



Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria

Submission by Deakin University

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A note about Deakin University:

Deakin University was established in Geelong in 1974; it now has four Campuses: the Geelong Waterfront Campus, which is its head office, the Geelong Campus at Waurin Ponds, the Warrnambool Campus and a Melbourne Campus at Burwood. In 2009, 16, 000 of Deakin's 37, 000 students were enrolled at its regional Campuses. In 2007, almost 25% of the domestic students in Victoria whose home residential location was in a regional area were enrolled at Deakin University (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Number of domestic student enrolments in Victorian universities by student home residential location, 2007

	Number of enrolments				Share of enrolments			
	Postgraduate	Undergraduate	Other	Total	Postgraduate	Undergraduate	Other	Total
Metropolitan home residence								
University of Ballarat	289	648	9	946	0.7	0.6	0.8	0.7
Swinburne University	2,917	7,600	82	10,599	7.3	7.3	6.9	7.3
Victoria University	2,077	10,774	274	13,125	5.2	10.3	23.2	9.0
La Trobe University	3,576	11,206	90	14,872	8.9	10.7	7.6	10.2
Deakin University	4,731	13,604	156	18,491	11.8	13.0	13.2	12.7
RMIT	5,642	14,698	20	20,360	14.1	14.1	1.7	14.0
Monash University	9,039	22,463	491	31,993	22.5	21.5	41.6	22.0
The University of Melbourne	10,439	18,309	5	28,753	26.0	17.6	0.4	19.8
Australian Catholic University*	657	2,553	51	3,261	1.6	2.4	4.3	2.2
Other providers	729	2,394	2	3,125	1.8	2.3	0.2	2.1
Total Metro home residence	40,096	104,249	1,180	145,525	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Regional home residence								
University of Ballarat	653	3,020	71	3,744	8.7	11.1	24.2	10.7
Swinburne University	284	659	4	947	3.8	2.4	1.4	2.7
Victoria University	207	1,129	12	1,348	2.7	4.1	4.1	3.8
La Trobe University	1,462	6,091	44	7,597	19.4	22.4	15.0	21.7
Deakin University	1,677	6,838	69	8,584	22.3	25.1	23.5	24.5
RMIT	637	1,898	0	2,535	8.5	7.0	0.0	7.2
Monash University	1,331	3,771	91	5,193	17.7	13.9	31.1	14.8
The University of Melbourne	1,019	2,898	0	3,917	13.5	10.6	0.0	11.2
Australian Catholic University*	160	520	2	682	2.1	1.9	0.7	1.9
Other providers	105	398	0	503	1.4	1.5	0.0	1.4
Total Regional home residence	7,535	27,222	293	35,050	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Data presented in the First Progress Report of the Expert Panel on Victoria's Tertiary Education Plan.

Deakin's Mission and Core Commitments are set out in its Strategic Plan – *Delivering Effective Partnerships*.

Mission:

Deakin University aims to be a catalyst for positive change for the individuals and the communities it serves. This will be achieved by ensuring that Deakin's teaching, its research, its partnerships, its international programs and the services that support those activities are:

- Relevant,
- Innovative, and
- Responsive.

By pursuing these objectives, Deakin aspires to be recognised as Australia's most progressive university.

Core Commitments:

The University's core commitments are 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
- Research that makes a difference
- Contemporary and flexible teaching programs
- An international outlook.

Deakin's goal for rural and regional engagement 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's Submission is framed around issues in relation to higher education regarding two of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference:

- identify the key factors of disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria, such as access to education, health care, employment opportunities, housing affordability and transport; and
- investigate the impact of social and economic trends on the future of rural and regional Victoria in the context of disadvantage.

The submission is in two sections. The first section discusses factors relating to higher education in regional Victoria, with an emphasis on the regions surrounding Deakin's Geelong and Warrnambool Campuses. The second section sets out Deakin's strategies to address access and aspiration toward higher education in regional Victoria.

Higher education context in regional Victoria

Education is crucial for superior economic and social outcomes

Educational attainment is the most significant predictor of economic prosperity for individuals, families and regions. A graduate can expect to earn \$1.5million more in over their working life than someone with only Year 12 qualifications.¹ Health and wellbeing are positively correlated with educational attainment.² Superior social, cultural and civic outcomes flow from better educated populations.

¹ Cassells,R, Miranti,R, Nepal,B and Tanton,R (2009) *AMP.NATSEM income and wealth report issue 22*, AMP.NATSEM, Sydney.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2009) *Australia's health 2008*, Cat. no. AUS 99. AIHW, Canberra.

Research internationally has demonstrated that regions with high levels of education and strong links between educational institutions, business and industry, and government organisations exhibit higher levels of innovation.³

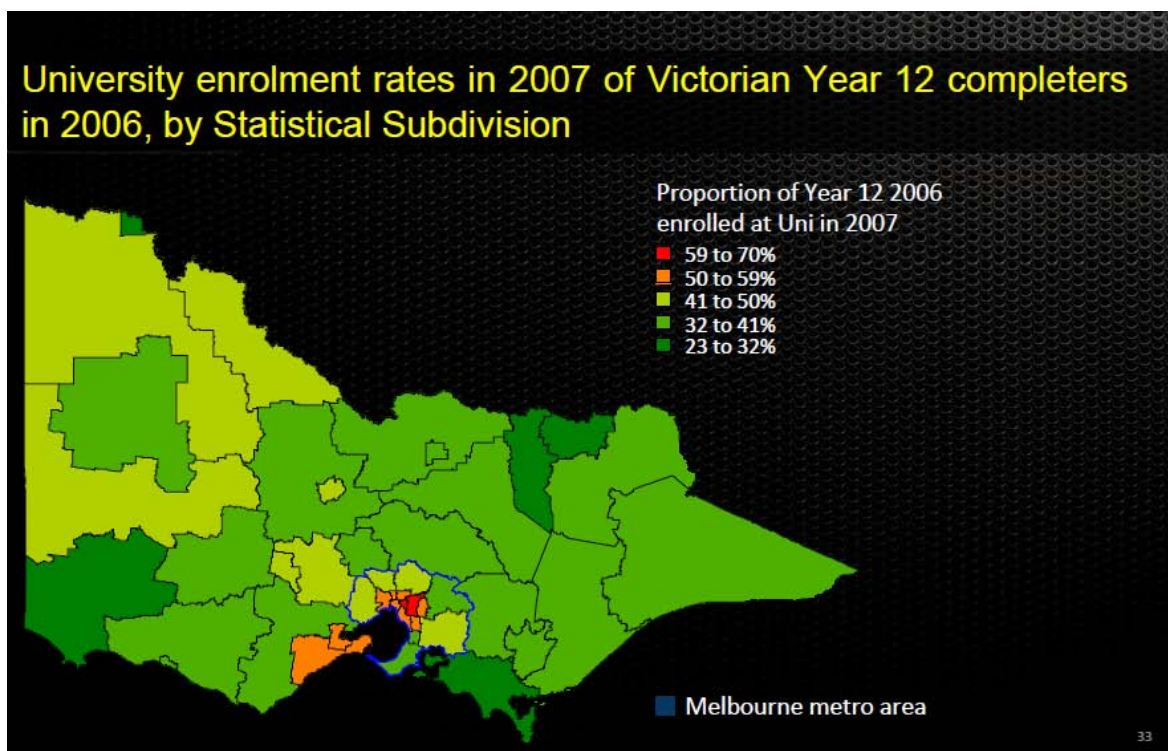
The Australian Government wishes to increase the number of people with a bachelor degree or above (attainment) and increase the proportion of higher education students from low SES backgrounds (access).⁴ The Government's attainment goal is to increase higher education enrolments so that by 2025, 40% of all 25-34 year olds will hold a qualification at bachelor level or above. The Government's access goal is, by 2020 to have people from low SES backgrounds constituting 20% of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level.

Inequitable educational participation and attainment in regional Victoria will perpetuate disadvantage

The report of the Tertiary Education Expert Panel advising on the development of the Victorian Tertiary Education Plan, chaired by Professor Kwong Lee Dow, concluded that Victoria will need a rate of bachelor degree attainment in the order of 47 per cent of 25 to 34 year olds with a bachelor degree by 2025. In 2006 the rate for regional Victoria was 19.4%, while for Melbourne it was 37.6%.⁵

Retention from school to university in regional Victoria is generally lower than in Melbourne (Figure 1). Victorian data shows that fewer rural and regional students achieve the highest ENTER scores (80-100).⁶ This reduces their opportunities to be selected into university courses.

Figure 1



Source: First Progress Report of the Expert Panel on Victorian Tertiary Education Plan.

³ OECD (2007) *Higher Education and Regions: Globally competitive, locally engaged*, OECD, Paris.

⁴ *Transforming Australia's higher education system* (2009) Commonwealth of Australia.

⁵ Lee Dow, K., Adams, B., Dawson, J. and Phillips, D. (2010) *Report Advising on the Development of the Victorian Tertiary Education Plan*, State of Victoria, Melbourne.

⁶ VTAC (2009) *Annual report and statistics 2008-09*.

Deferral rates are higher for non metro than metro Victoria. Analysis of VTAC data shows that 19.7% of VTAC applicants enrolled at Deakin in 2008 deferred their studies, including 20% of those from Barwon who deferred, and a much larger percentage, 39% of those from the Western District deferred. Deferral rates are even higher for students enrolling at Deakin from other regional areas (Table 2).

Table 2: Analysis of Deakin University VTAC Enrolled Applicants by Region

Region	Deferred	Full-time	Part-time	Total "Enrolled"	% of all deferrals	% from the Region who deferred
Melbourne	355	2734	270	3359	32.6%	10.6%
Barwon	154	603	81	838	14.2%	18.4%
Interstate	132	113	46	291	12.1%	45.4%
Western District	84	145	35	264	7.7%	31.8%
Gippsland	66	115	5	186	6.1%	35.5%
Central Highlands	64	86	6	156	5.9%	41.0%
Goulburn	67	67	10	144	6.2%	46.5%
Loddon	52	61	9	122	4.8%	42.6%
East Gippsland	33	38	1	72	3.0%	45.8%
Ovens-Murray	44	19	5	68	4.0%	64.7%
Wimmera	24	30	6	60	2.2%	40.0%
Mallee	9	24	4	37	0.8%	24.3%
Unknown	4	12	2	18	0.4%	22.2%
TOTAL	1088	4047	480	5615	100.0%	19.4%

Source: Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) Masterfile 2009

*The Barwon region includes Greater Geelong, Colac Otway, Surf Coast and Golden Plains local government areas. The Western District region includes Warrnambool City, Southern Grampians, Moyne, Corangamite and Glenelg local government areas.

Rural and regional school leavers are more likely to defer their place, should they obtain one

In 2007 the Victorian regional deferral rate was 15.7% compared to 6.4% for students from metropolitan Melbourne.⁷ Financial reasons and isolation explain much of the deferral rate. Non-metropolitan deferrers are much more likely to be from a low SES background; 82.8% of the regional students who deferred were in the lowest two SES quartiles⁸.

Research commissioned by regional Local Learning and Employment Networks found that 30% of regional deferrers do not subsequently take up their places.

Because many regional campuses are unable to offer the same range of choice to local residents as that available from the many providers in metropolitan areas, many school leavers from regional areas are forced to move away to access their preferred course or, indeed, any university course.

Further analysis of the On Track Survey data shows that retention to university from Year 12 in Geelong, Warrnambool and neighbouring local government areas of Moyne and Surf Coast is relatively high, though still below the State average, but retention from school in the remainder of the regions is below the non metro

⁷ Polesel J. (2009) *Deferring a university offer in regional Victoria*, Centre for Post-Compulsory Education and Life-Long Learning, University of Melbourne, Melbourne.

⁸ Polesel, J (2008) *Deferring a University Offer in Regional Victoria (interim report)* Centre for Post-Compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne.

average of 51.6% (see Table 3). When considered along with data from the On Track Survey, some of which is summarised in Tables 2 and 3, it appears that the further away students live from a university campus, and the narrower the range of university courses available at the nearest campus, the higher the deferral rate, and the lower the within two year rate of retention from school to university.

Table 3: 2008 Year 12 Completer University Destination by Local Government Area - Barwon South West Region

Destination		Local Government Area								
		Glenelg	Southern Grampians	Greater Geelong	Surf Coast	Colac-Otway	Corangamite	Moyne	Warrnambool	Total
University	No.	30	42	616	2	36	32	9	79	846
	%	25.20%	22.70%	36.90%	28.60%	22.90%	27.10%	36.00%	27.10%	32.90%
Deferred	No.	21	44	259	2	35	21	5	86	473
	%	17.60%	23.80%	15.50%	28.60%	22.30%	17.80%	20.00%	29.60%	18.40%
Total	No.	119	185	1670	7	157	118	25	291	2572
	%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
University + 70% deferred students	No.	45	73	797	3	61	47	13	139	1177
	%	37.6%	39.4%	47.7%	48.6%	38.5%	39.6%	50.0%	47.8%	45.8%

Source: On Track Survey data

University participation by young people is lower than the retention figures in Tables 2 and 3. A proportion of students leave school before Year 12 and so are not part of the cohort eligible for transition from school to university.

In the case of metropolitan Victoria, from 2002 to 2007 inclusive, the Year 10-12 retention rate for government schools varies between 85% and 86%, compared to between 73% and 76% for non-metropolitan regions.⁹ Drawing on Department of Education and Early Childhood Development data, it is reasonable to say that Year 12 completion rates in Geelong and the Western District have been consistently below the State average and well below the metropolitan average in recent years. Strategies that increase retention to Year 12 will increase the pool of Year 12 leavers available to participate in university study.

University is not only for Year 12 leavers

Information concerning mature age (those aged over 25) participation in university is available from ABS Census data. Table 4 shows that 6.3% of Victorians in this age group attend university, compared to only 3.6% of those living in the Barwon-Western District. Table 4 suggests there is scope to increase the number of mature aged residents of Barwon and the Western District of Victoria who study at university.

⁹ Deakin University (2008) *Submission to the Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate at which Victorian Students participate in Higher Education*, Available http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/etc/fs_inq_he.html

Table 4: University participation by Victorians aged 25 and over and educational attainment (2006)

	Victoria	Barwon-Western District (Statistical Region) - Vic
Population 25+	3167687	240567
Attending TAFE	102,305	7351
% of 25+ population attending TAFE	3.2%	3.1%
Attending University or other tertiary institution	199,027	8681
% of 25+ population attending University or other tertiary institution	6.3%	3.6%
% of 25-34 population with a Bachelor degree of higher	30.4%	19.8%

Based on 2006 ABS Census data

The Expert Panel on the Victorian Tertiary Education Plan has noted that to achieve equitable growth in participation it will be necessary to draw students from older cohorts.¹⁰ In 2010, 45% of all commencing places at Deakin's four Campuses were offered to non Year 12 leavers. Almost 60% of Deakin's commencing undergraduate students from rural and regional areas across all Its Campuses are aged over 20, as Table 5 shows.

Table 5: Deakin commencing undergraduate enrolments by regional indicator and age group

Age Group	2008		2009		2010	
	Enrolments	%	Enrolments	%	Enrolments	%
Under 20	683	43%	649	41%	801	46%
20-24	579	36%	633	40%	624	36%
25-35	170	11%	164	10%	176	10%
36 and over	157	10%	137	9%	154	9%
Total	1,589	100%	1,583	100%	1,755	100%

Note: 2010 data is based on a snapshot of enrolments as at 24 March 2010

University entrance need not necessarily be via year 12 completion. Alternative pathways (eg TAFE to University) or undertaking university studies once engaged in employment, are viable alternatives and attractive to rural and regional people. Regional universities with strong industry and TAFE partnerships will also mitigate the risk of attrition associated with students who need to move away from home to undertake university studies. In this context, university study becomes less formidable and more attainable.

Age and career stage must be considered in improving regional participation

Age, educational attainment, employment category and career stage (early, mid, established) require attention when considering how to improve regional higher education participation. Understanding the issues that impact upon these groups helps identify their needs, the opportunities they present and the challenges they face.

¹⁰ Lee Dow, K., Adams, B., Dawson, J. and Phillips, D. (2010) *Report Advising on the Development of the Victorian Tertiary Education Plan*, State of Victoria, Melbourne.

School leavers

International evidence suggests that an integrated approach works best to increase rural student participation in higher education. If they are properly resourced, universities can build effective partnerships with school and TAFE providers to build students' capacity and counter factors that may impact adversely on students aspiring to undertake higher education. The research by James and colleagues¹¹ found that aspiration is affected by parental influences, SES background and lack of role models.

Collaboration between parents, communities and tertiary education providers is necessary. TAFE - University partnerships and school - University partnerships, particularly ones which enable some of the coursework in a degree program to be undertaken in regional TAFEs and schools, will: reduce the cost of study; mitigate the risk of attrition due to social or geographic isolation; shift attitudes in families where university has not traditionally been considered an option; and facilitate the transition to university studies.

20-24 year olds – early career stage

Opportunities to access higher education are available at all ages and stages of life. The motivating drivers and needs may be quite different. The individuals in the 20-24 year old cohort who have previously engaged in higher education through TAFE or university programs will be better-placed than those who have not. For 20-24 year olds who are engaging with higher education for the first time, higher education will present some challenges; the transition to study may require additional support.

An important contributor to higher education attainment for regional residents in this cohort will be the extent to which access to the education can be provided at the local level. Particularly for those in employment or with family responsibilities, rural and regional providers will facilitate attainment and remove possible barriers associated with accessing university education elsewhere.

Rural and regional higher education providers also have the potential to skill local workforces and continue to upskill them in their own community. Regional employers must be engaged in the discussion about raising educational attainment. Cadetships can assist students in this age group to enter higher education.

25 – 35 year olds – mid career stage

This cohort will have either completed university studies and now be seeking to build on already established academic foundations or they will be coming to university studies for the first time. The drivers for this cohort may include: the need to upskill, the desire to change career path or the need to remain competitive in the workforce.

This group will be looking for courses that will help build management and leadership capacity and thus fill some of the gaps being created by an aging workforce. University-trained individuals in this and older cohorts are also able to consider a range of graduate entry programs that will enhance their workforce options and mobility.

Opportunities to study close to home will be an additional inducement for this cohort as this will lessen the impact on work and family commitments.

Older, established workers

For older workers with university qualifications, returning to study opens up postgraduate study opportunities. Others in this age group may see higher education as a means to improving career options or sustaining employability; alternatively they may enrol as a result of being made redundant.

¹¹ James R., Bexley E., and Shearer M. (2009) *Improving selection for tertiary education places in Victoria*, Paper prepared for the Joint Policy Unit on Youth Transitions, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne.

Those who have not engaged with higher education will provide some challenges for universities. They may require bridging or other programs that will facilitate their capacity to undertake university studies. This group may also feel more anxious than younger students about their capacity to participate successfully in higher education. Notwithstanding this, having regard to particular workforce shortages in rural and regional areas, this cohort represents a particular marketing opportunity for local higher education providers. With appropriate preparation and support, people in this cohort will be able to engage successfully in higher education and meet current and emerging regional workforce needs.

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.¹²

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 at least to some extent.¹³ 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 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 below and the array of courses offered at Deakin's regional Campuses at Geelong and Warrnambool 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 to enhance the liveability of regional Australia.

¹² Western Research Institute (2007) *Economic impact of Deakin University*. Bathurst, NSW.

¹³ 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.

Deakin's strategies to address regional access and aspiration

Deakin supports the Tertiary Education Expert Panel's proposals on partnerships¹⁴ as our experience is that this will encourage greater collaboration and linkages between educational institutions and the communities they serve.

Access

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

Deakin's regional Campuses at Geelong and Warrnambool attract students not only from their surrounding district, but also rural and regional students from elsewhere in Australia (particularly Victoria). Residential accommodation provides a supportive environment that helps students become engaged in their study. 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.

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.

Deakin University has pursued these strategies to build demand at its regional Campuses and to manage costs effectively.

Wherever possible, Deakin bases highly attractive, specialised courses at its regional Campuses. These include Medicine (Geelong Campus at Warrnambool), Architecture (Geelong Waterfront Campus) and Marine Science (Warrnambool Campus). These courses attract students from metropolitan and other areas. As an indication of how effective this approach can be, 23% of students attending the Warrnambool Campus in 2009 had been recruited from Melbourne.

Given that course preference is a major determinant of where students choose to study, Deakin recognises that achieving a sustainable size involves delivering a breadth of courses that will attract local and other students. Consideration of course offerings – particularly new courses - is also based on engagement with the community in which the Campus is based and the identification of local economic and labour market priorities as typically these will also drive student preferences.

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

¹⁴ Lee Dow, K., Adams, B., Dawson, J. and Phillips, D. (2010) *Report Advising on the Development of the Victorian Tertiary Education Plan*, State of Victoria, Melbourne.

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 does not feel like studying at a distance. For peer support and for group and individual communication between our staff members and students, online conferencing through 'eLive' and 'iLecture' is an increasingly important part of our teaching and learning environment.
- intensive 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.

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

In 2010 Deakin University introduced the 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. In 2010 it is offered 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 using interactive e-learning blended with face to face learning. The Associate Degree articulates into a Bachelor Degree. 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 a 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.

Deakin is now working to extend this concept and its related benefits to rural and regional schools; to deliver such programs to students at the school in which they completed Year 12. Students will have a safe and familiar environment to commence and undertake University studies for at least one year, before transitioning and continuing on to complete their course at a TAFE, University campus or even in off-campus mode.

The delivery mode for the *Deakin at Your Doorstep* program 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. This would require 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.

Deakin has a four way Alliance and suite of articulated pathways with its three neighbouring TAFEs, including the Gordon and South West Institute of TAFE in regional Victoria. As well, there are pathways to Deakin degrees

from other TAFE Institutes in regional Victoria, for example from the Diploma of Business (Management) at Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE and the Diploma of Community Services at East Gippsland TAFE.

Flexible delivery is the key to addressing the challenge of maintaining high educational quality while catering for the differing individual circumstances and preferences of regional students

Deakin's experience is that flexible delivery is definitely not a less expensive option, but it does allow the University a greater reach in terms of providing education at both its metropolitan and regional Campuses.

The National Broadband Network is a welcome development that has the potential to facilitate more reliable and extensive electronic delivery to students. At this early stage, the timing of availability and costs for institutions and students is not clear. For these reasons, the *Deakin at Your Doorstep* project is delivering much of its face to face component via interactive videoconferencing. This has been costly to implement because it has necessitated broadband upgrades in regional towns such as Swan Hill.

Building on Deakin University's success in regional education, its commitment to partnerships and its success as a distance education provider, the University has developed a proposal for the ***"Deakin University Centre for Tertiary Education Partnerships"*** (copies enclosed).¹⁵ We believe that this proposal will go some way towards addressing the Government's participation targets, but it cannot be fully implemented without Government funding.

The Centre will work in partnership with educational providers and others such as local government and industry. It will utilise high speed broadband communications and internet technology for the delivery of programs through a combination of e-learning, face to face learning and peer support groups backed up by locally based staff and regular in person interactions with Deakin staff. This model of delivery will offer a high quality educational experience that can be tailored to the differing needs and circumstances of students and communities. It is a cost effective alternative to building new Campuses that are expensive to operate and often not well utilised. The model builds on Deakin's excellent relationships with TAFE Institutes, schools and with local government so that resources and infrastructure are shared.

This is the type of regional delivery that needs start up funding. We welcome the Expert Panel's recommendation for a Partnerships Facilitation Fund to facilitate partnerships between TAFE, schools and higher education institutions.

Aspiration

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.

Deakin University's Regional Engagement Access Program (REAP) is designed to increase school students' aspirations to participate in higher education. It targets students in years 9 to 12. This program aims to:

¹⁵ If you have any questions about the ***"Deakin University Centre for Tertiary Education Partnerships"*** please contact Mr Kean Selway, Deakin University's Pro Vice-Chancellor (Enterprise).

- raise aspirations of regional, low socioeconomic and under-represented students for higher education;
- smooth the transition between school and university;
- increase awareness about the pathways that students can access to maximise higher education opportunities; and
- support academic performance.

Social inclusion research supports the view that addressing disadvantage requires working with industry, other government and community service providers and tailoring responses to the specific community. Regionally-based universities are best placed to continue to provide avenues for participation at whatever stage of life that students are able to pursue tertiary study.

At Warrnambool, Deakin University leads a group of education providers, the South West LLEN, local government, TAFE and other organisations with a shared desire to increase retention and participation in further education in South West Victoria. The purpose of the group is: *to raise the educational aspirations of people in the south west region through developing a strategy and coordinated series of actions*. The group has agreed on issues surrounding retention and participation in further education and some strategies to address these.

Issues that work against higher education aspiration include: family expectations based on the traditions of employment in the region, i.e. manufacturing and agriculture; poor family understanding of pathways, options, pre-requisite subjects and university; and the fact that small and medium businesses do not have a training or development culture. Strategies for improvement of educational aspirations and the retention and participation of students at Deakin University in particular fall within four broad areas: altering business culture toward education and training; industry engagement; educational planning; and raising the profile of Deakin University.

Conclusion

Increasing participation in higher education in regional Victoria is crucial to addressing disadvantage and inequality. If participation rates in regional Victoria are to be increased to achieve attainment goals there is much work to be done to change attitudes and culture. Appropriate financial incentives and access strategies must be identified and implemented.

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 Government in terms of incentives for rural and regional students and funding incentives for regional University Campuses and delivery.