAL institutions AT A DISTANCE FROM

THEIR HOME LOCATION, and metropolitan students attending regional universities or technical and further education (TAFE) colleges ... .

This submission addresses selected aspects of the Terms of Reference, including the suggested broader Terms of Reference. It highlights:

- Alternative delivery modes for regional students
- Changes to attitudes and to culture and appropriate financial incentives that are required to achieve the Government's attainment goals
- Costs of operating regional higher education campuses and alternative delivery modes
- The contribution of regional higher education campuses to regional communities and economies.

**Term of Reference b. the education alternatives for rural and regional students wanting to study in regional areas**

Rural and regional students can study at a regional campus in their area, if there is one, or at a regional campus in a different location.

Regional campuses attract students not only from their surrounding district, but also rural and regional students from elsewhere in Australia. It is regrettable that the introductory paragraph to the Terms of Reference does not recognise this.

Some 50% of the students living in the student residences at Deakin University's Warrnambool Campus are from Victorian regional locations outside the Warrnambool district. Regional campuses also attract students from metropolitan areas. For example, many of the students studying Environmental Management, Marine Biology and Freshwater Biology and Management at Deakin University's Warrnambool Campus and Occupational Therapy and Architecture at Deakin University's Geelong Waterfront Campus are from metropolitan locations.

Deakin University's Strategic Plan – *Delivering Effective Partnerships* – commits the University to the following strategies:

Offering general and professional teaching programs at the Geelong and Warrnambool Campuses that demonstrate ongoing demand sufficient to ensure the quality of the educational experiences and outcomes for students undertaking those programs

Offering specialist and niche teaching programs that attract students to the Geelong and Warrnambool Campuses from outside the relevant regions

Rural and regional students can study 'off-campus' (by distance education).

Deakin University has a long tradition of “off-campus” delivery of higher education. This offers an alternative access mode for rural and regional students. Off-campus study (or distance education) involves students studying the same course as on-campus students, but, instead of attending on-campus classes, they receive comprehensive study materials. These may include study guides, reading lists and audio and video tapes. Off-campus students are supported through Deakin University's library service and interactive study methods including:

- Online conferencing - Deakin's use of online technologies means that studying off-campus doesn't feel like studying at a distance. For peer support and for group and individual communication between our staff members and students, online conferencing is an increasingly important part of our teaching and learning environment.
- Tutorial and tele-tutorial groups - Depending on local enrolments in the same units, Deakin can form these groups between students and a University appointed tutor.
- Weekend schools - These are conducted in some courses to enable students to meet academic staff members and fellow students. Depending on the unit, the school is usually held only once each Trimester, over one or two weekend days; it is usually not compulsory to attend.

In 2008 34% of Deakin University's domestic students were enrolled in off-campus mode; 64% of these students lived outside the Melbourne metropolitan area.

Thus, the education alternatives for rural and regional students wanting to study in regional areas include off-campus study from their home locations.

Rural and regional students can take advantage of the pathways and partnerships which some universities have with TAFE Institutes which allow students to study in their rural and regional communities.

In 2010 Deakin University will introduce an Associate Degree of Arts, Business and Sciences as part of the *Deakin at Your Doorstep* program. *Deakin at Your Doorstep*, which is funded by the Australian Government's Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund, is an example of a program designed to maximise the chance of success for rural and regional people unfamiliar with higher education. It will commence in 2010 at Deakin's Warrnambool Campus and in partnership with three Victorian TAFE Institutes - Sunraysia, East Gippsland and Chisholm. The program:

- permits regional Victorians to study for an Associate Degree that articulates into a Bachelor Degree, using interactive e-learning blended with face to face learning. The program is designed to encourage increased access to, and participation in, tertiary education by people who would not otherwise gain a university place.
- draws on the infrastructure of TAFE campuses in regional areas and supplements it with high speed broadband, interactive electronic and video learning technology and the best available pedagogy.

- is a cost effective alternative to a series of small stand alone rural or regional university campuses because it shares physical and some human infrastructure with another partner.
- is designed to engage students by bringing together people studying a number of disciplines for interactive learning in a peer group of sufficient size for a quality educational experience.
- includes specialisations that have been selected in consultation with each partner rural community to meet local skill needs.

Lack of family familiarity with higher education due to past barriers to access means that rural and regional residents are less likely to aspire to university than their metropolitan counterparts. Appropriate support for the students who are the first in their families to attend university comes at a cost to universities.

Of the students studying at Deakin from rural and regional areas, a staggering 63% are the first in their family to study at university. School leavers and others from rural and regional areas embarking on university study for the first time require appropriate support. Deakin's experience is that with right support to engage students early in their studies, this group goes on to achieve at the same level as other students. Residential accommodation can provide a supportive environment that helps students become engaged in their study.

Higher education is not as accessible for rural residents as for their metropolitan counterparts. Thirty percent of 2008 Victorian school completers from non metropolitan areas enrolled at university in 2009 compared to 49% of school completers from metropolitan areas.<sup>1</sup>

There is some way to go if regional Australia is to contribute to the meeting of the Government's target of at least 40% of all 25-34 year olds having a Bachelor degree or higher qualification by 2025. For example, Australian Bureau of Statistics Census figures show that, at the 2006 Census, 20% of 25-34 year olds in the Barwon and Western District of Victoria had attained this education level compared to 30% of all Victorians; many regions have even lower attainment levels as they do not have a regional university campus, the presence of which raises aspirations to attend university.

There is much work to be done to change attitudes and culture in addition to identifying and implementing appropriate financial incentives if participation is to be increased to achieve the Government's attainment goals.

A realistic regional loading would allow universities to expand rural and regional educational alternatives for the benefit of students and their regions.

The costs of delivery to the smaller class sizes typical in regional locations constrain the ability of universities with regional campuses to meet regional needs.

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<sup>1</sup> VTAC data

Deakin University receives a loading of some \$600,000 annually from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Regional Loading Program in respect of its two Geelong Campuses and its Warrnambool Campus, yet Deakin subsidises its Warrnambool Campus alone to the extent of \$10 million per year. A realistic loading would be ten times the level of the Regional Loading Program as currently structured, costing the Federal Government around \$290 million per year nationally.

The delivery mode for the *Deakin at Your Doorstep* program (see above) is more cost effective than traditional face to face teaching while still providing the support required by regional students not familiar with higher education. Deakin sees opportunities to expand this delivery mode to other courses and other regional locations, given funding for the large upfront capital costs at new sites, for adequate broadband capacity and for the cost of face to face support in regional locations.

**Term of Reference c. the implications of current and proposed government measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas**

Deakin anticipates that many rural and regional students will continue to defer their studies under the proposed measures; this has implications for institutions as well as students (see comments in relation to Term of Reference d. below).

Lack of family familiarity with higher education (see comments in relation to Term of Reference b. above) means that rural and regional residents are less likely to aspire to university than their metropolitan counterparts. Rural and regional families do not necessarily give a high priority to higher education in the family budget and are more likely to be discouraged from aspiring to higher education by financial barriers (see also Term of Reference d. below).

**Term of Reference d. the short- and long-term impact of current and proposed government policies on regional university and TAFE college enrolments**

Deakin University has responded to the changed student financial support arrangements by increasing the time a student is permitted to defer from one year to up to two years.

Deferrals are already high and are likely to rise.

Under previous arrangements, deferral rates were higher for non-metropolitan than metropolitan Victoria. Analysis of Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) data shows that 19.7% of VTAC applicants offered places at Deakin in 2008 deferred their studies, including 20% of those from Barwon which includes Geelong where Deakin has two campuses. Deferral rates are higher for students enrolling at Deakin from regional areas further away from a University Campus and reach over 60% for the Ovens Murray region and 55.3 for the East Gippsland region.

**Table 1: Analysis of Deakin VTAC Enrolled Applicants by Region – Selected Regions**

| Region | Deferred | Full-time | Part-time | Total "Enrolled" | % of All deferrals | % from the Region who deferred |
|--------|----------|-----------|-----------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
|--------|----------|-----------|-----------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|

|                   |             |             |            |             |               |              |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| Melbourne         | 425         | 2927        | 153        | 3505        | 38.4%         | 12.1%        |
| Barwon            | 158         | 592         | 37         | 787         | 14.3%         | 20.1%        |
| Western District  | 138         | 198         | 18         | 354         | 12.5%         | 39.0%        |
| Interstate        | 67          | 95          | 8          | 170         | 6.1%          | 39.4%        |
| Goulburn          | 60          | 77          | 4          | 141         | 5.4%          | 42.6%        |
| Central Highlands | 53          | 66          | 4          | 123         | 4.8%          | 43.1%        |
| Gippsland         | 47          | 119         | 5          | 171         | 4.2%          | 27.5%        |
| East Gippsland    | 42          | 34          |            | 76          | 3.8%          | 55.3%        |
| Ovens-Murray      | 40          | 26          |            | 66          | 3.6%          | 60.6%        |
| Loddon            | 35          | 58          | 4          | 97          | 3.2%          | 36.1%        |
| Wimmera           | 23          | 34          | 3          | 60          | 2.1%          | 38.3%        |
| Mallee            | 17          | 22          | 2          | 41          | 1.5%          | 41.5%        |
| Unknown           | 1           | 25          | 1          | 27          | 0.1%          | 3.7%         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>      | <b>1106</b> | <b>4273</b> | <b>239</b> | <b>5618</b> | <b>100.0%</b> | <b>19.7%</b> |

Source: VTAC Masterfile 2008

Of concern is the large proportion of deferrals who do not subsequently take up their place. Research commissioned by the Victorian LLENs<sup>2</sup> shows that financial considerations were the reason why 66.4% of regional 2007 Year 12 deferrers did not take up their place immediately. It is anticipated that the proportion of those who defer who do not subsequently take up their place could be even larger if students defer for two years so as to qualify for Youth Allowance.

Deakin University has recently introduced a Trimester academic calendar. We are investigating ways of using the Trimester system to spread a light study load over the two year period to encourage students to commence their studies even while working to qualify for Youth Allowance.

#### **Term of Reference f. the educational needs of rural and regional students**

A high proportion of rural and regional students prefer to study in their home location if their chosen course is available.

<sup>2</sup> Polesel, J (2008) *Deferring a University Offer in Regional Victoria (interim report)* Centre for Post-Compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne

There are two aspects to the educational needs of students in relation to higher education: first, the delivery and pedagogical issues discussed in relation to Term of Reference b. above; and, secondly, course content.

Rural and regional students' course preferences fall across the spectrum of disciplines, as can be seen in Table 2 which shows first and second preferences from students in the Barwon and Western District for courses available in these areas and for those outside these areas. Some courses are available within the region, while other courses, or specialisations within them, are not, such as undergraduate medicine and many performing and creative arts and communication and media arts specialisations.

When a course is available in or near their home location, VTAC 2008 Preference data show that more than 80% of students from the Barwon and Western Districts wanting to study education, physical education, nursing, construction management and biological science prefer courses available in their area (that is university campuses in Geelong, Warrnambool and Ballarat). Some students do, of course, wish to move to Melbourne or other locations. Nonetheless, these data indicate that a high proportion of rural and regional students prefer to study in their home location if their chosen course is available there.

**Table 2 Summary of preferences by course groups and area of preferred institution campus - first and second preferences of students from the Barwon and Western District regions (50 or more preferences)**

| Course Group                       | 1st and 2nd Prefs. In Barwon/ West. Dist. | 1st and 2nd Prefs. Outside Barwon/ West. Dist. | Total 1st and 2nd Prefs. |
|------------------------------------|---|--|--------------------------|
| Nursing                            | 780<br>84%                                | 150<br>16%                                     | 930                      |
| Arts                               | 286<br>58%                                | 209<br>42%                                     | 495                      |
| Teaching - Primary                 | 423<br>87%                                | 62<br>13%                                      | 485                      |
| Commerce (Business)                | 271<br>60%                                | 178<br>40%                                     | 449                      |
| Science                            | 135<br>42%                                | 184<br>58%                                     | 319                      |
| Medical/Medical Science            | 9<br>3%                                   | 287<br>97%                                     | 296                      |
| Physical Education                 | 263<br>94%                                | 18<br>6%                                       | 281                      |
| Engineering                        | 87<br>34%                                 | 166<br>66%                                     | 253                      |
| Psychology                         | 196<br>79%                                | 52<br>21%                                      | 248                      |
| Communication and Media/Media Arts | 33<br>14%                                 | 199<br>86%                                     | 232                      |



| Course Group   | 1st and 2nd<br>Prefs. In<br>Barwon/ West.<br>Dist. | 1st and 2nd Prefs.<br>Outside Barwon/<br>West. Dist. | Total 1st and 2nd Prefs. |
|--|--|--|--------------------------|
| Performing and Creative Arts -<br>Music, Visual, Dance and Drama | 10<br>5%   | 205<br>95%   | 215                      |
| Health Science   | 120<br>66%   | 61<br>34%  | 181                      |
| Arts/Commerce (Arts/Business)                                    | 129<br>73%   | 47<br>27%  | 176                      |
| Law/Arts   | 107<br>63%   | 63<br>37%  | 170                      |
| Architecture   | 118<br>70%   | 51<br>30%  | 169                      |
| Management   | 103<br>62%   | 63<br>38%  | 166                      |
| Information Technology (Computer<br>Science)                     | 90<br>70%  | 39<br>30%  | 129                      |
| Government and Community - Social<br>Work                        | 79<br>64%  | 44<br>36%  | 123                      |
| Teaching - Primary and Secondary                                 | 93<br>76%  | 29<br>24%  | 122                      |
| Environment and Ecology  | 5<br>4%  | 113<br>96%   | 118                      |
| Law  | 79<br>75%  | 27<br>25%  | 106                      |
| International Studies  | 47<br>45%  | 57<br>55%  | 104                      |
| Education  | 93<br>100%   | 0<br>0%  | 93                       |
| Human Movement/Sports Coaching<br>and Administration             | 0<br>0%  | 90<br>100%   | 90                       |
| Occupational Therapy   | 61<br>70%  | 26<br>30%  | 87                       |
| Construction Management  | 75<br>90%  | 8<br>10%   | 83                       |
| Teaching/Arts  | 24<br>30%  | 56<br>70%  | 80                       |
| Tourism - Hospitality Management                                 | 22<br>35%  | 40<br>65%  | 62                       |
| Sports Management/Sports Science                                 | 17<br>29%  | 42<br>71%  | 59                       |
| Biological Science   | 42<br>81%  | 10<br>19%  | 52                       |

Source: 2008 VTAC Masterfile data

## Term of Reference g. the impact of government measures and proposals on rural and regional communities

While the focus of this inquiry is on individual students and their needs or demand for higher education, rural and regional communities and industries also have a legitimate demand for higher education. Regions need the skills taught in higher education institutions.

A scan of the Victorian Government's Skilled and Business Migration Program's list of occupations wanted in regional Victoria features shortages of health, science and engineering professionals. Health professionals are important to the liveability of our regions; a quality health service is important for attracting skilled workers to a region, as well as for the well being of the existing population; science and engineering are key skills for the industries that will drive our regional economies in the future, industries such as clean energy production, water and food processing.

People who grow up in rural areas are more likely to return to work in rural Australia. For example, it is well established that those health professionals who choose to practise in rural areas are more likely to have come from a rural background and/or had a positive professional placement during their university study.<sup>3</sup> Deakin University's Medical School, which is based at its Geelong Campus at Waurin Ponds, encourages applicants from rural backgrounds and ensures that students are in well supported placements in rural locations including Geelong, Ballarat, Warrnambool, Hamilton, Ararat and Camperdown. The array of scholarship programs for rural residents to study medicine and other health disciplines also recognises the relationship between rural origin or positive rural study experience and rural practice. It is highly likely that the relationships between rural origin and positive rural experience during tertiary study and later rural practise applies similarly to other professions such as accountants, engineers and teachers, many of which are in short supply in rural and regional Australia.

Regional campuses are a resource available for positive change in regional Australia that can be harnessed for a small investment; the economic impact of regional campuses is substantial.

Deakin University's operations at its Geelong and Warrnambool Campuses in 2005 - 2006 were estimated to have accounted for around \$450 million in output, \$215 million in Gross Regional Product (value added to the region), over 1,995 full time equivalent direct and indirect jobs, and \$130 million in household income in the Barwon and Western Districts region of Victoria.<sup>4</sup>

There is a loss of regional spending when families send their children away from their rural or regional homes to study. Two-thirds of all university students are financially dependent on their parents to some extent.<sup>5</sup> The cost of living away from home is estimated to be around \$20,000 per year, per student. This is \$20,000 per year that is not spent in the student's home location. When someone leaves a rural or regional community, depending on family circumstances, some or all of the following is spent outside the local region: money earned by the student from part time work; money paid to the student by way of government assistance; and the proportion of income earned locally by the parents that is spent outside

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<sup>3</sup> See Dunbabin J, Levitt L (2003) Rural origin and rural medical exposure: their impact on the rural and remote medical workforce in Australia *Rural and Remote Health* [cited 23 March 2009]; 3 (online) (212).

<sup>4</sup> Western Research Institute (2007) *Economic impact of Deakin University*. Bathurst, NSW.

<sup>5</sup> NATSEM (2008) *What price the clever country? The costs of tertiary education in Australia*, AMP.NATSEM Income and Wealth Report 21, University of Canberra, Canberra.

the local region. Assuming average family support of one third of costs, for every 50 students studying for a three year degree not provided locally, \$1million would be lost from a regional community.

#### Regional campuses contribute to the social fabric of their regions.

Deakin University participates in regional bodies including G21, the Committee for Geelong and the South West Sustainability Partnership. Bodies such as these are important in setting the future direction and aspirations of their region.

Students and staff contribute to civic life through membership of clubs and associations and leadership roles on bodies such as the South West Sustainability Partnership, Brophy Family and Youth Services and the South West and Geelong Local Learning and Employment Networks.

Regional campuses address the Australian Government's social inclusion and access agendas by providing educational opportunities. The *Deakin at Your Doorstep* program mentioned above and the array of courses offered at Deakin's regional campuses provide examples. The Australian Government has stated its willingness to invest in building national infrastructure as a way of addressing the economic downturn caused by the global financial crisis. The right funding incentive model with a realistic regional loading will improve equity outcomes, encourage regional economic development and employment and the development of sustainable essential services and social infrastructure designed to enhance the liveability of regional Australia.

#### **Conclusion**

Improving access to higher education for rural and regional students requires a range of responses:

- from universities in terms of delivery;
- from regional communities in terms of raising aspirations for higher education and awareness of local skill needs; and, crucially,
- from the Australian Government in terms of incentives for rural and regional students and funding formulas for regional university campuses and delivery.