



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

This submission is made primarily with reference to the situation of students in higher education institutions (or wishing to attend them), although certain remarks will be relevant to students in other educational sectors.

DUSA strongly urges greater government measures to support higher participation and completion rates for students from rural, regional and remote areas. Many of us who are DUSA members are from such backgrounds and known directly the difficulties and challenges of going to higher education. Experiences of rural and regional students have been well-documented in other inquiries.

Higher education funding changes generally

DUSA welcomes changes to higher education policy and funding that have been announced and/or implemented in the last 12 months, from the Bradley Review onwards. In particular, we welcomed the Bradley Review's focus on rural/regional education provision, including greater funding and consideration of a specialist national regional university.

Notwithstanding the Federal Government's budget statements and provisions for rural/regional higher education,¹ DUSA is mindful that within the higher education sector as a whole the actual impact of increased government spending will be to ameliorate to long-term (and, in OECD terms, anomalous) decline in investment. As Professor Marginson has remarked:²

It was not the education revolution. It had been oversold.

It will be six years before near full research funding, four years before near full indexation. These are crucial measures that rebalance the system by creating a sustainable core and halt the growing dependence on massive exports. This gets us back to the mid-1990s policy settings. But these changes merely establish a normal funding system and do not address the global challenges of 2010 to 2020. Nor the planned expansion in participation; the one genuinely forward looking element in the package, has been grossly underfunded.

The problem there is that there has been no change in the funding rate for teaching and learning which in most disciplines falls below cost.

The general levels of public investment in higher education will inevitably have a significant impact on the capacity of rural and regional students to access places and to stay in the system. Further, the sector remains excessively dependant on, and sensitive to, fee income from students (especially international students) and hence the commercialisation strategy that has been strongly encouraged (for the purposes of 'fiscal relief') by successive governments. As we note below, there is evidence that dependence on such commercialisation strategies has been indirectly to the detriment of rural and regional campuses and therefore provision of higher education in these areas.

¹ See generally, Commonwealth of Australia *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* (2009), 40-41

² Simon Marginson 'Teetering on the edge' *Campus Review*, 25 June 2009



If, as Professor Marginson notes, recent budget measures bring the system back to policy settings of the mid-1990s, the series of important critiques made of higher education policy made over the past decade³ cannot be discounted: the crises to which they refer are, perhaps, contained.

Provision of higher education opportunities in regional and rural Australia are significantly affected by levels of public funding generally in the sector, and are arguably more sensitive to the question of public funding.⁴ DUSA submits that action on access to tertiary educational opportunities for rural and regional students cannot be abstracted from public funding to the sectors overall. In this regard, we submit that, at a minimum, Australian governments need to increase levels of public funding as a tertiary education proportion of GDP be increased in the short- to medium-term to the OECD average: that is, from 0.8% of GDP to 1% of GDP.⁵

Our submission focuses on three more specific issues impacting on regional and rural students' access to higher education: student income support; provision of tertiary education in rural and regional areas; provision of infrastructure and serves facilitating educational opportunities.

Student income support

Recent changes to student income support announced by the Federal Government are welcomed. However, DUSA remains concerned about the administration and introduction of changes to workplace eligibility criteria, which will likely disadvantage many students taking a 'gap year' in order to save money for university studies and establish eligibility for student income support. Additionally, DUSA concurs with criticisms of problems likely to be faced by students undertaking seasonal work in achieving eligibility for income support.⁶ Many students from rural areas use seasonal employment in order to fund their studies through the semester.

³ Eg Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee *Universities In Crisis* (2000); Senate Employment Education, and Workplace Relations References Committee *Student Income Support* (2005); Senate Employment Education, and Workplace Relations Committee *Hacking Australia's Future: Threats To Institutional Autonomy, Academic Freedom And Student Choice In Australian Higher Education* (2003).

⁴ See eg Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee *Universities In Crisis* (2000), [10.80]: 'The Committee agrees that there is a need to review the funding model with particular reference to the special needs and circumstances of regional universities...'

⁵ See Simon Marginson *Education: Australia and the OECD* Australian Policy Online (2007), <http://apo.org.au/commentary/education-australia-and-oecd>, 14

⁶ See eg Senate Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Committee *Budget Estimates Hansard* (4 June 2009), 50, regarding administration of the workplace participation criteria:

Senator BACK—Eighteen months. So it is not 2,250 hours, which is what a 30-hour week equates to. If they did 90 or 100 hours while the crop is going in or when the crayfishing season is on or whatever, that would not count for more than 30 hours in that week, and in the weeks that they cannot find 30 hours of paid employment then they effectively do not qualify?

Dr Moorhead—I think that they would not qualify for the independent rate of youth allowance. You have to go back to the family incomes that you spoke about.

Determination of independent status under workforce participation criteria includes the test that students work 30 hrs work/week for 18 months over a two year period. Calculation of participation, according to DEEWR officials, refers to 'a minimum weekly figure' rather than an average: Senate Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Committee *Budget Estimates Hansard* (4 June 2009), 49-50.



DUSA recommends that the 30 hrs work per week rule in respect of the workforce participation criteria be calculated as an quantum averaged out over the two year period.

Further, DUSA supports any amendments to change the date of implementation of changes to the workforce participation criteria for Youth Allowance from 1 January 2010 to 1 January 2011.

Provision of tertiary education in rural and regional areas

The presence of university campuses in regional areas has a range of major benefits that have been widely recognised, including providing greater access to tertiary education, employment and social benefits to regional communities, and support for regional industries.⁷ Further, development of higher education in rural and regional areas in Australia has historically been associated with the development of important initiatives in 'distance' or 'off-campus' education, and this mode of educational provision continues to be strongly associated with universities in rural/regional areas or with rural/regional campuses. Access to 'off-campus' education is integral to any strategy for access to educational opportunities in rural/regional areas. For Koori and other indigenous students, provision of tertiary educational institutions (or other bodies within universities) in regional areas, especially where these are specialist entities, is crucial to the access and participation of indigenous students in tertiary education. A significant proportion of indigenous students are from, or live in, rural, regional or remote parts of Australia.⁸

DUSA recommends that the Australian government resolve as a matter of priority mechanisms for appropriate indexation and loading of public funding for rural and regional institutions/campuses, having regard, among other things, to relevant (dis)economies of scale, contribution of those institutions to regional social, political and economic development, and significance of such institutions to the right to education⁹ and to educational equality and justice for citizens in rural and regional areas.

DUSA also recommends that public funding for Australian higher education shift, as a matter of priority, from a strategic reliance on commercialisation strategies, above all on dependence on fee income from international students. Authors such as Marginson¹⁰

⁷ See generally Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee *Universities In Crisis* (2000), [10.1]-[10.80]. See also eg Bronwyn Ellis, Julie Watkinson and Janet Sawyer 'Working Together To Make Things Happen: New On-Campus Higher Education Opportunities In A Regional Centre' (2008) 35 *The Australian Educational Researcher* 3 71; Chrys Gunasekara 'Universities And Associative Regional Governance: Australian Evidence In Non-Core Metropolitan Regions' (2006) 40 *Regional Studies* 7 727.

⁸ Generally, see Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Committee *Katu Kalpa - Report On The Inquiry Into The Effectiveness Of Education And Training Programs For Indigenous Australians* (2000) Chs 7, 9; Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education 'Submission No. 170 to Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee Inquiry into the capacity of public universities to meet Australia's higher education needs' (2000)

⁹ Compare HREOC *Rural And Remote Education Inquiry* (2000)

¹⁰ Simon Marginson 'Submission No 81 to Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee Inquiry into the capacity of public universities to meet Australia's higher education needs' (2000)

and Quiggin¹¹ have submitted important evidence in other inquiries in support of the dysfunctional and distortive effects of the commercialisation strategy on the university sector's 'core business' of teaching, learning and research. It is DUSA's submission that, on evidence available from Deakin University, the commercialisation strategy centred on international students has a significant disadvantageous effect on the development of regional/rural campuses. In Deakin's case, the strategy has led to a relatively greater focus on its Melbourne (Burwood) campus than on other regional (Geelong, Warrnambool) campuses. This trend arises from relative concentration of international students on the Melbourne campus, and concentrated enrolments in the Business and Law faculty.

In 2007, Deakin University's overall performance for enrolment (access) of students from rural and regional areas was above the State and National average, and the University ranked third (behind the University of Ballarat and La Trobe University) in enrolment of students from these backgrounds.¹² In this respect, the University's performance is consistent with trends for universities with regional/rural campuses to 'provide some buffer against competition for university places.'¹³ Further, that performance is arguably consistent with the statutory objects of the University under its founding legislation: *inter alia* to maintain a university in the Geelong region.¹⁴ Yet, as the *Student Equity Report* notes this participation is highly skewed between campuses: 'on the Warrnambool campus, the 2008 interim participation rate of regional students is 70.3%, while on the Burwood campus, it is just 8.2%.'¹⁵

These data can be read alongside data on international student load. Fees from international student enrolments form a central plank of the University's commercialisation strategy, as is the case with the rest of the sector. Consideration of 'internationalisation' can therefore be considered alongside 'rurality' to obtain a sense of the impact commercialisation strategy on regional and rural campuses. This relationship can be seen to be mediated through the Faculty of Business and Law in particular. In this respect, the central role

First, the performance of the University with respect to enrolment of rural/regional students by Faculty is shown in Table 2. This ranking shows that the lowest proportion of rural/regional students by Faculty is in the Faculty of Business and Law. This Faculty was also (with respect to available data) the only one with a proportion of rural/regional students below the 2005 State and National average.

The rural/regional orientation of campuses is focused toward those located in rural/regional areas and way from the (major) metropolitan campus. The rural/regional orientation of Faculties is focused toward sciences and away from Business and Law.

Coextensively, the Faculty of Business and Law is by far the most 'internationalised' Faculty in the University, with around 40% of its student load comprising international

¹¹ Professor John Quiggin 'Submission No 49 to Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee Inquiry into the capacity of public universities to meet Australia's higher education needs' (2000)

¹² Deakin University *Student Equity Report 2007*, 15-16

¹³ *Ibid*, 16

¹⁴ *Deakin University Act 1974* (Vic), s 5(a). That section also includes further prescription of that object, at subs 5(ab) that the University is 'maintain campuses of the University at Geelong, Warrnambool, Burwood, Malvern and such other place or places as are prescribed by the Statutes.'

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 15

students: Table 1. This is more than twice the rate of the next most ‘internationalised’ or ‘commercialised’ Faculty, Science and Technology.

Table 3 shows in more detail the concentration of students by metropolitan and regional campuses by Faculty, which is to say students’ primary campus regardless of where they have come from (eg rural/regional area, overseas). Consistent with trends noted in Table 2, there is a significantly higher proportion of Business and Law student load at the metropolitan (Burwood) campus in comparison with regional campuses: 68.59% of Business and Law students are at the Melbourne campus, as against around 58% for Arts and Education, 54% for Health, Medicine, Nursing and Behavioural Sciences, and 41% for Science and Technology. The highest rate of regional campus student load is in the Faculty of Science and Technology (52.68%).

What these data sets infer is that greater rates of commercialisation of higher education (as evidenced by engagement in the international student ‘industry’) tend to orientate education provision toward metropolitan campuses as distinct from regional/rural campuses. This phenomenon is in addition to other distortive curricular effects of commercialisation, via the international student market, as noted, for instance, by Marginson.¹⁶

While it may be the case that revenues from international student fees cross-subsidise activities on rural/regional campuses, commercialisation has produced a trend to *urbanisation* of institutional activity. The only meaningful response to this situation is to shift away from funding models that produce institutional dependence on commercial/international student fee revenues. This evidence reinforces findings that maintenance, development and expansion of higher education in regional areas can only be achieved through *proportionately greater expansion of public funding to the higher education system*. As Professor John Quiggin has remarked: ‘More public funding is not a complete solution to the near-collapse of higher education, but without it here is no possible solution.’¹⁷

¹⁶ See Simon Marginson ‘Submission No. 81 to Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee Inquiry into the capacity of public universities to meet Australia’s higher education needs’ (2000), [46]-[47]:

The international program rests to an increasing extent on a narrow band of general-vocational fields in Business Studies and Computing, provided via coursework vocational programs. There has been a shift away from intensive formation in the academic disciplines, including science-based training, in two senses: the areas that have grown most rapidly provide a different kind of education, especially Business Studies; and the role of international research degrees has declined. Business courses mostly focus on skill development and specialised applied knowledge, rather than immersion in discipline-based knowledge and the formation of discipline-specific research techniques. They also tend to be Anglo-American and monocultural in content, thus missing the more extended opportunities for cultural mixing and deeper learning that international education presents. The consequences for the domestic system are that resources for Business Studies have grown much faster than resources for the science-based disciplines. The outcome has been a less than optimum allocation of resources... The fully commercial approach to international education not only creates these distortions in the domestic capacity of higher education; it also restricts the potential policy objectives that an international education can fulfill..

¹⁷ Professor John Quiggin ‘Submission No. 49 to Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee Inquiry into the capacity of public universities to meet Australia’s higher education needs’ (2000), 40

Table 1: International student load by campus and faculty, Deakin University 2009

	A&E	B&L	HMNBS	S&T	Other ¹⁸	Total intern student load	Total all student load	Total intern/all students (%)
Melbourne (Burwood)	315	3222	488	296	43	4364	14630	29.83
Waurm Ponds	32	61	20	248	5	366	3862	9.48
Waterfront	0	0	48	123	4	175	1841	9.51
Warrnambool	0	10	0	8	4	22	905	2.43
Off-campus	44	41	13	5	2	105	3911	3.05
Total international¹⁹	391	3334	569	680	58	5032	-	-
Total all students	7891	8201	5199	3756	101	-	25148	-
International/all students (%)	4.96	40.65	10.94	18.1	57.43	-	-	20.39

(Source: Deakin University *EFTSL Performance By Owning Faculty, Campus And Funding Category* (2009), <http://www.deakin.edu.au/planning-unit/statistics/stat-reports/student-load-reports.php#timeseries>)

Table 2: Proportion rural students by Faculty (%)

Faculty	2007 rural students	State 2005	National 2005
HMNBS	22.4	16.5	17.5
S&T	22.4		
Education	21.7		
Arts	18.2		
B&L	14.9		

(Source: Deakin University *Student Equity Report 2007*, Table 4.2.5, 28)

Table 3: Deakin University student load by campus and faculty, 2009

	A&E		B&L		HMNBS		S&T		Other	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Melbourne	4574	57.96	5626	68.59	2812	54.1	1556	41.44	62	60.78
All regional ²⁰	1683	20.76	1095	13.35	1835	35.3	1978	52.68	17	16.67
Off-campus	1635	20.72	1481	18.06	551	10.6	221	5.89	23	22.55
Total ²¹	7892	100	8202	100	5198	100	3755	100	102	100

(Source: Deakin University *EFTSL Performance By Owning Faculty, Campus And Funding Category* (2009), <http://www.deakin.edu.au/planning-unit/statistics/stat-reports/student-load-reports.php#timeseries>)

Measuring socio-economic participation

We would note that while the issue of socio-economic status is important to participation in education, the current basis for measuring that factor is misleading and ought to be changed. The current measure of SES status by postcode does not

¹⁸ Cross-institutional load

¹⁹ All data excludes off-shore enrolments and load

²⁰ Ie Geelong Waterfront, Geelong Waurm Ponds, Warrnambool

²¹ Excluding off-shore enrolments. May not equal 100% because of exclusion of off-shore load.



accurately reveal the actual SES situation of students. We concur with remarks made by Professor Marginson:²²

DETYA collects socio-economic status data on the postcode composition, but this is not only a blunt research tool, it can be a poor guide to the actual trend. First, the socio-economic composition of postcodes is subject to change over time, and over decades these changes can be very marked (for example, in the case of gentrifying inner-city suburbs). Second, there are significant internal variations within all postcode districts. The aggregating of data from within a postcode creates an averaging effect. Yet variations may be greater in some districts than others; and student participation may be more selective in one postcode district than another. Postcode data collapses such variations.

It would be better to collect annual data using the standard socio-economic data such as parental income, parental occupations, parental education and students' own incomes.

Provision of infrastructure and services integral to educational opportunities for rural and regional students (or prospective students), including on-campus services

We note that the Federal Government has put forward legislation to provide for funding and regulation of student services and amenities in the higher education sector: *Higher Education Legislation (Student Services And Amenities, And Other Measures) Bill 2009*. The measures provided for in this Bill would be a considerable improvement over existing 'VSU' arrangements. We note that in the *The Impact of Voluntary Student Unionism on Services, Amenities and Representation for Australian University Students: Summary Report*, released as part of the process of reviewing on-campus services and support, it was found that

Most submissions concluded that the abolition of upfront compulsory student union fees had impacted negatively on the provision of amenities and services to university students, with the greatest impact at smaller and regional universities and campuses.⁷

The Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations reported earlier this year on the legislation, similarly reiterating the points that

A number of submissions indicated that the adverse effects of VSU have been felt more strongly at rural and outer metropolitan university campuses than at inner metropolitan campuses... Student organisations may reduce their costs by linking for-profit and not-for-profit services. A further complication affecting regional campuses is that student organisations (or university administrations) have fewer opportunities to link these different kinds of services.

We strongly concur that student services and amenities on campus are critical to the effective provision of educational opportunities for students on rural and regional campuses. In particular, a 'critical mass' of support and services must be maintained, which may entail forms of cross-subsidisation. The standards proposed in the Student Services, Amenities, Representation And Advocacy Guidelines (2009) are a means of ensuring such a critical mass is achieved on rural/regional campuses. DUSA submits that it is additionally crucial that the role of student organisations in directly recognised and incorporated into the Guidelines, not least because it is typically student organisations that provide key services, support and representative infrastructure on

²² Simon Marginson 'Submission No. 81 to Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee Inquiry into the capacity of public universities to meet Australia's higher education needs' (2000), [54]-[55]



rural and regional campuses, and play a key role (if not *the* key role) in non-academic support and engagement in rural/regional tertiary education.

Finally, educational opportunities increasingly depend on key infrastructure enabling physical and ‘virtual’ mobility. It has been reiterated in submissions to various inquiries, not solely those concerned with higher education, that opportunities generally in rural/regional areas (and in particular for young people) depend on factors such as access to public transport and to high-speed broadband and internet connectivity. These factors are equally important in consideration of access to educational opportunities for people in rural/regional areas. Access in this respect refers to enrolment in higher education but also completion.²³ Provision of high quality, regular and reliable public transport services, for instance, have been noted by numerous submitters to the present Victorian Parliamentary inquiry into regional centres, including from regional university campuses.²⁴ We strongly concur with those remarks, and note that DUSA itself has been campaigning for improved public transport services in the Geelong region for some time.²⁵

²³ Note references to high level of deferral of tertiary education among young people in rural/regional areas in Youth Affairs Council of Victoria ‘Submission No. 50 to Victorian Parliament Rural and Regional Committee Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future’ (2009), http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/rrc/inquiries/rcf/rcf_submissions.html, 5

²⁴ See eg submissions to this inquiry from Monash University Gippsland Campus, Warrnambool City Council, Wimmera Development Association, Wellington Shire Council, and Public Transport Users’ Association – Geelong Branch.

²⁵ See DUSA *Deakin University Students And Transport Behaviours In Geelong – Submission To Central Geelong Bus Review* (2007)