

# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into the impact of high levels of unmet demand for places in higher education institutions on Victoria**

Bendigo – 1 December 2003

#### Members

Ms H. Buckingham  
Ms A. Eckstein  
Mr P. Hall  
Mr S. Herbert

Mr N. Kotsiras  
Ms J. Munt  
Mr V. Pertou

Chairman: Mr S. Herbert  
Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford  
Research Officer: Dr G. Berman

#### Witnesses

Cr R. Fyffe, Mayor, City of Greater Bendigo; and  
Mr B. Gould, Executive Manager, Economic Development.

**Necessary corrections to be notified to  
executive officer of committee**

**The CHAIRMAN** – I declare this hearing of the Education and Training Committee open. The Education and Training Committee is an all-party joint investigatory committee of the Parliament of Victoria. It is hearing evidence today in relation to the inquiry into the impact of unmet demand for places in higher education institutions on Victoria.

I wish to advise all present at this hearing that all evidence taken by the committee, including submissions, is subject to parliamentary privilege and is granted immunity from judicial review pursuant to the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act.

We welcome the City of Bendigo to the very first regional meeting of the parliamentary Education and Training Committee, and we are very much looking forward to your evidence. We will give you the opportunity to say something, or make a statement, and we will then ask questions.

**Mr FYFFE** – Brian Gould from our economic development unit will be giving the main part of our evidence. But I would like to say a few things on behalf of the council and our community. Firstly, I welcome you all to Bendigo and say that we are very pleased that you were able to come, because this issue is an extremely important one for us and certainly to the Greater Bendigo community.

We are one of the fastest growing areas in the state and an important major service provider for many other regional towns around this central Victorian region. It is absolutely paramount for our city to have the ability to provide the necessary services required to match our strong growth, and to service the needs of those outer lying areas.

As the major regional centre, our young people are our future. Being a secondary teacher at the Senior Secondary College, I can assure you that that is of prime concern to me. In order to keep young people from leaving, it is imperative that we provide accessible higher educational facilities where they can continue to study in their own town. Regional areas like Greater Bendigo must be able to train and maintain a skills base and continue to meet the expectations of the people who are moving into our region.

The city also shares the concerns of the community regarding the future of La Trobe University Bendigo campus and the federal government's plans to reduce funding for university places. We support the need to sustain a strong regional tertiary facility here in Bendigo; and that is an ongoing issue that we are addressing at the moment.

The university has an active and growing role, understands regional issues and is responsive to the needs of the community and the region it serves. It is important to have a university that links closely to other major education organisations, such as TAFE and our secondary colleges, so that we as a city can offer in the way of education services a strong and competitive model. It is disturbing that at a time when all sectors of the national community are focusing on the strength of the regional community that there is even any talk of downgrading tertiary and higher education facilities in our region.

We believe it is paramount to maintaining university campuses that they continue to grow and are of a high quality, offer varied tertiary opportunities and understand the response to the needs, issues and requirements of regional Victoria. The presence of a university that is able to provide quality tertiary education and opportunity to regional Victoria is of the utmost importance to Bendigo and to Bendigo's role as a major service provider to many other regional centres.

We find the potential loss of 500 places completely unacceptable, and we believe this would have an enormous impact on our city and our region. We would like to translate that then into figures. Approximately 670, 680 students from Bendigo Senior Secondary College go on to tertiary education. So if you look at knocking that 500 off, a significant component would not be able to potentially go to university.

My council recognises the significance that education and training makes for the economic wellbeing of our economic municipality and beyond. In our municipality alone there are close to 3,000 people employed in the education sector. For a number of years now, the council has worked closely with educational services within the region to promote our region as a safe and feasible centre for international students and educational tour groups. We have been able to meet many initiatives, and Brian Gould will be able to explain those in more detail. Any attempt by state and federal governments

to cut expenditure that reduces Bendigo's capacity for places in higher education institutions in Victoria will make it difficult for students to move on to work that will promote regional Victoria as a place not only in which to live but also in which to work and invest. Re the state government's Make it Happen campaign in provincial Victoria – we have been contacted by a range of people seeking tertiary qualified positions should they choose to relocate from Melbourne. We need to ensure that in cities such as Greater Bendigo and Geelong the job and skill shortages are kept to a minimum by being in a position to attract people – particularly young people – into higher education institutes such as La Trobe University and the Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE to undertake tertiary and business management courses that will support our city's rapid growth and the demands placed upon us.

On behalf of the city of Greater Bendigo, I thank you very much indeed for coming, and I hope you leave with a better knowledge of the issues of higher education in our municipality.

**Mr GOULD** – I have a prepared paper. I have copies for the committee members, and I will also make it available through email, so if you will bear with me, I will read from that.

The City of Greater Bendigo has recognised for a number of years the significance that education and training has on the economic wellbeing of the municipality, and in fact, the region. Analysis of the education sector within this municipality shows that there are some 2,800 people employed directly in the education sector generating a significant economic output.

Not content to rely exclusively on the local and regional population base, educational institutes within the City of Greater Bendigo forged a unique alliance commonly called Bendigo Education Connection (BEACON). The initial alliance included La Trobe University Bendigo, Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, Girton Grammar School and Catholic College Bendigo, to promote the internalisation of Bendigo through the educational sector primarily targeting overseas full-fee paying students and the delivery of educational services internationally. A key component of the unique alliance was a desire to attract overseas students who would undertake VCE studies and then move on to either vocational or tertiary studies through the Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE, La Trobe University Bendigo, or other educational institutes in Australia.

Now known as Education Bendigo, the membership has been expanded to include Flora Hill Secondary College and the international division of the Department of Education and Training and local business consultant, Asia Pacific Brokers. Education Bendigo's role is to coordinate and promote the education services of the Bendigo region as a safe and viable destination for international students and educational tour groups.

It is worth highlighting again that international students now constitute 20 per cent of the Australian university student population. Federal Education Minister, Brendan Nelson, recently asserted that the internationalisation of education was worth \$5.2 billion to Australia – more than wool and as much as wheat.

The City of Greater Bendigo continues to enjoy a booming local economy that meets not only existing demands, but is well placed to meet the challenges of this expansion for the betterment of generations to come. In order to ensure the council is well briefed on important matters relating to the economic wellbeing of the business community, it has initiated a number of strategic reference groups to work with council officers and councillors. These groups include the Bendigo Manufacturing Group, the Food Industry Liaison Group, the Human Resource Management Group, the Business and Professional Sector Group, as well as sponsorship of the Central Victorian Business Network.

The Bendigo Manufacturing Group is the peak organisation within the municipality that is charged with providing support for the retention and growth of existing manufacturers, together with expanding new investment. The need for skills training to meet the massive increase in the number of people entering the Bendigo labour market has resulted in representation on both the Manufacturing Industry Consultative Committee and the subcommittee looking at skills and training needs for industry. The Human Resource Management Group provides practical experience for local small to medium enterprises, and a network to address issues, including the attraction of skilled staff to local businesses. The Food Industry Liaison Group has been formed to support significant state government funding for the Industry Liaison Agent (ILA) pilot project for which the City of Greater Bendigo has received funding to support the food sector. Whilst the ILA project is still in the early stages, survey results obtained to date highlight the need for small to medium businesses to be able to attract skilled senior management people generally requiring tertiary qualifications such as financial controllers and human resource management positions.

The economic development unit has established a process to work with the local business and professional services sector, not only because this sector makes a significant contribution to higher salaries and business profits, but because of its contribution as a major provider of advice to business owners and managers in the wider Greater Bendigo business community. We include in this sector computer, business, marketing and human resource consultants, building design professionals, accountants, lawyers and real estate professionals.

Less than two weeks ago, a major Greater Bendigo forum focused on understanding the needs of the business and professional services sector that is one of the most significant employers of tertiary qualified staff. At this meeting, attended by over 90 people from this sector, a number of key issues were identified.

Higher education supports the professional occupations and industries reliant on professionals for business retention and expansion in regional Victoria. There is a concern among professional businesses in regional Victoria that they are not as competitive as metropolitan employers in attracting the professional staff with both the right qualifications and expertise. The sector also believes there is a strong link between people obtaining their qualifications in regional areas and retaining them.

An assessment of the census 2001 data shows that regional Victoria and regional centres such as Greater Bendigo have a significantly lower level of professionals in the business and information professions than in the metropolitan area. Melbourne has 6.95 per cent of the workforce in this profession compared to 2.90 per cent and 2.47 per cent for Greater Bendigo and regional Victoria respectively. In the law profession, which is classified in the miscellaneous social professions, there is also a significantly lower level in Greater Bendigo at 0.31 per cent of the workforce when compared to Melbourne at 0.81 per cent. Table 1 shows the comparison of the professionals employed in the workforce for Greater Bendigo local government area, regional Victoria, Melbourne statistical district and Victoria.

In contrast, there is a higher level of professionals in the education and health professions in Greater Bendigo than in metropolitan Melbourne. In Greater Bendigo the education profession represents 5.33 per cent of the workforce and 4.88 per cent for the health profession compared to Melbourne at 4.26 per cent and 3.66 per cent respectively.

The issue of where professionals are located in many respects is linked to the job opportunities created by the various business sectors. One reason for the variation in the workforce ratios being higher in education and health is that the state government is the major employer of these sectors. The state also actively undertakes policies to locate these services into regional areas. In business and information professions, employment opportunities are more closely aligned with private enterprise. And, dare I say, they therefore make business decisions on that basis alone.

In working with the business and professional services sector they are saying that to be able to compete they need to be able to attract a larger number of undergraduates and post-graduate employees so that they can undertake the entrepreneurial risk in developing and growing their business in regional areas.

I head the next section Booming Bendigo. Bendigo enjoys a significant and sustained development regime that needs to have highly skilled tertiary qualified new entrants continuing to flow through the education system at both university and TAFE levels to meet council and, dare I say, state and federal government vision for a healthy and vibrant community. Any attempt by state or federal governments to cut expenditure that reduces the capacity for places in higher education institutes in Victoria potentially undermines the work done to promote regional Victoria, not only as a place to live but to work and invest.

The major state government campaign Make it Happen in provincial Victoria saw Bendigo being contacted by a range of people, mostly seeking tertiary qualified positions should they choose to eventually relocate from Melbourne. More not less needs to be done to ensure that cities such as Greater Bendigo are able to ensure that skill shortages are kept to a minimum by being in a position to attract people, particularly young people, into higher educational institutes such as La Trobe University Bendigo and Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE to undertake tertiary and business management courses that will support our rapid growth as a provider of goods and services both domestically, and also increasingly on the international market.

The City of Greater Bendigo also has a strong partnership arrangement with the tertiary sector through its direct support and ongoing involvement in projects including the ICT Centre and the recently opened Business Continuity Centre at the Innovation Park. Both of these facilities add enormous value to the IT infrastructure of the city and the region. It is also a source for the further development of this sector and 'bedrock' for tertiary qualified personnel now and into the future.

The Arts is also an integral component of a sophisticated community. The relocation of the Arts school at La Trobe University Bendigo to the Arts precinct in View Street, Bendigo, opposite the Capital and Art Galley further highlights the importance of higher education to the fabric of our community, as well as the direct economic impact to the municipality.

Council has just released the third edition of its Arts Register that further underscores this sector's importance to the local and Victorian economy. This register lists over 300 entries about artists, art businesses and art consultants, whether professional or amateur. The prerequisite for inclusion in this register is that contributors offer creative skills and must live and/or work in the City of Greater Bendigo region. It is for anyone in need of a creative person or product for a new project.

There are other people who will appear before you today who can give specific information on the impact the reduction of higher education places will have not only on this region but Victoria and Australia. The City of Greater Bendigo is on the cusp of further significant growth and a well-educated workforce will underpin our future. Thank you for the opportunity to address this important issue.

**The CHAIRMAN** – Thank you. Questions.

**Mr HALL** – Do you have difficulty in attracting professional staff to Bendigo, particularly in education and health, which you said were two of the strengths of this area; and also generally, do you have any view or any feeling about attracting other professionals to the area?

**Mr GOULD** – Interestingly, our professional sector was one of the fastest growing areas. The last census report showed Bendigo's growth in its labour force at about 15 per cent; the state average was about 10 per cent, so we were much faster. Interestingly enough also were the professional sectors that we did particularly well in. We actually had an additional 1,000 people flow into that sector. So at the moment the answer is no, but it is a qualified no. To date we have been able to attract people. I think what is important, though, is that we want to continue to be able to do that. The concern that we have in economic development within council – and from talking to the business and professional sectors – is that it is about how do we make sure that those people keep coming through? I think having a university like La Trobe University here in Bendigo offering those sorts of courses, it is about often being able to get people to start their education and/or training here and to continue to bring them back.

I think an important part of that is how we as a community can start to form alliances with other centres, such as Melbourne, where we might be able to say, "Well look, someone does part of their training in Melbourne and has some experience up here" and vice versa, so that we can start to get exposure there. I know that is a fairly long-winded answer, but I guess the reality is that we have done well to date. Our concern is how do we maintain that as we continue to be one of the leading cities in terms of our prospects?

**Mr HALL** – And related to that, do you do any tracking of where some of the people with tertiary qualifications who are employed, say, with the Greater Bendigo Council, or indeed within the local professions – where they actually come from? Obviously La Trobe offers a limited amount of training, but not through every vocational area. And does the council have a local policy in respect to their employers at all?

**Mr GOULD** – The short answer is no. But that is one of the areas where I think for the first time we started to look at what are some of those key areas that we have not particularly well catered for. We formed the Bendigo Manufacturing Group nearly two years ago now – two years this month actually. So I guess the formation of the business professional sector only a few months ago highlighted to us that this was a vital area that we knew not enough about, in fact very little about, and we needed to do that. We are very keen now to start working in ways in which we can use the expertise that we have got there, and start to do some research into how we might use that as a basis for getting industry to tell us what they need to attract people here.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – You've made mention of the potential loss of 500 places at Bendigo. Can you elaborate a bit more on what you see as the professional impact on the Greater Bendigo community, both

economically and socially, if that were to come to pass?

**Mr GOULD** – Whilst I cannot give you the specifics – and I understand that you have Peter Sullivan coming to talk to you, the acting dean and pro vice-chancellor, and I am sure he will give you the exact figures. But can I give make as a generalization – perhaps I could say along the lines of what our mayor said – there are something like 650-odd students leaving for Bendigo Senior Secondary College that go on to tertiary qualifications, so we are talking about effectively the largest pool of young people that we have in our community suddenly being potentially denied access to it. So it is of real concern to us. La Trobe University Bendigo has a very large geographical area, so it is not just the City of Greater Bendigo that it potentially impacts on; we are talking Mildura through to Wodonga, in that sort of arc, as part of their geographical area. So it is the impact that it will have not only on our municipality but also on our region, and that is one of the things I think we have been able to address over the past couple of years – that country Victoria, as a generalization, has been able to retain a lot of their young people. The last thing we want to see is a return to the old days, where our biggest export unfortunately was our young people. And I can speak from experience from having four adult children, three of whom had to leave Bendigo to get jobs. Fortunately, a couple of them have come back.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – Do you see a retreat from the campus end?

**Mr GOULD** – I think without having the ability to have those older enrolments it does start to place some real strain on their capacity to have the right number of mix in terms of the infrastructure that you need to have a viable university faculty here, so it is about the lecturers that are there; it is also about the research that goes on and those sorts of things.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – And the courses that are offered?

**Mr GOULD** – 500 students is a very significant number. Again, I am sure Peter can give you the exact figures, but there is something like 3,500 to 4,000 students up at La Trobe University, and you start to take 500 out of that equation and that is a significant impact on their ability to deliver what we are looking for, which is a variety of skilled people who can add to our social stock.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – A big concern.

**Mr GOULD** – Very.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – Brian, you spoke about a subcommittee that had been formed that looked to professionals – I think you said it was from the Bendigo Management Group, and you said you had some statistics. My question is have you got statistics that if you obtain qualifications in a regional area you are more likely to stay in a regional area?

**Mr GOULD** – We have some statistics that are attached there that will give you an indication of where the professional people are. One of the interesting things that came out of it is that in Bendigo, for example, we have people in the professional areas that don't have the same level of tertiary qualifications as they have in their metropolitan counterparts. The accounting profession is typical of that, where there are people who have been in the business for a long, long time. Now as we move into that generational change from my age group to baby boomers, there is a need now to have those tertiary qualifications. What we are saying though is to get them to stay – or first of all to get them here we need to have them tertiary qualified rather than the old system, without necessarily having those tertiary qualifications. Secondly, if we have them trained here in a regional centre they are more likely to want to stay here – but not necessarily stay here forever. We are quite comfortable with people staying here, going off and getting other experiences and coming back. But often if they don't have a good experience in their tertiary training part of it, they won't come back; they will just go away and stay away. And I guess that is the risk, or the concern we have.

We have manufacturing that is booming along; we have a lot of other sectors that are booming along. These days you have to have tertiary qualified people to back that up. We often find: how do you get a financial controller to make sure that that a company is capable of meeting all the demands that the business will need them to meet? If you haven't got good HR management people, how do you make sure that your concerns about everything from WorkCover to occupational health and safety and all those other issues are addressed appropriately so that your staff are well cared for and looked after and want to stay and therefore get more training and therefore do more productive work for their business, and therefore the company is more successful? You need all of those things to happen. So it is not just about getting accountants and lawyers and everything else, it is a whole plethora of those



tertiary qualifications – the IT qualifications et cetera – that underpin what a local economy is all about.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – Have you done any analysis of what skills are required in Bendigo?

**Mr GOULD** – We are only just starting to. That is why we have formed these reference groups where for the first time a couple of years ago we said, “No, hang on a second, we are doing this too much on an ad hoc basis”. What we are now very much driven by is getting industry representation to totally dominate those groups. While you had people from council there – and a couple of my staff sit on those committees – we make sure that the vast majority of them are people from industry and that people from industry actually chair them, so we are looking at people from the food sector, from the manufacturing sector, from the professional services sector, from the HR group, and having those groups together telling us what their needs are. And I guess in some ways helping us to have a better appreciation of what is needed.

**Mr KOTSIRAS** – Have you got data that show what number of students go to Melbourne and actually come back to Bendigo?

**Mr GOULD** – I haven't, but it is fair to say the educational institutes around here do keep a very close tab on that. We are very fortunate in Bendigo that we have got really only a couple of major providers of VCE, and I will go in the reverse of size: Girton Grammar has a small amount of VCE students, then you have Catholic College Bendigo, which has several hundred, then you have Bendigo Senior Secondary College. Does everyone understand the difference between Bendigo Senior Secondary College and most of the other arrangements? Okay. Very quickly, in Bendigo you can go to Year 10 in the state system at a whole range of schools – there are heaps of them to choose from – but you can only do Years 11 and 12 if you want to go through the state system at Bendigo Senior Secondary College. So all of the secondary schools finish at Year 10 here in Bendigo and feed into Bendigo Senior Secondary College, which has about 2,000 students, in round figures. So it is the largest provider of VCE subjects in Victoria, and I think the largest VCE provider for students in Victoria as well. That is one way in which they will track what is happening with their students. And I know the Catholic College does, and I am assuming that Girton would do the same. So those people could get that information for you very, very quickly.

**Mr KOTSIRAS** – Are you aware of any financial pressures on Bendigo TAFE at the moment?

**Mr GOULD** – I don't know any institute that is not under any pressure in terms of funding, but I don't have any specific knowledge of it, no.

**Ms MUNT** – I am interested in the percentage of places from the La Trobe campus that actually go to the 650 students that do go through the Bendigo Secondary College; do you have any information on that?

**Mr GOULD** – No, I don't. But again, I am sure Peter can give you that. I can only do this anecdotally from personal experience of having all four of my children having attended La Trobe University Bendigo at some stage. It is often the institute of first choice for two reasons: one, it has been here for a long, long time and it does offer some very good courses that are popular, from nursing through to business, and more recently law – part of the law degree – and also pharmacy.

I think the other reality is that we are a city of nearly 100,000 people. The cost of education is not cheap, so if your children want to do a tertiary qualification, if they can do it here in Bendigo, I am sure, like any parent, we would be encouraging our kids to look in their own backyard first, assuming of course they offer the courses. The fact that a lot of feeder schools from around here – people have friendships here and it is a lot easier to go to that next level of education if you can go with mates. So I guess from that point of view there is a strong push for the people to come here. But specifics, no, I can't answer, sorry.

**Ms MUNT** – The other thing that I am interested in is that I am looking here at the breakdown of the percentage of population of different work. 35.7 per cent of the working population is professionals or associate professionals in Greater Bendigo – from 29.9 per cent in 1991 – so it would seem to me if there were a loss of 500 places at the La Trobe campus, it would have a very great impact on the future growth of that professional component of the city. Would that be a fair comment?

**Mr GOULD** – I think that is a fair comment to make. We have been able to grow our labour force significantly between the last census and the census before. We are continuing to boom and, as I said

earlier, just very briefly, the good news from our point of view was that the spread was virtually right across the board. There were only one or two at the most sectors that actually had a decrease, and we are talking about handfuls of people down – one of which is mining, which is now on the way up here at Bendigo. So it has been across the board.

What I said before, which was important, is that part of that was the professional sector, which is booming. We need to make sure that we don't lose the momentum we have got, and that is the concern that we have. It is not just about the number of positions that are up there. In fact, it is retaining what we have got, and hopefully being able to expand and grow it rather than be contrasted with a contraction of that magnitude.

**The CHAIRMAN** – You indicate that from observation you have a higher percentage of teachers. I guess there must be quite a large school-age young people population. And I would think if there are more teachers, and it is all standard formula, then you must have quite a growing school-age population.

**Mr GOULD** – We have something like 55 educational institutes in our municipality. We are a fast-growing area, so I guess one of the things is our population growth – and I haven't got an exact figure, this is off the top of my head – but it is growing at about half a per cent faster than the state average, I think, from memory. So it is important that we have been able to attract people here and that it is across the board.

We are starting to do a lot more research into that. In fact council, for what it is worth, is undertaking a number of major strategies at the moment. One is the commercial land strategy, to have a look at what we need for our retail for the next five to 10 years; what we need for our commercial buildings, because we are really starting to get into a struggling situation and we want to make sure we have the right mix for people. We have just undertaken a major study that will be released in the next week or two in draft format for our residential strategy for the next 10 or 15 years. We are also doing one on open space, because one of the things you have to make sure about is that you balance all those sorts of things. About two years ago we did one on industrial land strategies. So all those things are happening now because we are in a booming situation, and we want to make sure that not only are we able to meet the needs of people, but that we also look at that future need. So if you want to keep attracting young people here in the region and to keep them here, then you have to have all those things in place. So lining up all the ducks as much as we possible is part of our strategy here.

**The CHAIRMAN** – I assume that retention rates – staying until Year 12 – is part of your strategy, once you look at the demands of your industries, trying to ensure people stay on at school.

**Mr GOULD** – Yes, and that is one of the reasons we were very keen – we see the food sector as the growth area in terms of manufacturing for our municipality – to have a look at that very, very carefully. While its focus is very much on those who are currently in the workforce, it is looking at the needs of small community businesses, which are the engine room of any local economy, to make sure that we understand what their needs are and how we can keep bringing new people in. The only new people you are going to get in large numbers are going to be our young people; they are not going to be people of my age group.

**The CHAIRMAN** – We do have La Trobe University behind us – welcome. So I just warn you, the next question relates to La Trobe. For Melbourne-based universities we have heard evidence, and we have heard evidence from regional campuses, about reconstruction costs, et cetera. I know some years ago there was a debate about the services in the Bendigo university area, and there has been a fair bit of work that has gone on – and I will get you to comment in a moment – in terms of building La Trobe University's central support for the Bendigo campus and from the growth of subjects offered here. Can you perhaps comment on the work relationship between council, La Trobe as a regional centre, and also on the centre of Melbourne, and also how you project into the future. All things being equal, if you don't lose students, how would that go – and the relationship.

**Mr GOULD** – I think it is fair to say that we have always enjoyed a reasonably good relationship between the council and La Trobe University, for the time I have been here. I think it is also fair to say that over the last couple of years that has actually strengthened and grown. I mentioned earlier the business continuity centre, the IT centre downtown, and the Arts area. A lot of those projects have been a cooperative arrangement between La Trobe University and council. You can't do a lot of those things unless you have that partnership arrangement. I think therefore on that basis that underpins it. Our continuing push to look at the internationalisation of Bendigo using education as a vehicle for doing that through our Education Bendigo Consortium, I guess, is again showing not only the City of Greater Bendigo relationship with La Trobe but all the educational institutes working together with the City of



Greater Bendigo, asking, “How do we make things better for our community?” which underpins the fact that you may do things in regional centres that you may not be able to do anywhere else. It is often about relationships, and the importance of those is often based on a long association. I guess to be frank, too: if something goes wrong in our local community and I do something wrong, I will get told by dozens of people, because I meet them at the shopping centres and at the sporting arenas. I am originally from Melbourne, and I know that I could go down to the next street and no-one will know who I am, but you can't get away from that here. Relationships are much more important from that point of view, but we have got a good relationship. And yes, like a bit of a family thing, there will be times when we don't always agree, but I think underpinning all of that is a desire to make sure that our community is better and has a better outcome as a result of that.

Certainly from my personal view, I sit on a number of committees where I have people like Peter Sullivan, sitting behind me, on those committees; other senior people from councils sit on regional boards, advisory boards with La Trobe University. I think that again highlights how important the educational institutes are to us, even though I guess we sometimes undervalue them on the basis that we see them every day. It is a bit like retail: everybody does it so no-one understands or appreciates it. But I think we are starting to understand that education is vital to us. Tertiary education is what I think takes us to that next step.

**Mr HALL** – Brian, does any other university other than La Trobe have a presence in the City of Greater Bendigo?

**Mr GOULD** – There is Monash here, but the reality is that La Trobe University is the primary educational institute for the City of Greater Bendigo, and has been for a long time.

**Mr HALL** – When you say Monash –?

**Mr GOULD** – They have an association with the Bendigo Health Care Group through that part of the hospital – I still have difficulty calling them health care groups. So there are certain courses that they do offer as a consequence of that.

**Mr HALL** – Does the city see it as desirable having the presence of other universities here in the city; and are you actively trying to encourage and facilitate that?

**Mr GOULD** – I think we have always argued that what we want to have is the best available for our community, so we would welcome any university, any other educational institute that adds value to our university. We have never said it has to be La Trobe University – certainly not to my knowledge anyway. It is a bit like the Bendigo Bank, if I can use that analysis. I always go out and tell people that one of the good things about Bendigo is that we have the Bendigo Bank here; it is unique, and we have the headquarters here. But if that does not suit you, we also have Westpac, ANZ, Bank of Melbourne, and the like. So I think it is important to be able to say we are a sophisticated community which has an educational institute that offers everything from early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary qualifications. Who delivers it to a large extent doesn't matter.

**The CHAIRMAN** – Thank you very much, Mr Gould; all this has been very useful. We look forward to perhaps getting some information when you do those business surveys – and about skills shortages and skills demands in the future. We would be very pleased to receive any information on that.

**Mr GOULD** – Thank you very much.

**Witnesses withdrew**

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Bendigo – 1 December 2003

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Mr V. Pertou

Chair: Mr S. Herbert  
Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford  
Research Officer: Dr G. Berman

#### Witnesses

Professor P. Sullivan, Acting Pro Vice-Chancellor;  
Professor R. Endacott, Head, Department of Nursing; and  
Dr V. Prain, Head, School of Education, La Trobe University, Bendigo

**Necessary corrections to be notified to  
executive officer of committee**

**The CHAIR** – Welcome to the first Victorian parliamentary Education and Training Committee. We welcome La Trobe University. The evidence you give today is, of course, covered by parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review under the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act. We welcome Professor Sullivan, Professor Endacott and Dr Prain.

We have spoken to La Trobe University in Melbourne, but it is important for the committee that we come out to regional centres, because regional provision is the major part of demand and higher education. If it suits you, you might like to make a statement, tell us some of your viewpoints in terms of the committee's inquiries, and we will open up to questions.

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – Thank you very much all members of the committee for coming to Bendigo to give us an opportunity to present our views. I am mainly going to talk to the written submission that we made to you.

I can tell from the question that you asked Brian before, and from your introduction, that you are well informed about a number of aspects about La Trobe University and regional provision.

Again I may be stating the obvious, but there are three ways in which the provision of higher education places in a regional area are distinct from the provision of the equivalent places in a metropolitan-based area. One is the supply of graduates, and particularly professionals, to the regions – it seems very clear that where children and students from country areas, including regional cities, go to Melbourne to study, they are less likely to return to the country to then, if you like, conduct their professional lives or to join their professions. Our experience is that the students who study for the professions or study for business in Bendigo and other regional campuses are far more likely to stay in those regional areas to practice their professions. Given that what we are projecting is current serious shortages in some areas and projected serious shortages in other areas predominantly in the country, then we need to maintain the presence of higher education – appropriate numbers of higher education places – to ensure that there is that provision of the professions.

The second issue relates to access. Some 28 per cent of our current students are non Year 12 leavers or non-entry. Very many of those are people who have not followed the traditional pathway of finishing school and even taking a year off and then going to university. These are people who have worked; they have possibly gone to TAFE, they have maybe have families, and they come to study with the intention of a career change. Those people have families; they have established roots in the community, and they would not be able to undertake their higher education places were they to have to travel to Melbourne. So the provision of access for people from the country is very important. One of the other issues is that the cost of people from outside Bendigo coming to Bendigo to study is significantly less than the cost of those same people going to Melbourne to study – the residential accommodation, the cost of food and even the cost of transport. So that access component is important.

Finally, another issue from the other direction is the capacity of the higher education facility – and the Bendigo community, of course, is very interested in that development, too. This afternoon there is a meeting of the Bendigo Plus organisation that will be addressed by a staff member from La Trobe Bendigo who is to talk about the economic modelling possibilities that can actually do research on the economic benefits to Bendigo of the completion of the duplication of the Calder Freeway. So you can see that responsiveness to the university by the community in a way that the synergy actually creates a vitality that contributes to community growth and regional development is an important element of the provision of higher education places in the regions.

The key issue for us at La Trobe University Bendigo, and I guess of interest to your committee, is what is the demand for higher education places for people from the regions? As you can see in the paper, we are currently funded for slightly over 2,500 students, but we enrol about 3,000. The reason is that were we not to enrol those students, those students would not get access to a higher education place; those people then would not be available for the professions and for community life generally on graduation, and therefore the community would be that much the poorer. We find that we can cater for the additional 500 places in our existing facilities, in our existing residences and our existing catering and classrooms, and so on. So we have made an ongoing commitment to the over-enrolment of those

places. As you would be aware, the Backing Australia's Future budget proposals project a cutback on those unfunded enrolments, and possibly the creation of additional places out of the pool of 25,000, or whatever the number is for us to have access to – or by some competitive process.

Our point is that we currently have unmet demand in Bendigo under the existing numbers of places, but we are probably comfortable with that level of unmet demand. What we would be extremely concerned about is if those 500 unfunded places were taken away from Bendigo, in a sense creating an ongoing pool of 500 more unmet demand places in our various courses. Were we to lose those 500 places, there would be a serious problem in Bendigo and surrounding areas in the provision of higher education places for people who need them. Basically, we have three types of courses that we offer here – and these are in the tables in the document and you can refer to the details yourselves.

The first type of course are the generalist courses we run for the region – Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Applied Science, Bachelor of Applied Engineering – more or less generalist courses that we would argue we wouldn't be serving our regional mission were we not to offer them. Now those courses tend on balance to have slightly lower entry scores, but as you will see, even those courses have very acceptable levels of students. I am sure you are aware of this particular issue, but if I can restate it for you: the ENTER scores of students on leaving country high schools on average are substantially below the ENTER scores of students who leave private schools in Melbourne. That is not because the students who attend country high schools are 30 points dumber than students who go to private schools; it is because of the whole environment of those schools, and the way those schools are conducted, which makes it more difficult for students to excel. So a student who gets an ENTER score of 70 in a country high school has actually done very, very well indeed and has tremendous potential for growth once they reach university. Even though some of those courses have ENTER scores in the 60s and 70s, we find that those students are able to cope with the university environment very well and are able to produce very high-quality outcomes at the end of their courses. I think that any assessment of the satisfaction of the professions that employ our graduates – those we conduct at interview and we have access to – you will find there is great satisfaction in the quality of graduates from La Trobe University Bendigo.

The second type of course is what we call our niche courses; that is, we are the only place where these courses are offered within La Trobe – our regional pharmacy course, outdoor education, nature, tourism, visual arts, graphic design – we are the only faculty that offers those courses. The selection of those courses is predominantly more than via the ENTER scores, but the table actually presents the average of the ENTER scores for the first year; and you will see those courses all get very high-quality students, and indeed in some cases outstanding students. We will probably put in two new courses that will be offered next year in Bendigo. One is law – they will be all combined degrees – and the other is physiotherapy. Physiotherapy for the first two years will be done in Melbourne, in Bundoora, and the latter two years will be done here at the Health Care Group. In fact, that is our second most popular course for next year.

**The CHAIR** – Quite a coup, I would have thought, Bendigo campus – law and physiotherapy.

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – They are very important achievements and very important initiatives, so we are delighted with that occurring.

The third type of course in a sense is the professional course – teaching and nursing – which are both very popular and very successful courses, and I guess we would even consider those as almost the bread and butter, or the main stay of the university higher education offerings in Bendigo. Included in those would be IT courses, business courses and so on.

Part of the reason that in our submission we produced so much detail – including a sort of a sense of warts-and-all type of detail – is to try to establish the point that we are making, that at the current level of enrolments, which is 500 above the currently funded level, we are still getting good students into our courses – in some cases excellent students. We are producing very high-quality graduates within the existing resources we have available. The key issue for us is: were we to lose those 500 unfunded places, there would be very severe unmet demand in the Bendigo region for students eligible

and able to complete tertiary study but not able to access a place. I guess we would be appealing for your intervention in some way to ensure that those additional places are maintained once the additional allocations are made available.

I am sure we are all willing to answer specific questions, if you have them. I would be happy to answer or clarify any questions you have.

**The CHAIR** – I might start off with a clarifying question. Convoluted as it might be, but you said that country areas or regional areas had less ENTER. I assume that's because they tend to be less academically orientated than the more diverse private schools in Melbourne, for instance. Let me see how this works. You have schools that tend to be in regional Victoria less academic oriented, per se. You also tend to have lower retention rates in regional schools, secondary schools, and that transfers into less in-the-bag university places as a whole. We have just heard from – and if I am wrong here, please correct me – Bendigo Council that Bendigo is growing, that there is a greater demand for professional groups, professional services for more diversified industry and higher level skills in the Greater Bendigo area. To my way of thinking, that relates to the number of mature-age students – you have nearly 30 per cent looking to upgrade into higher education courses; and presumably it will flow back through the school system. So you have a two-way effect here: one, mature-age who want to get into university; and two, you will probably see an increase in retention rates in the secondary schools as students need to complete their VCE to get higher qualifications to access a job. It is a long way of introducing a question, but given that, how do you see your demand in the next decade for places in Bendigo rising; or what will the situation be? Do you have a decade plan for meeting demand here? You have said you are not worried about it over and above the 500 places. But what about 10 years from now, given the changes in Bendigo?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – I have heard people here say that if you take a somewhat broadish circle around Bendigo, the population is more or less 100,000, I understand. I have heard people project that the within 15 years the population will be in the order of 170,000 to 200,000. I think if that were the case, what we anticipate is you would need double the number of places.

The 70 per cent of students who currently attend La Trobe Bendigo have postcodes that we would consider as being in the Bendigo region – if you go up to Swan Hill, Mildura and out to Maryborough, and so on. I guess we would say that if there were to be 70,000 to 100,000 people come to the Bendigo region as part of their life and employment and so on, then there would be substantial need for increasing the size of the university presence in Bendigo.

**The CHAIR** – Thank you.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – Just a clarification question before I have a question about nursing, which I might direct towards Professor Endacott. These tables, do they represent the places for HECS students; or are they the total numbers of places including full-fee paying and overseas students?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – La Trobe has no full-fee paying undergraduates. In fact, these are only our undergraduate courses that have enrolments of 30 or more. We in fact have 45 undergraduate courses, and there are only 14 in the table, as I was trying to give a general picture. It does not include international students in the undergraduate courses at all. The figures are about actual students, so that were there to be 500 fewer places, you would have to subtract.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – Thank you. That makes sense. May I ask about nursing? If I am reading this table correctly – and I have to find it again – the target was 70 enrolments. The actual enrolments were 98, so you over-enrolled about 25 per cent. But at the end of that, 325 kids had it in their first preferences, their first three preferences. Did they actually meet the ENTER? Did they get the qualifications to get in but there were not enough places?

**Prof. ENDACOTT** – There are two ways of looking at it. Obviously the students who come in from VCE are coming in on the basis of an ENTER score. We have students who come in through a whole range of other ways – obviously the division 2 nurses are coming in with stat test scores – and we could also



recruit more division 2 nurses.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – Do you have an articulated pathway across from the division 2 from the TAFE year?

**Prof. ENDACOTT** – We don't have automatic articulation, because the students have to compete for places. But we set aside five places for division 2 conversion places.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – Just five?

**Prof. ENDACOTT** – We only have 20, so we set aside five; and in addition we have other students who would apply in the process.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – Professor, can you give me an idea – you have 20 places – how many normally apply for those 20 places?

**Prof. ENDACOTT** – Normally for division 2 we would be looking at anything up to 60. There are quite a few of those division 2 nurses who don't meet our entry requirements, and one of the messages we are keen to get across is that going to TAFE and doing division 2 is not the back door into university, because normally they go to TAFE to do division 2 because they can't get into university to do division 1. And we are keen to improve the nursing workforce by making those division 2 nurses convert across. We are running a program in Canberra, which is employer sponsored, for division 2 conversion and ACT Health are actually funding us to run a program, which is a significant way forward. But in a sense I think they are a slightly different category.

If we are talking about students who meet our entry requirements, one of the things that we always have to juggle is maintaining a sufficiently high ENTER score to continue to attract the high-level students. If our ENTER score drops too far, then those high-level students won't want to come to Bendigo; and I think I would probably advise them not to come to Bendigo if our ENTER score is actually too low because – sorry, you wanted to –

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – Under the proposed Nelson changes there were 250 more places. Was Bendigo going to receive any of those?

**Prof. ENDACOTT** – No, we are not receiving any of those. Those places have already been announced. For Victoria they are going to places like Hamilton, particularly to enhance their new rural campus. We have no idea of the mechanism for the allocation of those places. I was not asked for any kind of submission or opinion on those places.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – Is there an actual shortage of nurses in Bendigo?

**Prof. ENDACOTT** – There is a shortage of nurses in rural and regional Victoria, and it is very evident. One success story for us is that one of our recent honours graduates actually comes from Corang, and she has come to us, done her four-year program, achieved first-class honours and is going back to Corang to work. That epitomises certainly – well certainly, that student came in with an ENTER score that was not in the top level, which illustrated Professor Sullivan's point about the ENTER scores from country Victoria.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – Will you be able to continue to over-enrol at about 25 per cent?

**Prof. ENDACOTT** – We could certainly do that within our current resources, and we could do that without compromising our ENTER score. We would be very keen to do that.

I think one of the interesting anomalies in the situation at the moment is that DHS has run, I think, a very successful recruitment campaign, so we have people knocking on our doors but we have to say, "Okay, but we don't have any more places".

Another particular point for us is our graduate entry. At the moment we have limited numbers of

graduate entry places because we have our numbers for nursing as a whole bucket, and then we have to work out how many of those places we are going to use for division 2 for school leavers and so forth. We could recruit up to 300 graduate entry nurses, which would mean that we would be preparing nurses for the profession for two years instead of three, which would be significant for the nursing workforce. But we can't morally take those places from our undergraduate school leaver pool because it is those undergrad school leavers who we have to give those opportunities to as well. So when we sit down and decide how we are going to divide up that bucket of places, it is those kinds of judgments – some of which I think are moral judgments – that actually come into play as well.

**Mr KOTSIRAS** – In your presentation you said the students in government schools, or in Bendigo, are finding it difficult to excel. Can you elaborate what you mean, please?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – Partly underlying the recent changes announced by Minister Kosky in the blueprint documents was research conducted by Richard Teese on the performance of schools generally, and relating the performance of schools particularly by socioeconomic status to their overall ENTER score. What was found was that for government schools generally students were on average performing less well than the students in private schools. The situation in the rural areas is that it is even more severe. A number of the reasons – as you can imagine – there is more focus on community issues; maybe people have family responsibilities after work on farms and so on. And there is in a sense a less community-wide orientation towards the schooling as an avenue for educational opportunity and reform. I guess the point that I was really making there – and I want to emphasise – is that we see that students who come from a rural school with an ENTER score of 70, for example, as having much greater potential than students who come from a private school in Melbourne with an ENTER score of 70. If we take into account the schools they have been to, their prior background and their prior opportunity, we are very happy to take students from rural schools. We do give students from rural schools a bonus, but the bonus is, if you like, much less than I think they would be entitled to if we were to do the full analysis on this picture. What I am really saying is that looking at the ENTER scores, if you were to sit down with the full range of courses for Melbourne University, for example, you might say these ENTER scores appear quite low.

I guess the point I am making is that the ENTER scores are not in fact low; the students who have achieved these ENTER scores actually have considerable potential for development during their tertiary studies, during their higher education studies. And we are very comfortable with the quality of our entrants, and indeed the quality of our graduates.

**Mr KOTSIRAS** – Have you any data on the number of students who completed nursing or teaching and have found employment; or what percentage has not found employment in the first year?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – Perhaps I will ask Professor Endacott.

**Prof. ENDACOTT** – We certainly over-enrolled three years ago more than the 25 per cent, and we had 150 nursing graduates from our nursing program this year. All of those graduates were offered employment before they even sat their final exams, and I think that is a measure. In the middle of the year we had a career symposium and all of the Melbourne hospitals were up here trying to entice our students to go and work for them. So I think we are part of a much bigger pool. We are also trying to encourage the smaller rural and regional hospitals to be part of that, because it is actually those places that we need to be sending our new graduates out to, so there is no problem.

**Dr PRAIN** – It was certainly true in the past the employment prospects were more uncertain, but now there is a very high demand and lots of our secondary students have jobs at the end of the year, and the same for primary.

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – That's just prior to the end of this year.

**Dr PRAIN** – Yes, prior to completing their studies.

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – We assume that relatively soon after the start of the year there is more or less 100 per

cent of employment for people who at least are prepared to move out of Bendigo for their first job.

**Mr KOTSIRAS** – Can you tell me, when you compare the ENTER scores for your course compared to the ENTER score say in the Melbourne course, a similar course, is there much difference?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – In teaching and nursing there is not much, no.

**Prof. ENDACOTT** – We have five points for nursing.

**Dr PRAIN** – And we have 289 first preferences for next year for 128 places, so it is highly probable that the ENTER score will be going up.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – I would like to go back to the potential loss of the 500 places. If that were to come about, or at least a substantial number of them were to come about, what are the implications for the campus in terms of staff, in terms of courses, in terms of students?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – Probably the implications for the campus are not really that clear, given that we are not fully funded for those places anyway, and even the funding mechanism within the university means that even the marginal funding that the federal government supplies does not all come to us anyway, so our budget would be not much less.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – But what will you do?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – My real answer to the question is the people who really miss out if the 500 places are lost are the students who would have had those places, and the community as a whole. Those 500 places, we can teach them within our current resources, we have the facilities for them and we believe they are good enough quality graduates on entry; and we are certainly happy with the quality on completion.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – Would you have to cut staff? Would you have to cut courses? And if so, what courses?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – No, I don't think we would have to cut staff or courses, because we are not currently funded for those places anyway.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – No, but you have to have staff to teach them.

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – But I guess we are still paying those staff salaries, though. There may be some marginal on the end; just a small amount on the edge of that. There may be some courses that would become less viable because the numbers of students would not mean that we could have a bigger range of options.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – Do you have any idea what those courses would be?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – No, I don't have any idea what those courses would be. As you know, different courses go through various and different cycles of demand and decline. One of the interesting issues from the provision of higher education places in regional areas is, for example, engineering. I understand Monash has recently made a decision related to the Gippsland campus that is to reduce engineering places, and there are not so many people who want to do engineering. I understand even Monash engineering courses have difficulty attracting students – the Monash Clayton campus. So at the moment, based on the figures, you would say engineering would have to be a course you would have to think about. But at the same time, Coliban Water, for example, more or less can't get engineers to come to the country. They have a huge problem with supply of engineers to the region. Hypothetically, I am not talking about cutting out engineering entirely, but if we were to cut it, we would lose the infrastructure and then when there is a change in circumstances and more students start to take an interest in it, we would not have the capacity to, if you like, re-engineer ourselves to get into it again.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – Would you have to cut your first-year enrolments dramatically if this were to happen?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – We are to some extent anticipating in a sense the bad news by reducing enrolments next

year by 5 per cent.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – What does that mean in real numbers, in bodies?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – About 50. Actually, we are planning to cut back by 50 bodies, but because some of the law courses that are actually combined courses – law/arts, law/science and law/business – some of them are coming, and we will increase about 40 onto those, although they are funded places. The actual decline in total places will be about 10, but the decline in unfunded places will be about 50. That is in the entrance for next year.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – And you don't expect any impact on staff? I don't see how you can potentially lose 500 places and not have to cut staff.

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – We are actually funded for 2,500.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – I understand that. But 500 is a lot of students, and people have to teach them.

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – I guess probably the area where we would have to cut staff would predominantly be in the residences, if we had less demand; it would be in the range of student services, if we had fewer students that were there, mainly in the range of support staff areas. And probably we may say, “Well okay, we don't need to replace that position now that the person has left because we have fewer students”.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – That is a cut of staff.

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – We may make that decision, but in terms of budget and in terms of government-funded income to the faculties, there would be quite limited reduction. Certainly we would be very comfortable if we were to get, if you like, our fair share of the 25,000 places that are made available through the federal government. We would be very comfortable about the fact that that would actually make a positive contribution to the higher education provision for the region.

**Dr PRAIN** – It is perhaps hard to get some sense of Bendigo campus; it is 45 courses, it is like a mini university, so the 500 are spread across quite a broad range of areas. So there is some capacity to absorb across a broad range of courses that amount of over-enrolment, or that amount of reduction.

**Prof. ENDACOTT** – If I could clarify: certainly within the nursing programs the reduction in nursing places will be – we have one less tutorial group, and tutorial groups are split off from our main undergraduate cohort, they have lectures, and then they will be divided into tutorials. That means the academic workload should be slightly more manageable, because I think in most of the disciplines compared to our metropolitan campuses we would say that the teaching load is far higher. So if anything, on the one hand, I am supportive of having fewer students because it means the academics will actually be able to concentrate on the other aspects of their work, and so on, if we can reduce that academic load a little. It is something that is a concern of the academics, that they are actually teaching a lot more hours than their metropolitan counterparts.

**Ms MUNT** – We have been talking about the impact of the loss of the 500 places on the university. I am interested in the impact of the loss of the 500 on the community. In particular we heard from the last group that came that 600-odd students from Bendigo Secondary College go on to further education. I was wondering if you could tell me how many of those 600 actually come to your campus to continue their education.

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – About half.

**Ms MUNT** – So about 300 of those local students come through to La Trobe University, hopefully stay and contribute to the community. So what would be the impact then on them of this loss?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – If you imagine, 500 places overall works out to be about 200 in the first year – the way

the three-year course drops down – and what it means is that in some of our courses we would be offering 10 fewer places and in some, five fewer places, to make up the 200. Each of those places that are cut will be a student that will not have the opportunity to go to university locally. We suspect that each of those places that are cut will be a student who will not have the opportunity to go to university at all. Some of them, by the way – I hope that you have the opportunity – because of the flow-down effect, in the end I understand will suffer significant unmet demand, which no doubt you will hear about later on.

I guess that there is probably a direct economic benefit to the town, if you like, in the year and so on, because if there are 500 students fewer at the university, 500 fewer people buying pizza every night, and 500 fewer people renting properties, getting their cars serviced, you can see it is a direct economic impact on the town. But what I am more concerned about is the long-term economic benefit. Clearly a centre like Bendigo, and a rural area such as this, is going to rely on educated young people to be able to compete in the sorts of industries, the sorts of enterprise, the individual initiative that is going to be so necessary for the creation of a future for the region, and indeed the country.

**Ms MUNT** – And that's what the business representative this morning was saying.

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – So if you just had 500 fewer educated people ready to take up those jobs, the communities a whole is going to be the less.

**Ms MUNT** – The other thing that caught my eye – because our brief is particularly for nursing and for teaching – was that of the first, second and third preferences with the 475 places for teaching – 136 got a spot; and of the 325 places for nursing, 98 got a spot. So there are a lot of students out there who want to go into those particular courses. There will be a lot of demand for teachers and nurses. The employment figures are very good, and you were saying that everyone got an offer. I was wondering if you could comment on the level of unmet demand that really is going on for those two courses in particular.

**Prof. ENDACOTT** – Certainly from a nursing perspective I like to think of unmet demand in two ways: unmet demand that really is unmet need; in other words, student who would meet our entry requirements and who we would welcome this. There will always be a level of unmet demand for people who will never get in because they actually don't meet the requirements; yet they still like to put it down as maybe a first preference, but they will never make it, unless they come through TAFE and build up their skills in that way. And it is the first category that I am particularly concerned about rather than the latter. So I feel we have to be a bit careful when we are talking about demand, and I will filter that a little bit – it is probably part of my health care background as well.

**Ms MUNT** – And do you have some idea of those figures?

**Prof. ENDACOTT** – We do, informally. I think one of the things that we need to probably look at in terms of how we get our data in is actually how many of those people we end up not taking who don't go anywhere. I think it is an interesting point that I am not sure how we would get hold of that kind of data, but that is the sort of thing as a state we need to get smarter on. Those things will be the kinds of things you can address rather than us addressing them locally.

I would certainly say that in terms of the unmet demand, probably at least half of those would be people who we could take because they would meet our requirements – whether they are coming in through the usual ENTER score post-VCE route or whether they are coming in as grad entrants or as conversion students, and so on. So we have got, I would say, 50 per cent of those who we would like to be able to take.

**Dr PRAIN** – And for education we don't have precise data on that. But the figures for our first three preferences for next year are 561, so we have again another leap in terms of the interest in our course. It would be highly probable – or one would expect high levels of unmet demand.

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – It is also interesting in that figure that at least some of the 475 people who opted 1, 2 and



3, may have been offered a place at another university. But on the other hand, keep in mind that the students in Year 12 are very aware of their marketability. So if they don't apply – and someone gets an ENTER score of 50 they don't apply to get into medicine – the people who are applying for this course are going to be in the ball park, and that is their preference for study, so we can assume that discounting the figure for the number of students who would get a place elsewhere, the rest of those probably constitute unmet demand.

**Ms MUNT** – And most likely from probably this regional area, I would say, who want to come particularly to this campus.

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – Yes.

**Mr HALL** – Peter, thank you for your presentation. My interest is as a country boy, and I might add native to this region. Therefore I was interested in your comment about 70 per cent of your enrolments here at Bendigo come from what you describe as your logical geographical catchment area. To achieve that, do you have a local priority selection policy; and if so, how do you get around discrimination and equal opportunity legislation to apply a local policy selection policy?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – We offer a bonus of three points to anyone who comes from a regional or rural school. That is in fact the extent of the advantage. We are actually going next year to offer a bonus of five points for law. The reason is that we want to try and advantage the local students who want to do law rather than metropolitan students who miss out on a place at Melbourne University. In a sense, all we do is provide a bonus for students from the regional areas.

A student from Camperdown, or somewhere, is no less likely to get into La Trobe Bendigo than a student from Echuca.

**Mr HALL** – I applaud the initiative. I was just wondering whether there was any equal opportunity stuff you have to apply to overcome that.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – VUT have done it in the west.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – I wouldn't have thought so, providing it is all regional areas. There is a bonus for LOTE. If you've done LOTE, there is a bonus.

**Mr HALL** – The other question I want to ask is in relation to the submission you gave the committee, and just interpreting the tables. Under the target commencing enrolments for each of those faculty areas, does that represent the actual funded places as opposed to the underfunded?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – No, it does not. On balance you will see comparing the target with the actual that there are some above the target figure and some below it. On balance we hope to meet our targets overall. The targets overall in fact are the targets that will project the 500 over-enrolled places.

**Mr HALL** – How do the politics of the university work in terms of allocating places to La Trobe Bendigo as opposed to any other campus of La Trobe? Am I right in assuming it is purely a decision on La Trobe, the governing body, La Trobe council to say, for example, for La Trobe Bendigo we will have, for argument's sake, 120 funded Bachelor of Teaching places each year?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – The federal government makes institutional visits about its overall profile, I think annually, and the institution makes three-yearly plans about the provision of places. I guess on balance the provision of places is based on historical factors, so we would be very confident, for example, that in the university planning for 2005 that the number that the university would plan to allocate and fund would be the same as in 2003; and certainly we would anticipate we would get advance warning of that.

As it happens over the period, as I have mentioned there, of 1994 to 2004 there has been that decline in the number of funded places in La Trobe University Bendigo, but there has been a decline in the number of funded places in La Trobe University over all.

**The CHAIR** – Victoria.

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – So in a sense, the provision of places for the regional campuses is predominantly based on historical grounds, or custom.

**Mr HALL** – Which is not always fair. So am I right in saying that if there is going to be an extra 25,000 positions funded under the Nelson plan, and it is conceivable that La Trobe will pick up some of those somewhere along the line, could they not therefore offset potentially loss of unfunded places in Bendigo by allocating additional numbers of funded places?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – Absolutely. I guess I would suggest to the committee that one of the things you might consider when you are forming your recommendations is to recommend to the federal government that when they allocate the places they don't allocate them to university but allocate them to campuses.

**Mr HALL** – So targeted funding arrangements?

**Prof. ENDACOTT** – And if I could add to that: the regional loading that is proposed, if that part of the plan goes forward – that would actually mean that the university would prefer, one would hope, to use some of those places in the regional campuses because they will get additional income for those students who are on these campuses.

**Mr HALL** – Does La Trobe Bendigo have a governing body, or is it purely an advisory body within the La Trobe council?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – We have a regional advisory board that advises both the campus and the council.

**Mr HALL** – Thank you.

**The CHAIR** – The regional loading you mentioned; is that sufficient do you think? Your point about the adequacy of the regional loading as proposed –

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – I am actually happy to have a go at that, because I wrote a comment on it. La Trobe University Bendigo will get a loading of 2.5 per cent. The University of Ballarat will actually get a loading of 5 per cent. The reason that La Trobe University Bendigo gets only 2.5 per cent is because the model that is used by the federal department says that we are at an advantage compared to the University of Ballarat because we are a member of a larger metropolitan-based university. The argument is that we enjoy economies of scale by being part of that university that the University of Ballarat does not enjoy. My argument is that that model is not appropriate because the main additional cost that we have is that we have to run more courses with fewer numbers, so almost all our entire additional costs in comparison to a metropolitan-based university are in our staffing, and the additional costs that the University of Ballarat has compared to the La Trobe University Bendigo are very marginal indeed.

Both groups – La Trobe University Bendigo and the University of Ballarat – have substantial additional costs over, for example, a metropolitan-based university because of this additional staffing. So that differential that exists in the federal government formula that means we receive only 2.5 per cent loading actually disadvantages La Trobe University Bendigo and does not acknowledge the additional costs of the provision of places in the region.

**The CHAIR** – Do you have an estimate of that additional cost?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – I think the 5 per cent for the University of Ballarat is probably a reasonable figure.

**The CHAIR** – Just going back to the point you made before about over enrolments – and do you do that by your academic staff working harder, having larger lectures, more tutorials and spreading complements. So on one side, if you lose those over-enrolments it will be perhaps better for your academic staff but

the community out here will be less. To that point you say you have facilities and resource that can cover that; is that correct?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – Yes.

**The CHAIR** – You said about 3,000 full-time; is that the actual physical resource there?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – Yes.

**The CHAIR** – Okay. You are cutting back 50 positions – not counting them all – and I assume that is in preparation for the fact that you may need to scale back, which if you continued over the next few years I guess is bad news for the VCE student leaving school in 2003, 2004, 2005; would you like to comment on that?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – You are absolutely correct. The situation we anticipate is exactly what you say.

**The CHAIR** – I am only saying this because kids have just been studying for exams left, right and centre, and they all have high hopes, so I just want to be a little transparent that the next few years will be tough.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – Will the ENTERS go up as well?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – Yes, the ENTER scores will go up. If I can give you an example of an event that occurred not long after the announcement of the Backing Australia's Future proposals: we had an information night for mature-age students, and normally there is a handful of people who come up and seek information about courses. Well, you couldn't move. Literally hundreds of mature-age applicants came up to examine the offerings, because they could see the situation was going to become progressively more difficult and they thought they should start applying straight away. I think you can anticipate that it is going to get harder to get in, fewer people will get places – and if we don't get some of the funded places, or unless there is a change in the other provisions –

**The CHAIR** – Have you seen what happens in the Senate with their strategy over the next few years?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – Yes, and part of our situation at the moment is to try to work out what will happen. As you know, the details of the proposals that were released with the budget were actually fairly thin. It is broken down by discipline mix now – what fits in to what particular discipline is important for us to study, exactly how the penalties would be applied, and what would be the severity of the penalties for over-enrolment. I guess that is something we would have to evaluate as well. Even indeed the criteria for the allocation of the additional funded places. So we certainly will be examining the documents as soon as they are available – and in trying to locate the decisions.

**The CHAIR** – Thank you very much for your information. It will be very illuminating. We did have some questions we did not get to in terms of student demand, et cetera. Would you be happy for our research officer to contact you if there is more information we need?

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – Absolutely, no problem at all. Any time.

**The CHAIR** – Thank you very much. And good luck with your law course in particular and teacher-staff mix.

**Prof. SULLIVAN** – Thank you very much.

**Witnesses withdrew**

# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into the impact of high levels of unmet demand for places in higher education institutions on Victoria**

Bendigo – 1 December 2003

#### Members

Ms H. Buckingham  
Ms A. Eckstein  
Mr P. Hall  
Mr S. Herbert

Mr N. Kotsiras  
Ms J. Munt  
Mr V. Pertou

Chair: Mr S. Herbert  
Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford  
Research Officer: Dr G. Berman

#### Witnesses

Dr M. Langdon, Bendigo Regional TAFE Institute; and  
Mr N. Sharpe, School Representative, Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network.

**Necessary corrections to be notified to  
executive officer of committee**

**The CHAIR** – This all-party investigative committee of the Parliament of Victoria is hearing evidence in relation to the impact of unmet demand for places in higher education institutions in Victoria. I advise you that evidence taken today by the committee, and submissions, are subject to parliamentary privilege and are granted immunity from judicial review pursuant to the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act.

We welcome Michael Langdon and Neville Sharpe from the Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network. If you would like to make a brief statement and outline some of the issues you see pertinent to the terms of reference, we will then open up to questions.

**Dr LANGDON** – Thank you, and thank you for listening to us. We have presented you with a paper, and I am sorry we couldn't get it to you earlier. We will go through that.

The first issue is about the Goldfield LLENs, and you know what the LLENs are all about so I won't read through all of that. The area that is covered is the Bendigo, Maryborough and Castlemaine area.

**Mr SHARPE** – It is probably worth noting that Michael, but I am with the local secondary college and am the local principal.

**Dr LANGDON** – We are speaking to you on behalf of our region in total. We have included there some background demographics, and again I guess you can get those figures from most places. We put in there the population trend and significant industries. The first one is Bendigo, then Mt Alexander Shire, followed by the Central Goldfields Shire, so that is the total area we cover.

I will deal with the first area in the terms of reference; however, we would like to make a comment under nearly all of those points. The first is: The relationship between unmet demand and high-level skill shortages in the Victorian economy. There are defined areas of skill shortage in our region. The construction industry – as it has statewide – has grown enormously in line with the large growth in population over the last decade, and continues to be one of the region's fastest growing employment sectors. The population is also ageing, and the health and community services industry is currently experiences an acute shortage, particularly in the aged care area.

We are also aware, from anecdotal information gained through local employer forums, that the manufacturing/processing industry continues to expand and is experiencing strong employment growth with 28 per cent of the population here employed in this sector. It is, however, struggling to attract enough young people into careers and has significant shortages of skilled labour.

The Premier, Steve Bracks, released new figures last week showing that Bendigo's population was expected to grow by 130 per cent – and that is over 25 years – making Bendigo the fastest growing Victorian city outside Melbourne. He believes that a significant impact has been made by large organisations relocating to Bendigo – and that was in our *Bendigo Advertiser* just last week.

This expected growth will impact enormously on skill shortages that are already here, and the region's educational providers. You have just had the university here talking to you; we also have our local TAFE and ACE providers. They are unable to meet the needs of these industries due to the current funding levels and the lack of resources. In effect, tertiary places available have remained static in the Bendigo area, or they are declining. This, combined with the fact that very little skilled migration occurs from the metropolitan area from rural to regional centres compounds the issue and highlights the need for much greater level of quality, appropriate and the available training for people within our own community as having a skilled local workforce in the future will go a long way towards addressing the current and projected skill shortages.

Unless you want to ask anything about the first point – or do you want me to keep going?

**The CHAIR** – It makes it easier – we will take notes – if you keep going.



**Dr LANGDON** – The unmet demand: whether that has a negative effect or not. From the GLLN's point of view – we have run surveys through our community about what skills and outcomes there will be for our young students, because the GLLN focuses on the 15 to 22 year-olds – we are in that bracket, that is where our focus is. Anecdotal evidence has informed us that many businesses in the local area are unable to attract suitably qualified staff. And we have heard people say they are scaling down operations because of it or they are attempting to attract staff from outside the region, and that they advertise in Melbourne or down in Ballarat.

Again, we experience difficulties with the traditional lack of skilled migration to regional and rural areas – because a lot of those skilled migrants want to stay in the big cities rather than come to the country – which presents a problem for the future growth in small business that requires a skilled labour force to continue to expand and thrive.

The next point addresses the demand for teaching and nursing places, and how that demand is affected by the insufficient number of HECS places. You may have heard earlier – we were not here for the whole presentation – but there is a high demand for teaching and nursing places among students applying to both university and TAFE in this region. Aged care has already been identified as a sector that is currently experiencing acute shortages – and this year the local university offered 70 places for its Bachelor of Nursing course. Some 147 students nominated the course as a first preference, with a further 178 choosing the course as a second or third preference. The local TAFE experienced a similar problem in 2003, with 300 people applying for entry into the Certificate IV in nursing, when we only had 60 places. The acute shortage in the health and aged care industry means that 100 per cent of students are placed in employment after completing their course, but there are clearly not enough places available to address the issue of the labour market gaps.

Within the next five years the region will be experiencing another acute shortage in the education sector. Most of the teachers employed are close to 50 years of age, and will be retiring in the near future. This will create huge problems for schools. We are currently providing training places for around 130 teachers at a local level, even though 475 students nominated this course as a first, second or third choice for university study. Again, the problem of little skilled migration to rural and regional centres, combined with the projected population increases, will impact enormously on skilled teaching staff in the region in the future.

The next point is how unmet demand impacts on the demand for TAFE places. This is really consequential for what happens down the line. Traditionally, TAFE has picked up much of the overflow of students who are not successful in obtaining a place at university, particularly in the country, as the majority of country students are getting into our local university, as you would have heard, and those who miss out want to go to our TAFE.

The option of completing a diploma and later converting this qualification to a degree or articulating up into the year is an option that many students take up. However, this course of action impacts directly on the number of places available to prospective students who choose TAFE as their first preference of tertiary education as they could be easily displaced by students with a higher academic score. If students can't get into the uni, they will apply to the TAFE, and of course they generally will have a higher academic score if they have just missed out on uni than the traditional people who are trying to get into TAFE.

Currently the local TAFE institute is experiencing a very high demand for entry level courses in general, and currently would require a 13 per cent increase to existing student contact hours to deliver the training presently required. This would mean an increase of up to 1500 student places to meet the current demand, and that is without stimulating the market and promoting courses further. Overall, good news from the TAFE perspective is that 92 per cent of students exiting TAFE colleges are in employment or full-time study within six months of completing – they are the latest NCVER figures that came out on the student outcomes survey this year. This must impact positively on the community's economy in both the short and long term. I guess what we are trying to say is that there are positive outcomes for people going to TAFE, but if we are going to squeeze the places for them to get in, it means less people have that chance.

The degree to which the commonwealth higher education funding policies directly contribute to unmet demand is the next point. The cost of educating young people in Melbourne as opposed to the option of studying in their own regional centre is prohibitive for most families. The financial costs for rural families include fees, relocation expenses, rent and board and so on, and the extra expenses are not a viable option for them. In fact a number of students I know in our local colleges have decided that they might defer so they can save up some money and become independent students so they can afford to go to Melbourne, if that is the only option they have got. Of course that is not a very good option, because as you know, the stats came out stating that 42 per cent of those people who defer don't go on to further study.

This combined with the fact that most young people are not immediately eligible for financial assistance from the commonwealth government, contributes to the problem, and also impacts on the high rate of student deferment from the local university. As I have already said, to compound the issue, recent studies conducted by the local university have shown that a large percentage of these deferred places are not taken up at a later date. Our local university is facing the prospect of losing 500 unfunded places, and you have just heard that, I know. This will surely have an impact on the current unmet demand experienced. The loss of these places will put even greater pressure on an already stressed TAFE/ACE sector and will increase the level of skill shortages in local industry in the longer term.

The next point: The need at a national level to improve the cooperative arrangements between the VET and the higher education sectors. At present we have articulation arrangements in place with the local university. In fact, we have had a lot of meetings to try to improve on our articulation to help pathways for our students. However, the issue of providing adequate numbers for places for students across course levels remains a problem, because as part of that articulation agreement the university said, "We just cannot guarantee X-number of places for your students because we just haven't got the places". So TAFE experienced difficulties meeting demand as it is let alone moving up to university.

**The CHAIR** – Thank you, Michael. Questions.

**Mr KOTSIRAS** – You said that currently there is unmet demand at TAFE in Bendigo; correct?

**Dr LANGDON** – Yes.

**Mr KOTSIRAS** – Do you think the increase in fees recently announced by the Minister will assist, or will it deter students from enrolling in TAFE; and two, do you think the amount the government pays for student contact hours is sufficient?

**Dr LANGDON** – The increase in fees – the 25 cents on top of the dollar – there is a 25 per cent increase there, and I guess any price increase will make it more difficult for students who want to go and get any sort of an education, particularly with the TAFE cohort of students – which while not totally – but there is certainly a large cohort of TAFE students who are from low socioeconomic backgrounds. At the moment they are finding it difficult already to pay TAFE fees. So that is only going to compound that issue. The amount that you've talked about – that money, the 25 cents, is not going to the TAFE institutes, it is going back to Treasury or wherever else, so it is not actually going to help the local TAFE at all.

You asked whether the student contact hour rate was sufficient. I would say definitely no. I know at the local TAFE institute for next year the amount of money that we are getting for our training is actually declining. In real terms, the whole institute is getting the same amount, but it has been moved into different areas, targeted I guess by the government, but that's their prerogative. But the amount for training is actually declining, and therefore there are even less places available next year for students. Therefore, there will actually be another course closure at our local TAFE, which is as a result of a lack of funding; so no, there is not enough money per student contact hours.

**Mr HALL** – What is the reason for the declining funding for next year, Michael? From what you've said

today, the demand here is ever present and therefore one would think the institute would have a very good case to put to government.

**Dr LANGDON** – The institute has a very good case to put to the government, but I guess the government in its wisdom has to make some decisions on its priorities. At the moment from a TAFE perspective, I guess, it does not appear that TAFE is the highest priority at the moment, and there is actually a squeeze of funds. I think that there are a lot of priorities. Health is a huge priority, and the government has to decide where its priorities are. But I feel TAFE has not had an increase in funds for a number of years, and again the 1.5 per cent productivity claim has been put onto TAFE for the next year as well, and that is continuing.

**Mr HALL** – So what is the reduction in your base funding for next year?

**Dr LANGDON** – As I said, as a total amount of money into the institute it is the same. I am supposed to be representing the GLEN, and I don't want to get out of that area, so it is really as far as – yes, I guess I don't want to talk out of school. I am supposed to be talking on behalf of the GLEN.

**Mr HALL** – But you are entitled to express a view as a member of the GLEN, particularly as some of the terms of reference relate to unmet demand at the university and its impact on TAFE, these are the direct things that the committee is interested in.

**Dr LANGDON** – From the GLEN's perspective, what the GLEN really wishes for the young – because we are talking about that age cohort of students, 15 to 22 year-olds – we want a number of places available as pathways for students at a secondary school into a tertiary provider in Bendigo, and we haven't got sufficient places. Because there is no increase in the places at La Trobe University – there is actually a decline in the places available at the local TAFE – those pathways are not available, and that is from the GLEN's perspective. We are not satisfied with that at all. Our local population definitely isn't.

**Mr HALL** – Could I ask a question about the GLEN then? First of all, I met your executive officer when she was down at Parliament at our reception the other week, and it was good to meet her. She told us how the GLEN was operating very well in this region, which was encouraging to hear.

One of the things I asked the Greater City of Bendigo people was whether they were actually doing any work with other universities to encourage their involvement in terms of providing courses within your region. Does the GLEN itself see a need for other universities to deliver more into the region? For example, in the area I represent in Gippsland, we have three universities actually operating in the area. In particular, Gippsland Institute of TAFE has a relationship with RMIT, for example, which helps the delivery of some first-year level courses undertaken by the institute. I would have thought it was in the best interests of the Local Learning and Employment Network to actually encourage universities on top of La Trobe to actually deliver courses. Are you as an organisation doing any active work in encouraging that sort of thing?

**Mr SHARPE** – No, we are not. Our focus has mainly been to look at alternative pathways, and our concerns about the total number of places available to students exiting Year 12. Our real concern is the social justice issue in that many families simply are not able to afford to send their children out of this area, this region, for education. That is our major concern. We are looking at trying to provide that range of pathways where TAFE training is just as valuable as university. As I said, we are really concerned about the potential knockdown effect if there are not more places.

**Dr LANGDON** – Can I just follow on from that: Central Gippsland, there is a little more difference there, too, because as you know, their region actually goes up into some of the metro areas. So for them to have the linkage with RMIT it would be natural to be able to do that and have other linkages with other universities; whereas being out in the rural area where we are, we have La Trobe University and we want to really try to strengthen that. Yes, I understand what you are saying. And we are represented in Castlemaine, which is very close to Ballarat; and I know as a GLEN they have been speaking to Ballarat. Because the government are funding a new education precinct in Maryborough, they are investigating whether there other universities that might also be able to also offer a course in the area.

**Ms MUNT** – We have been hearing that the local secondary college that does the Years 11 and 12s has 600 students, and half of those go to study at La Trobe University. We are also hearing about how the impact of the cuts to unfunded places will impact quite significantly on those students who wish to go through to La Trobe University campus in Bendigo. I am wondering as the group that is kind of responsible for looking after those students, have you had any thoughts about how you can accommodate this unmet demand from these 500 cut places? There would be a lot of expectations going on.

**Dr LANGDON** – That is a very good question. We have certainly discussed it. One of the things, I guess, is that all of the local community – of which the GLLEN is just one part – has really been trying to lobby the government to hopefully – fingers crossed and everything – not to do that to the local university. That might be in vain, I know, but it may not be, either. I suppose we are living in hope. Outside that there is not a lot we can actually do, because it is outside our realm of influence. I guess if those places do go, what do we do with our students locally? And if the TAFE can't take them and the university can't take them and ACE can't take them, we are really stuffed.

**Ms MUNT** – It is going to have this trickle-down effect.

**Dr LANGDON** – That's right. It will be a whole community issue; and you are right, we are representing that body of people in the community.

**Mr SHARPE** – I suppose we have a relatively higher retention rate for country regions in schools for Year 12 in Bendigo, and traditionally a very high percentage have gone on to La Trobe Bendigo. In fact, quite clearly this will have a definite impact on Year 12 students, and we are concerned about that. We also try to encourage TAFE placements; a number of students have gone to TAFE. We see that very important as a pathway also; but if some of those pathways get knocked off with courses disappearing, I think that could really affect the school base of our community. Further down the track that is where the problems will be.

**Ms MUNT** – Absolutely. And are students aware – you get students in Years 11 and 12 who are busily studying and hoping for a certain result, and a certain pathway – are they aware that this pathway might be increasingly difficult to achieve?

**Dr LANGDON** – It has been in the local media. One thing I know is that La Trobe University has had a lot of local media; the press has picked it up, and the local business people have been right behind the university in trying to lobby for that not to happen to them. So I guess from the students' perspective, they would know that something is happening, but the university has not communicated about what courses that might relate to. So for students, they really don't know what effect it would have on them.

**Ms MUNT** – I think it might be across the board. We heard earlier that some courses, in particular engineering, may be affected but the enter scores for other courses will of course increase, so it will be a multiple effect rather than just confined to one area.

**Dr LANGDON** – And if enter marks and scores increase, well then those who miss out will be looking. As you said, there are 85 per cent – I can't remember the exact percentage – but 80-odd per cent of those students at local university here come from our local region. So if they can't get in they will want to go into something, and if they can't go into TAFE because places are capped or declining, I don't know what they will do.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – Most alarming. Just following on from that: through the GLLEN, are you in a position to track students, where they go, and if they can't go here and they can't go here, what happens to them?

**Mr SHARPE** – That is one of the major functions of the GLLEN. We do go through tracking and we work cooperatively to try to trace and follow through pathways, but in fact the tracking will take place after the event and if the places aren't there at tertiary level, we will find there is this unmet demand with more students looking for work.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – But you say that early next year you will be in a position to say, “Well some got into university, some got into TAFE, this pushed the enter scores up” – to whatever – “and some didn't get into anything”. Are you able to track any of those who didn't get into tertiary courses in terms of employment, apprenticeships and other stuff?

**Mr SHARPE** – Yes, we do; we have that database.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – When would you have that information for this year's cohort?

**Dr LANGDON** – It is done within six months in the following year, so within that first six months.

**Mr SHARPE** – For example, this year we were grappling with the fact that a much higher number of students deferred university places within our community, and we have tried to grapple with what does that mean as far as implications. Although we believe that the factors there were really cost factors, economic factors.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – Rather than not-getting-in factors?

**Mr SHARPE** – Rather than not-getting-in factors. However, I think next year, if the enter scores go up, that we will approach the community in late January when the offers come out. We will then have to track what happens to those students then.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – So earlier next year you would have some indication?

**Mr SHARPE** – Yes.

**Dr LANGDON** – And the difficulty is, too, that some of those students who don't get into anything go off the radar, which is a real shame, too.

**Ms MUNT** – They probably end up on the unemployment figures.

**Dr LANGDON** – That is right. We work with Centrelink with that to try to get those figures out.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – What other possible pathways are open to students who don't get into university and don't get into the TAFEs? Are there traineeships offered by businesses up here? What else is done to encourage kids to perhaps seek alternative pathways and go back to study later on?

**Mr SHARPE** – There is a strong structure of traineeships through the ACE providers, and particularly through the TAFE provider. Many students will start those before completing Year 12, before they get to that age group. We are finding there is very strong demand for students, even before they get into Year 12, to go into apprenticeship courses and other areas, and this is growing. Lots of students follow those pathways, and we are trying to promote them. As a LLEN, we have tried to promote with employers and also with families; we are trying to encourage people to really focus on the skill shortage areas, and we are trying to work cooperatively with industry to try to encourage more students to take them up.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – What are the skill shortage areas?

**Dr LANGDON** – In our manufacturing area – for example, I can tell you about one – I probably shouldn't name the person. This is a furniture making company; they even have an ad in their window for skilled labour. They have 12 apprentices on, so they have enough apprentices; they could get more, but they say they also need some skilled older people, but they can't find them any more, so they are trying to give the ones they employ more training. They are advertising in Melbourne and other places. If you want to go and learn that, you could actually go and get a job tomorrow – just walk in the door. So manufacturing is one of the big ones in Bendigo, and Bendigo has historically been a manufacturing base, I guess, for its industry.



What was the other one –?

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – So do the courses offered here by the university and the TAFE match the skills shortages?

**Dr LANGDON** – I know they definitely try to do that; that is one thing with the TAFE, there is a lot of industry consultation about where the courses are and what is offered.

**Mr SHARPE** – We projected shortages in this region, big shortages. Bendigo is probably the last place they will hit really hard. They will hit the smaller rural schools further out; that's my belief. In fact, we depend very strongly on La Trobe Bendigo for training teachers. I think over time if there are cutbacks it will affect the whole of the education community in this area.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – Can I take you back, Neville, to what you were discussing earlier, the deferral rate, and that it has risen quite considerably; by how much as a percentage of exit Year 12s?

**Mr SHARPE** – I don't have the data in front of me. From the data on last year's student exits, we found that 30 per cent of students were deferring. One of the issues is that they are deferring to try to find work so they can become eligible for independent Aus Study along the lines of the federal government's finance requirements. The difficulty, of course, is that many of those students are not turning around and coming back in after they have deferred.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – And is the GLEN keeping statistics of that; how many actually do then take up their place 12 months later?

**Mr SHARPE** – We will be. Our concern is what happens to these young people.

**Dr LANGDON** – Because a lot of them end up in part-time employment. I guess that is the trend anyway with the younger people these days, part-time, and they don't get full-time until probably after they have been in employment for five years.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – They are the sorts of figures you also keep: how many students here at both the TAFE and the university are actually also working part-time?

**Dr LANGDON** – I don't think we have those figures.

**Mr HALL** – Are there any registered private providers, group training companies, et cetera, that are part of the GLEN network?

**Dr LANGDON** – Yes, CTGV is one of the most active with that, and they are on our committee. They have strong linkages with the TAFE and with the university, too.

**Mr HALL** – How do you manage your GLEN, which extends the area from Maryborough, Castlemaine and Bendigo? It seems fairly large, with three quite distinct focuses for it. Can you manage one LLEN right across the whole of that network?

**Mr SHARPE** – I think the issue is that we really only have one LLEN but three active subcommittees. For example, there is a Bendigo subcommittee covering the City of Greater Bendigo, where we have regular meetings and connection with employers, and we run functions on that basis. And the same would happen in Maryborough and Castlemaine. So I suppose the actual administration spread right across and the LLEN reflects that whole area, but there are lots of local issues that are different.

**Dr LANGDON** – And we actually have three subcommittees, so there is a Castlemaine subcommittee under their local government area, and a Maryborough one and then Bendigo. And then there are representatives of those on the central committee; that is how it is organised. It works well doing it that way.

**Mr HALL** – One quick question on the TAFE side of things, Michael. You said before that there is a potential need to close courses next year. Do you know what courses are in jeopardy of not running next year?

**Dr LANGDON** – I suppose that will become public. We are working through that issue.

**Mr HALL** – You haven't made that decision yet?

**Dr LANGDON** – We are very close to making it.

**Mr HALL** – We will read about it.

**Dr LANGDON** – Sorry, it is probably not my role to –

**The CHAIR** – We heard from the University of La Trobe that they didn't have a lot of information about their exit students, the students that had missed out on getting a place and where they went. I understand that LLENs had exit surveys this year of all your Year 12 students, and that is going to ramp up. I am just wondering is that part of what you do with your exit surveys; do you look at where students applied for universities and missed out, whether they went to TAFE or if they were employed or are unemployed? Do you do that? I am not suggesting that you don't, but it struck me as a bit strange that they didn't know where a lot of people had applied and when, but you have done exit surveys of Year 12 students. Could you comment on that?

**Mr SHARPE** – I think there are two issues: at the local level we look at all the school leavers in their age group, where they have applied to, and we can track where they have ended up. But probably for La Trobe Bendigo, they would have students applying from all over the state, and we certainly wouldn't have the data that would reflect all of their students that have missed out through unmet demand. Most of our students in this community, and most of the ones in this region, would apply for La Trobe Bendigo, mostly for financial reasons.

**The CHAIR** – Do you talk to them before you survey them; do you talk to them about what is in it? It might be possible to get some information useful to them about what you are doing next year.

**Dr LANGDON** – To the university?

**The CHAIR** – Yes.

**Dr LANGDON** – This year for the first time we now have a university representative on the GLEN committee, the registrar from there. We really targeted to get someone from the university to actually help with that, just to talk about it.

**The CHAIR** – The other question relates to the issue of TAFE and its role with universities. I know years ago there was an issue with Bendigo TAFE not meeting their apprenticeship and traineeship targets, in fact under-enrolling in terms of what they were supposed to do – that was a few years ago. And I suppose a couple of years ago it was still being worked through, which makes it surprising when you talk about that end, okay – that there has been such a stark reversal of two or three years ago outsourcing places, I guess was the best way of putting it in terms of training and apprenticeships, outsourcing the numbers you need to satisfy the unmet demand.

Is it because what you see is that the unmet demand for universities is translating into diploma courses, and there is some pressure on diploma courses at TAFE and that is impacted in terms of the TAFE's ability or desire to concentrate on the lower skill level of apprenticeship and traineeships?

**Dr LANGDON** – I see your point. And the unmet demand from three years ago – two years ago – there is actually a whole new executive team, and everything else, in place as well. There are a number of reasons for that, and I won't go into them all, as they are historical. At the moment we, last year,

exceeded or overshot our student contact hours target, and we going to do that again this year. As you know, with apprenticeships and traineeships, however many apply, part of our performance agreement is that we must take them. So you need to realign your training program, from other programs to apprenticeship trainees because they are the high priority area. We will actually overachieve in all our training this year, as we did last year.

**The CHAIR** – That is a fairly complex ask. You have pressure from the top and pressure from the bottom, I guess.

**Dr LANGDON** – That is right.

**The CHAIR** – I guess it must be difficult for the LLENs to work out what advice they may give in terms of where that structure should be.

**Mr SHARPE** – I think the focus of the LLENs has been on cooperation between all institutions to try to work together to promote and work out synergies where we can work together. We have not actually as a LLEN been debating internal TAFE decision-making, but we have been focusing on how we can get TAFE to work better with schools, which is a different area, and obviously with the university as well to try to encourage more places.

**The CHAIR** – Okay. Are there any more questions? Thank you very much.

**Dr LANGDON** – Thank you for listening.

**Mr SHARPE** – It has been an interesting experience.

**Witnesses withdrew**

# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into the impact of high levels of unmet demand for places in higher education institutions on Victoria**

Bendigo – 1 December 2003

#### Members

Ms. H. Buckingham  
Mr A. Eckstein  
Mr P. Hall  
Mr S. Herbert

Mr N. Kotsiras  
Ms J. Munt  
Mr V. Pertou

Chair: Mr S. Herbert  
Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford  
Research Officer: Dr G. Berman

#### Witnesses

Mr P. Benne, President; and

Mr R. Stephenson, General Manager, Bendigo Student Association.

**Necessary corrections to be notified to  
executive officer of committee**

**The CHAIR** – We welcome the Bendigo Student Association. You might like to say a few words first; we will then proceed to questions, if that suits.

**Mr BENNE** – My name is Peter Benne. With me is Robert Stephenson. We represent the Bendigo Student Association. I am the president; Rob is the general manager. In the document that we have handed you there is an introduction, which I will briefly read through. We will then focus on term of reference (e). So I will begin.

Bendigo Student Association Inc (BSA) is the major on-campus provider of services to students at La Trobe University's Faculty for Regional Development based at its Bendigo campus. We would therefore like to bring to your attention some of the issues that impact on students at this campus, and request that such matters be taken into account in the review of higher education that is currently being conducted.

The future of regional Australia depends very much on the ability of its citizens to make a successful transition from highly labour-intensive, low-skilled communities to highly skilled, technically literate workforces, capable of dealing with and adapting to the changes that continue to occur in modern society.

Central to this is the maintenance of a high-class education system, including recognition of the special role that universities fulfill in such communities, and the need to ensure that such facilities remain widely accessible to people living and working in those communities.

I start with term of reference (e). As a result of considering the federal government's *Crossroads* discussion papers, and preparing submissions in respect of that and the Senate Inquiry into Higher Education Funding and Regulatory Legislation, we have developed a thorough understanding of the impact of commonwealth higher education funding policies on students who currently choose to study at Latrobe University, Bendigo.

The vast majority of students at this campus are drawn from the immediately surrounding Bendigo area, or from other parts of regional Victoria and southern New South Wales. La Trobe University research shows that the key responses indicated by commencing students as influencing their decision to enrol at the Bendigo campus are location, quality of course, and economic.

While the economic benefits are obvious for students able to live at home while undertaking their studies, the costs for students relocating to Bendigo to study, either living on campus or in off-campus accommodation, are significantly lower than for comparable accommodation in metropolitan areas. This is a significant factor when one considers that the majority of undergraduate students remain reliant on financial support from their families to enable them to undertake their studies.

The Bendigo campus provides quality tertiary education to people from rural and regional backgrounds, and also provides the community it services with manifold social and economic benefits. La Trobe University, Bendigo, contributes significantly to the economy of the Bendigo region, both directly through provision of employment, and indirectly through the activities of students and staff within the community.

The wider social benefits of high-quality tertiary institutions located in regional Australia include the encouragement of the celebration of cultural and ideological diversity, and the forging of strong networks between those who will be leading our country into the future, whether it is as teachers, community leaders, or primary producers. Regional tertiary institutions are unique in that they are able to practically address the current widespread lack of connectedness between city and rural/regional Australia. By initiating a mixing of ideas, knowledge and aspirations from a myriad of origins, and being placed in a regional context, regional institutions have a great deal to offer to the future of this country.

As the interests and educational needs of people in regional areas are as diverse as those of people in metropolitan areas, it is important to maintain access to as broad a range of study areas as is

possible, with the essential criterion being that the quality of education should not be less than that available to metropolitan students. In addition, the value of being educated in one's own town or region should be recognised, and such education supported. Students educated in their own communities will have an understanding of those communities on which to base their future learning, and hence will be empowered and more able to apply that knowledge to the improvement and strengthening of those communities.

**The CHAIR** – Peter, would you be able to summarise this document, as we have a lot of questions?

**Mr BENNE** – Would it be quicker if people read through it for themselves?

**The CHAIR** – If you could summarise some of the points towards the end, it would be helpful.

**Mr BENNE** – The next section deals with the fact that campuses in rural areas are concerned about being called second-class, that their degrees are felt to be second-class. There needs to be the assurance that the quality of education is the same from rural and metropolitan universities. Particularly in Bendigo, we are facing under the Nelson Review the possibility of losing 500 places. We have only 4,000 students here, so if we lost those 500 places because of over-enrolment – obviously our campus is over-enrolled to keep the viability and the structure of it to provide the quality of education – but if those 500 places were lost and there has been no guarantee that those places are going to be filled by full payment places, then that would have a massive effect on the diversity and the viability of the situation – we just wouldn't be able to sustain ourselves. It will affect the local economy, and all sorts of things.

Because the university here is the second largest contributor to the economy – I think second to the mining industry of Bendigo – economically it is important to the local economy; but the idea is that students can come here from regional areas or from Bendigo and study at this institute so that they can then put back into the community what they have learnt.

Our worry is that students who are paying HECS at the moment are struggling enough already, and that the increase in HECS fees, or the increase in places – of full-fee paying places – plus the offering of the full \$50,000 student loan, we don't see would actually help the problem; it would probably worsen it and would reduce the amount of students who would be able to attend university in this socioeconomic area.

**The CHAIR** – We might open up to questions.

**Ms MUNT** – How many students do you represent under your association?

**Mr BENNE** – We have 4,190, and it fluctuates, year to year.

**Ms MUNT** – And they are all from the La Trobe campus, are they? Including the part-timers.

**Mr BENNE** – We have around 2,700 EFTSU students – that is off the top of my head. But yes, the rest of them are made up of, I suppose – well, the university has stretched itself to allow those extra students to study here, so they actually take the brunt of that, the costing. That costing is not put back onto the students obviously; the costing is put back onto the university, and then the rest is made up of part-time, I suppose, and casual, but we represent just over 4,000.

**Ms MUNT** – Predominantly from the La Trobe campus?

**Mr BENNE** – We represent only the students of the university at the Bendigo campus. We are the sole student body at that campus.

**Ms MUNT** – Do you have any idea of how many of the students at La Trobe campus also have to work part-time, or do significant other work to keep themselves?



**Mr BENNE** – I would say the majority. There are some lucky enough who live at home whose parents support them, but even that is at a stretch. I know one person who has that – but we have a real problem with university culture. Back when you treated your studies as a full-time job, you would come into school, you would do your classes, you would stay, you would study, and you would be involved in all the activities, that sort of thing. Now students come, rush in, do their 50 minutes, leave early, rush back to their job. So as far as the bulk of students on campus, there is a lot of rushing to and from jobs to study.

**Ms MUNT** – So if the HECS were to increase, for instance, or the positions at La Trobe were increasingly hard to come by and students had to go elsewhere, the burden would increase then?

**Mr BENNE** – Yes.

**Mr STEPHENSON** – I think one of the other concerns we have is that the students would not necessarily go elsewhere. One of the things about having the education available locally is that a lot of people come here because it is available locally and if it were not available, then I would believe a significant number would never proceed to university education.

**Ms MUNT** – Have you done any research on the socioeconomic background that your students come from?

**Mr STEPHENSON** – The university has in terms of looking at the reasons they come here, based on the catchment area through the northwest into the southern New South Wales; they predominantly come from fairly low-socioeconomic backgrounds. In fact it becomes quite evident if you attend the graduation ceremonies to see – this is one of my favourite stories, that is why Peter laughed – you see all the proud parents come down, and the fathers are still wearing their wedding suits. So they are certainly battlers, and that is quite evident from the people who turn up at those ceremonies. The prospect of taking on a \$50,000 loan for the sake of getting an education – I come from a small country town myself, and I know these people would run a mile at the horrendous thought of borrowing \$50,000. If you are living in Bendigo, that is not so scary; that's life. And anywhere else, that's just life.

**Ms MUNT** – Thank you.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – You've indicated in your submission and what you've said that the over-enrolments at Bendigo are a significant concern. And you've said that there are ramifications with staff and courses at risk. We heard a bit of a different story from the university, but can you expand on your take on this?

**Mr BENNE** – What was the story of the university?

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – Basically they felt they could cope.

**Mr BENNE** – If they funded places?

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – Certainly staff were not at risk; they would have smaller classes, and yes, there may be a bit of an impact on some courses, but they couldn't identify them. So I would like to get your take on it.

**Mr BENNE** – Professor Sullivan, who is the acting pro vice-chancellor and dean at the moment, who gave that talk – that was his view. Professor Les Kilmartin, who was in the job before him, openly expressed his concern about the 500 places. The way we look at it is that some courses, because of some of them falling within those 500 places – if they were lost – some of those courses would not be able to be run.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – Can you identify which ones?

**Mr BENNE** – No.

**Mr STEPHENSON** – The ones that have most frequently been identified are the maths-type courses. We have a very small maths department out there. And while I don't know the exact numbers, my

understanding is that it is fairly critical in terms of just enough students to make it viable. The fear is that were we to have a lesser number of students, then a decision could be made that the maths department was no longer viable, and that would then have flow-on effects to teacher education and the sorts of other courses that rely on that subject. I am sure you know we have a fairly chronic shortage of maths teachers around the place at the moment.

**The CHAIR** – Do they do maths as teaching; is that what happens?

**Mr STEPHENSON** – They do maths as part of their undergraduate degrees, and they become teachers following that.

**Mr BENNE** – But I think it would affect traditional subjects such as the arts and humanities; whereas as our society is becoming more focused on training for certain set career paths – teaching, nursing, engineering, et cetera – I think traditional subjects such as arts and humanities which are always good broad-based learning, and they have probably been targeted as well. I personally know that those areas have been cut back.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – Already?

**Mr BENNE** – Yes, quite significantly. I myself study arts, and over the past three years I have seen the cutbacks.

**Mr STEPHENSON** – Certainly what they have just announced for the humanities area next year – I think they have reduced the number of honours students fairly dramatically, and reduced the number of PhD students to one.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – So they have reduced the number of places at particular levels. Have they also reduced the breadth of the offering, so we don't offer so many different kinds of subjects?

**Mr BENNE** – Over time there have been cutbacks to all faculties. I even think a few degrees have been lost, especially in the recent times. A couple of students in particular were in a bit of trouble – I think it was last year or the year before – because their course disappeared from under their feet and they still had about two subjects to finish, so that was two actual points. They needed to do all sorts of things. I think it added another year onto their degrees, but that caused a massive amount of stress on these students who were trying to study and working out what to do with their futures.

**Mr STEPHENSON** – Certainly there are a number of subjects that are only offered every second year, so in the currency of a three-year degree at least it gives you the opportunity to pick up those subjects, but there are a number that run on a rotation of every second.

**Mr KOTSIRAS** – So are you saying these courses can be done away with because there has been a decline in enrolments for these subjects?

**Mr STEPHENSON** – At the moment I believe it is based on just enough numbers to run them every year. It is based on your student numbers and on staff.

**Mr KOTSIRAS** – But before you said with the maths course, for example, there was a decline in enrolments in the course?

**Mr STEPHENSON** – No, it is a very small number at the moment, or just enough there to make the maths department viable; that's my understanding.

**Mr KOTSIRAS** – And do you know of any programs that the university is doing, or the local high school, encouraging students to take up maths?

**Mr STEPHENSON** – I am not aware of the high school's policy.

**Mr KOTSIRAS** – Is your association involved in encouraging students to take up subjects where this is a shortage?

**Mr STEPHENSON** – We are not actively involved in careers counselling of students or any of those sorts of things. What we want in Bendigo is to maintain diversity of the courses, the diversity of the offering so that the students as far as possible are able to study those courses that they want to undertake.

**Mr KOTSIRAS** – But there would be a problem if there were only a handful of students who want to do maths; you can't offer a maths course.

**Mr STEPHENSON** – No. And certainly that will be a problem if the numbers are reduced any further by whatever pressures cause those to be reduced. It would be my view that the university should be the one that is trying to encourage students and careers counsellors in high schools. Graham Bastian, the Principal of Bendigo Senior Secondary College – someone like that would be more in a position to indicate where they are trying to send students.

**The CHAIR** – Thank you for coming in, Peter and Rob. Could you give us a quick outline of the range of services that the Bendigo Student Association delivers on campus?

**Mr STEPHENSON** – We say we do everything, except the academic side of it. We actually run a cafe and a retail newsagency, art supplies stationery shop. We run a fitness centre, which also has quite a number of community members and that helps to keep the prices on that down to increase its viability.

**Mr HALL** – Residential, do you do that?

**Mr STEPHENSON** – We don't do residential. We run the traditional activities and entertainment-type events, trips and short courses; we have a student advocacy welfare-type area, which is involved with education research.

**Mr HALL** – A fair range of things. What student fees then does a typical student pay to attend La Trobe Bendigo?

**Mr STEPHENSON** – The general service fee that we receive a portion of is \$310 a year each year for full-time students.

**Mr HALL** – Do you have any relationship with the TAFE students in the town?

**Mr STEPHENSON** – Not in a formal sense. The TAFE student association – as a result of a few problems two or three years ago, I believe – had control of the student association virtually taken back from the students by the council of TAFE. My understanding is at the moment they dole out money fairly judiciously, so it is not a particularly active student association there.

**Mr HALL** – But for your association, the majority of that \$310 or so, that comes directly to you guys, does it?

**Mr STEPHENSON** – We receive around about 75 per cent of it. A \$50,000 a year total goes to the child-care facility at the university, and it also pays part of the academic support services – the campus nurse and a few other bits and pieces like that.

**Mr HALL** – What sorts of students would utilise the residential facilities? In your knowledge, are they predominantly students from way outside of the region, or might they be a Swan Hill-type student who is coming down to study here?

**Mr BENNE** – Yes. Even some from half an hour – not half an hour, but an hour or so's drive, would use that; it is obviously too far to drive every day, but yes, from all over. I see someone living in Bendigo wouldn't utilise that service, but a number of students – there are 620 students who occupy those residences.

**Mr HALL** – And do you know what sort of mix of on-campus residential students there is, as opposed to those seeking private accommodation in the town?

**Mr BENNE** – Tell me if I am answering your question wrong: so if we have 620 students who are using the on-campus residents –

**Mr HALL** – Is there an equivalent number seeking private accommodation?

**Mr BENNE** – There would be more, I suppose, when you take into account the part-time and mature-aged students; most of them live here, but we have people travelling from Kyneton and Castlemaine, frequently.

**The CHAIR** – On the issue of unmet demand: do you find there are different cohorts, like the demand coming from mature students or from different parts of Bendigo? Do you have a view that if you had more numbers where would they come from?

**Mr BENNE** – Mature-age students definitely take up more the humanities or teaching or nursing sort of degrees; and there is definitely a lot of – let me just say, a lot of mature-aged students take to the humanities degrees, whereas I suppose there is a pretty good mix between mature-age and leaving school or a couple of years out of school who come in to do the nursing and teaching courses. Engineering is quite a small one, but we have quite a popular – or famous within its type of whatever you call it – outdoor education and tourism, which is very popular. I think it is the first one in Australia, or Victoria, that has been run here. I would go so far as to say it is the best one. That is mainly the younger type – or a bit older than me. You don't see many older people trying to get around the bush with heavy packs on their backs. That degree has the younger type intake; they have a really good social network, I suppose, because they go away a lot of weekends because of their trips. They have their courses compact from Monday to Wednesday – then Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, most weekends they are away on trips. I do tease them and say they are only getting a degree in camping, but there is a lot in that degree, and most of them go on to do a dip Ed afterwards, so they can become teachers.

**Mr STEPHENSON** – Certainly just to the pick up the courses where we could carry more students, the teaching course has a fairly high enter score, so a lot of people miss out on that; whether they subsequently obtain positions elsewhere or not, I don't know. I think there are 105 nursing graduates who finished this year, and I think all of those who had been seeking employment had jobs lined up prior to sitting their final exams. So certainly there is demand out there for those people as graduates, and one would assume that if they were able to expand the courses to carry a larger intake, they could achieve that.

**The CHAIR** – What about the HECS increases we have seen over the past five years? Is there much poverty? Have you any evidence of what the impact of those extra HECS fees and costs, I guess, have had on students, all the pressure; and what about the increase of those in the legislation? Do you have a viewpoint?

**Mr STEPHENSON** – With the HECS, it is not in itself a direct cause of poverty because most of the students who take it on do it on the never-never and will pay back later. Certainly student poverty and the ability to balance accommodation costs, which in the private market in Bendigo have certainly increased over the past few years – there is a very low occupancy rate in rental properties in Bendigo, so that is certainly a problem. Earlier this year we employed a part-time casual employment officer through the BSA; his sole role is to try to source opportunities for students to find work that will basically fit in with their studies – the 10 to 15 hours a week that a number of students really require to survive. It also shows up probably more so over the last couple of years, when we get to the processes we are going through now – chief examiners' meetings and following that, show-cause processes; there are always a number of students who turn up whose results are very poor, and when you explore the reasons, you find they have been working in a factory three nights a week to try to make ends meet as well as trying to study full time. So while it is not statistics, anecdotally that seems to be an increasing problem that has been more and more noticeable.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – This morning the Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network said there had been an exponential rise – something like 30 per cent were the figures that were used – of people deferring from uni, and I wonder whether your association has any anecdotal evidence that people are deferring. The suggestion this morning was because of financial reasons; do you concur with that, or do you have other reasons? And given that, I am aware that something like anywhere between 50 per cent and 70 per cent who defer usually don't take up their places, so I am wondering if you have any anecdotal evidence of what the figures are like here in Bendigo?

**Mr BENNE** – Your statement, I believe, is true; but as far as any anecdotal evidence, I don't have any.

**Mr STEPHENSON** – I believe they certainly had a large number of deferrals at the beginning of this year. I believe it is the highest they have ever had in Bendigo, and I know there was some considerable panic about how many new students, or how many commencing students, would finish up because of the number of deferrals. I think it was replicated around the state; I think there were more second-round offers this year than previously.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – So Rob, do you believe that is for financial reasons?

**Mr STEPHENSON** – Cause and effect, I guess. Certainly because of our catchment area, which is predominantly rural, and then through northern Victoria, southern New South Wales, which was badly affected by the drought 12 months ago – I believe a lot of students were in that situation. I know of some who applied for residential bursaries and missed out on those, and as a result were not able to study; and some who received bursaries did then finish up studying, and yes, I guess we also have some who obtain jobs at the start of the year as well. One guy who is on our board got six months work providing drought relief through the CES through Centrelink; he deferred his studies for six months and has now returned to them, so there are certainly examples of all of those.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – Do you think the introduction of full-fee paying positions at Bendigo La Trobe would work?

**Mr BENNE** – It would work if the institute were cut down to a very minimal small campus that only focused on a few key subjects, so we would lose our diversity, lose the university experience for students, we would lose countless jobs. It could only work with very specific courses, and the ones that were offered – I don't know what they take up. We don't offer any high-return type jobs such as law, dentistry and those sorts of things. We do have law. You can do the first two years here and then you go to Bundoora.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – Yes, we've been told that; and physiotherapy and pharmacy.

**Mr BENNE** – That's all great if you like to study law all over the state, but we are trying to keep people in the one spot.

**Mr STEPHENSON** – I guess we are also seeing with international students –

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – What percentage do you represent? Do you represent international students on your association, on your council or your board?

**Mr STEPHENSON** – There are none on our board. We have an international student representative on one of our committees. I think it is about 140 international students.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – So it is much smaller than city campuses.

**Mr STEPHENSON** – Yes. And again, as Peter was saying, to expand the full-fee paying situation, they are largely concentrated in a few courses: business, outdoor ed and public health.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – Thank you very much.

**The CHAIR** – If there are no further questions, thank you very much, Peter and Rob.

**Witnesses withdrew**



# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into the impact of high levels of unmet demand for places in higher education institutions on Victoria**

Bendigo – 1 December 2003

#### Members

Ms H. Buckingham  
Ms A. Eckstein  
Mr P. Hall  
Mr S. Herbert

Mr N. Kotsiras  
Ms J. Munt  
Mr V. Pertou

Chair: Mr S. Herbert  
Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford  
Research Officer: Dr G. Berman

#### Witness

Mr G. Bastian, Principal, Bendigo Senior Secondary College.

**Necessary corrections to be notified to  
executive officer of committee**

**The CHAIR** – This all-party investigative committee of the Parliament of Victoria is hearing evidence in relation to the impact of unmet demand for places in higher education institutions in Victoria. I advise you that evidence taken today by the committee, and submissions, are subject to parliamentary privilege and are granted immunity from judicial review pursuant to the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act.

Welcome, Mr Bastian. If you would like to say a few words, we will then open up to questions.

**Mr BASTIAN** – I will comment on the specific terms of reference as a starting framework. The perspective I bring is one of a very large VCE provider. Bendigo Senior Secondary College is a school of almost 2,000 Years 11 and 12 students only. It is a fairly unique structure across Victoria. Five government Year 7-10 colleges feed into Bendigo Senior Secondary College, and we take in an additional 250 to 300 enrollees for the start of any year. This whole topic is one that is very close to our hearts, because of the pathway options, the implications for pathways for our students as they complete Year 12 and look further for options.

The vast majority of the students who pursue a tertiary option do so locally. I will check to see if I have the figures correct. At the end of last year, for those who chose a tertiary pathway – and 410 students elected to continue with education and training post Year 12 – 58 per cent chose La Trobe and BRIT as the preferred destination – so local options, rather than perhaps the myth across some parts of the community of students busting their boilers to get out of the country and into the city. For us a viable tertiary option on our doorstep or close by is an essential element.

Coupled with those figures is a large number – about 130 or so students – who did an option and defer, and when you quiz those students and delve into that in a little more detail, you find the vast majority are deferring tertiary pathways because that pathway generally brings with it students who are moving to Melbourne or another centre with significant costs associated with that move. So they will defer for 12 months, gain employment, gain a level of independence recognised by Centrelink and pursue their studies after that 12-month break, because of the financial implications associated with an upheaval and a move to Melbourne. So it serves to reinforce the need in a rural and regional perspective that there are viable options available for students. The unfortunate reality is that out of those 130 or so students who defer only a relatively small percentage actually take up their tertiary pathway further down the track. So while the rationale is sound at the time – that is, “We will defer for 12 months; we will gain some money in the bank; we will gain some financial independence and then take up the option further down the track” – the statistics indicate that there is a very low take-up rate. They get involved in the world of work, their social patterns change; the move of uprooting from their community and moving off to another location to pursue studies are significant markers for some of those young people. I guess that is the perspective I bring to this afternoon's discussion. It may be worth me trying to respond to some of your questions.

**The CHAIR** – I am sure you will have lots of questions – and a pretty impressive folder, I might say, about Bendigo's achievements.

**Mr KOTSIRAS** – I see you have over 2,000 students, and 400 students applied for higher ed or TAFE.

**Mr BASTIAN** – Not applied for; took up that option. So 410 plus the group of 130-plus who deferred; the others went off – well, the way our data collection for the department works is that it does not recognise apprenticeships and trainees in higher ed, and further education. We could probably have a good discussion around that, about those who enter the world of work as being the viable pathway, but that is the way our data is apportioned. So we have 410 who have gone on to TAFE and tertiary pathways; 134 I think was the figure that deferred, so that is 543, if I have added it up correctly. And then a number have gone down those other pathways to the world of work, apprenticeships, traineeships; but that is really the breakdown of our college profile.

**Mr KOTSIRAS** – How many applied for courses and missed out?

**Mr BASTIAN** – We had around 700 students who applied for pathways, for tertiary pathways; that is a VTAC application of some sort.

**Mr KOTSIRAS** – So about 160 missed out?

**Mr BASTIAN** – That is right. I guess it is typified by the sort of figures – and I don't think I am misquoting La Trobe Bendigo with the number going into teaching next year – they have on their books something like 300 students who have indicated La Trobe Bendigo teaching as their first preference, and they will take about 85 to 90 of those. So there is going to be a cohort that will miss out on their first preference. They may pick up other preferences, but it gives you an idea of the limited opportunities for those who are selecting that as their first preference.

**Mr KOTSIRAS** – Are you able to tell us out of those 130 who missed out, how many of those met the enter scores or were successful?

**Mr BASTIAN** – You mean how many of those chose not to pursue the pathway?

**Mr KOTSIRAS** – No, how many of those were successful in terms of just below the enter score or missed out because there were not enough places?

**Mr BASTIAN** – It is a little difficult to actually give you that breakdown at this stage.

**Mr KOTSIRAS** – Okay.

**Mr BASTIAN** – It is not a figure that I can readily bring to hand.

**The CHAIR** – Following on from that, we heard from La Trobe that regional and country schools have lower TER scores, but that those TER scores are not a reflection of ability, they are just low in the country. Can you comment on that in the big secondary college; do your TER scores tend to be lower than the city, and if so, why?

**Mr BASTIAN** – When you analyse our results across what is a very large cohort of students, our cohort places the school well above state averages. If you are looking at the TERs and the percentage of the cohort within the 90-99 mark and the 80-89 mark, et cetera, we are well above state averages in those cohorts. So I am not sure where that perception has come from. We are well represented in the high achievers across the board, so I am not sure that I would in any way support that assertion.

**The CHAIR** – With the universities losing control of 50 places next year as they prepare themselves to reduce their own enrolments, depending on what happens with the legislation – whether it is 50, 50, 50, that amount – hopefully no more; how does that impact on you? There are 50 fewer places next year, and the year after. Will you re-evaluate the program in terms of your students? If there are fewer places for your students to go to university, how does that impact on the education provider?

**Mr BASTIAN** – It will have significant implications for us. There are also a large number of unknowns in there; 50 fewer places, it is a matter of how those places are targeted, and therefore the impact across the program options the student are selecting. But what it essentially means for a typical student out of our cohort is that if there are 50 fewer places, then a number of those students who would have pursued a tertiary pathway because it was available locally, won't, because the barriers associated with relocating to another centre, particularly Melbourne, to access it, are far too great; whereas the capacity to access a program locally has a whole range of attractions for these people – who in some cases are 17 or 18 – and the idea of disrupting significantly all facets of their lives to go to Melbourne is one they balance their decision around concerning all of the lifestyle and other aspects associated with their choices.

A reduction in 50, depending on where it is applied – if I switch faculties – has significant implications for the options of our students. It probably has issues for the university about the viability of some courses, and will call into question whether that course can actually be run under its current arrangements. Therefore the knock-on effect – if you take away 50, 50, 50 over three years and you take 150 places out, whether the course actually remains viable and therefore provides an option or whether it brings about a further narrowing of course selection and course choice for students who are

looking at a tertiary pathway locally, they are some of the things that we would have to explore.

Ultimately our brief is to try to work with each student to find where their strengths are and the sorts of pathways that are available to them. This reduction that you have alluded to would mean that as part of our course counselling we would have to work with students to make sure that when they are making particular selections they are doing so in the knowledge that past practices may change and that their course may not necessarily be available at Bendigo; it may mean they have to relocate to another centre to get access to a course that previously was available locally.

**The CHAIR** – What has happened with successful completion rates? And can you comment on the general student population in Bendigo? Is it growing? Is there an increase in student numbers? You are moving toward the state target of 90 per cent successful completions; is that going up, too, because obviously the number of students coming through who successfully complete Year 12 puts more pressure on university numbers? So what can you tell me?

**Mr BASTIAN** – The college has been growing at 5 per cent to 6 per cent per year for the last eight years, and with that pattern of growth with one blip that is coming in next year, we have been able to see a reduced cohort coming through primary and junior secondary, and now in Year 10 that is going to be with us next year. But that aside, that pattern of continual growth seems to be continuing from 2005 onwards. Our retention rate about eight years ago was around 75 per cent, that is 75 per cent of students who started Year 11 finished Year 12, and it is an area we work very hard on. This year we will be at about 89 per cent; last year it was 91 per cent retention rate, so those students who get to Year 11, we do a pretty good job with. But there are students who don't get to Year 11 along the way, so that when we are talking about retention rates we need to factor that in to say that there is a cohort of students that are not actually retained in schooling to the stage of Year 11, and they need to be part of the statistics as well.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – I was interested in what you wrote in the paper about the TAFE places filling before the university places are out. And we have heard elsewhere that a lot of people who don't make the degree course in nursing then look to do a Deb 2 course, become a Deb 2 nurse through TAFE, so that is not really an option locally?

**Mr BASTIAN** – No, I am not really sure of the reason behind it, but working with our School to Work team, that is certainly the pattern that is in place; that even before tertiary places are announced, many will enrol in the TAFE pathway. What it says about particular pathways, I am not sure, but that seems to be the pattern that they are aware of through their counselling and their work on a local level.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – Would any student enrol in both and then drop out if they got a university place?

**Mr BASTIAN** – Potentially, yes.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – Does it happen in things other than nursing?

**Mr BASTIAN** – Not that I am aware of, no. The normal pattern would be that students would work through their VTAC application and they would put down preferences when offers came out; they would either take up those offers or review their circumstances, and also when their results come out in the last week of this school term, on about 15 December, they would have a chance to review their options at that stage, but normally a university pathway would be perhaps their first reference.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – And if they don't get that, they look at other things. But here they really have to backstop themselves and try to get themselves a TAFE pathway in case they don't get a university pathway, and then they don't get a TAFE pathway either. That is very interesting.

**Mr BASTIAN** – I think it highlights the capacity for the university and TAFE to work more closely together around some of the programs that are on offer. There are some good examples in other organisations where there is the merging between TAFE and university sectors under the one umbrella. That does really support a more seamless movement of students into TAFE and onto tertiary and back again under

the one umbrella of the organisation.

**Mr HALL** – Graham, thank you for your comments; I found them very interesting. Can you give us an idea of how many students you draw from outside the immediate Bendigo area? Do you run buses from Castlemaine and those sorts of places?

**Mr BASTIAN** – We use the bus infrastructure that is actually in place, Peter. We don't actually run our own bus service. But students will come from as far afield as Mildura, Balranald and Swan Hill, not to access necessarily our schooling – although if we wanted to fly the flag we could probably claim that. Many are involved in lease-boarding programs that are part of the community of Bendigo and therefore attend schooling with us. We have students who have come down to play under-18 football at a league level with the hope of going on and playing AFL, being drafted and so forth. So we draw students in that context, and they will have accommodation here in Bendigo and generally stay the week, go home on weekends. Those who have that same commuting arrangement would be students coming from Gisborne and Kyneton, areas like that; and those who travel on a daily basis would probably be from as far away as Maryborough, Castlemaine, Rochester, Wederburn and Charlton would be about the daily commuting distance.

**Mr HALL** – How many of those 2,000 then would be commuters, either daily or weekly?

**Mr BASTIAN** – If we set aside those who would normally catch a bus service into Bendigo – and that is done through secondary schooling – and we look at those who perhaps have been drawn from a more distant pathway, probably out of that 2,000 about 80 or so students would be commuting under that arrangement from those more distant places.

**Mr HALL** – If my memory is correct, Bendigo Senior Secondary College was also interested in developing an overseas student program. How is that going, and what sort of numbers do you have enrolled in that?

**Mr BASTIAN** – It would grow really as much as we want it to. We have about 36 students, primarily from China, enrolled from Zhuhai and Shanghai – the main areas we are drawing students from. But we have a significant limitation with the size of the site; we are right in the centre of the town. The announced closure of the Bendigo prison affords us the opportunity to expand, although it will be a real challenge turning a prison into a school.

**Mr HALL** – Good accommodation.

**Ms ECKSTEIN** – You know what to do with the naughty kids, anyway!

**Mr BASTIAN** – Space is a limitation, and we are cognisant of the need to ensure that we don't have a needy backlash in our own community about bringing in large numbers of overseas students and creating overcrowding which therefore creates that negative perception. But from our perspective, I think it is absolutely essential that we broaden out the focus beyond Bendigo. The perception seems to be that the world rotates around whichever centre you live in. What we are trying to do through our array of overseas programs is to broaden that horizon. Part of that is to have students come and study with us for two years. We run summer school programs with China, with Germany and with Indonesian, and our students have a range of overseas visits and experiences as part of that arrangement as well. We have a group over from Germany from now until the end of January, so that is part of that program.

**Mr HALL** – Thank you for that, Graham. You spoke about retention rates before. From your experience, do you find that there is any reluctance from some students – a quarter of students – who actually find the transition from their local secondary school, their Golden Squares or their Flora Hills, or something, to Bendigo Secondary College a hard transitional step to make?

**Mr BASTIAN** – I guess it is fair to say that there is a range of experiences across that transition, Peter. It is an area we work very hard at. We start our transition program from very early in the piece – back in February – we have a program on Melbourne Cup Day, we have open days, and we have now got a

series – that is why I was a few minutes late – we now have 14 sessions of orientation for our new cohort as part of that preparation for next year.

We have put in place an array of structures that deal specifically with each student, so if they are having difficulties associated with any facet of the college – whether it is the transition and the customising to the new environment, or whatever the issue might be – there is support there. So there is probably an element of concern around moving to a large school and a different environment from a school of 800 or 1,000 to a school double that size; but when you talk to the majority of the students after a week or so, they have adapted to the new environment very quickly.

**Mr HALL** – Do you find that kids nowadays are accepting what government would like us to believe, that kids are now seeing TAFE as a viable alternative to higher education? I say that because you said that there are 410 or thereabouts students that have either gone on and studied in TAFE or higher education course, and when you look at the apprenticeships, traineeships and other options, then I would think a lot of your students would end up in a TAFE profession. Of the students who pursue a post-secondary education, probably half of them end up at the TAFE and probably half in higher education and some directly in other work. Are they seeing TAFE as a viable alternative?

**Mr BASTIAN** – I suppose it is a matter of “Who you ask?” If you ask their parents, you get a very strong picture that the first reference is a university pathway, and then look at options beyond that. In discussions with students and families about course counselling, that comes through very strongly: that there is a strong perception around a preferred pathway being a university pathway, and if that's not available for whatever reason, then the other pathways like TAFE might be explored.

When we work with students, the focus is very much around the needs of the students and trying to match those needs and that expertise into an appropriate pathway. So there is something of a tension there on some occasions when you have a discussion that involves other family members about where the pathway might be; you have the expectation of the student saying, “Well the pathway here for me to continue my hospitality program that I have done as part of a VET program as part of Years 11 and 12 is to go on locally at TAFE” and a different expectation being articulated by the parent. So I think there is perhaps an emerging understanding of the role the TAFE place, but I am not sure if it is a shared one across the community.

**Mr HALL** – But the outcome – is my gut feeling close – that of the students who are still enrolled in post-secondary education 50/50 are higher ed, TAFE?

**Mr BASTIAN** – If you included apprenticeships and traineeships and you had all of the other providers under that banner – I wouldn't call them all TAFE.

**Mr HALL** – Private providers, yes.

**Mr BASTIAN** – Then from our perspective of our cohort, that is probably a reasonable breakdown.

**Mr HALL** – Thank you.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – I assume that given your increasing retention rate – and I congratulate you on 91 per cent – that there is a growing expectation, and I think you've just alluded to it, from parents that if you are going to stay at school and finish Year 12 that you will go on to tertiary education of some sort. That is the case; are there growing expectations?

**Mr BASTIAN** – Yes, I think the expectations are there as the retention rates have increased, the cohort has increased. The expectation that it will be a viable pathway and in the eyes of the parents that pathway is a tertiary pathway, are the expectations that are there.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – I would like to commend you on the last four lines of this report you have given us and say I also agree there should be greater cooperation, but sometimes the vice chancellors don't have the same sort of view. But in courses like hospitality, IT and business, where there are clear articulated



pathways from TAFE through to university, obviously in a regional centre there is just far more opportunity for students who don't get to the university because of their enters, and I think you should be encouraging BRIT and La Trobe University to talk to each other.

Having said that, I am more interested in the 42 per cent who don't go to La Trobe Bendigo; have you got a sense of where they go? Do they go to other regional universities, or are they going into the city?

**Mr BASTIAN** – I will leave you with a copy of this if it is going to provide valuable data; it is a breakdown of all of our student destinations at the end of 2002. This is the cohort who either left school prior to completion of Years 11 and 12 or then completed Year 12, and then their destinations. I guess the standouts – if you take BRIT and La Trobe Bendigo out of the cohort, then there are places like RMIT with 20 students, Melbourne Uni with 24, Deakin with 25, and Monash is in here somewhere with – wherever it is –

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – Do kids go to Charles Sturt or Ballarat or –?

**Mr BASTIAN** – Eight went to Ballarat. The University of Queensland took two; University of Western Australia, three; Western Sydney, one – where else? Charles Sturt was five, so –

**The CHAIR** – Are they franchised, those universities? Do they do courses with private providers here? You know Stotts does, and Charles Sturt, I think; so do the students go there to do those university courses?

**Mr BASTIAN** – No, they are physically moving to those places.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – Graham, do you believe an increase in HECS, which has been touted as part of the Nelson review, will affect the number of kids who go on to university in Bendigo?

**Mr BASTIAN** – I think when you look at the issues that are factors around student decision-making about the sorts of pathways they are taking on, HECS at the current level, as well as any proposed increase, is certainly a significant factor in student choice. That is not to say that it is the sole factor by any means, but it is a factor, the prospect of exiting university with a significant debt associated with the HECS scheme, and it is a fairly daunting prospect for an 18 year-old – recognising that not every student who gains a degree is necessarily going to work in that area or work in a relatively highly paid profession. So the issue of the impact on that potential debt on their decision-making is quite a significant one.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – Do you track the Year 12s? Do you have them let you know after they have left uni so you know if they are actually working locally, or whether they have gone further afield?

**Mr BASTIAN** – We track our students for the first 12 months after they leave. Then we will make decisions. In some cases we will continue that tracking for a further 12 months, particularly where students are struggling if they need additional assistance. But the data we don't really capture is the sort of course changes the student will do. They will enrol in a double degree and drop one, enrol in one program and change over after the first year, or whatever it may be, and by and large we don't capture that data.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – Do Bendigo students have the same sort of dropout rate as there is in most university courses, something like 30 per cent attrition in the first year?

**Mr BASTIAN** – I really don't know the full statistics. I know the picture from our students who go on to Bendigo – and whether it is the nature of the environment they have come from – it is almost an adult learning environment across Years 11 and 12, with no school uniform, the ability to move in and out of school during the school day, a less regimented environment, if you like. But the tracking of that cohort would indicate that the dropout of our students is nowhere near that 30 per cent.

**Ms BUCKINGHAM** – Good for you.

**Mr BASTIAN** – But I am not sure, and I can't really comment more broadly across the local university figures

except for our own cohort.

**Ms MUNT** – First off, congratulations on your brochure; it is a great brochure and it sounds like a terrific school, so congratulations.

**Mr BASTIAN** – You are welcome to come and have a visit at any stage.

**Ms MUNT** – Terrific. My first question is how many of the junior secondary campuses feed into your senior campus of Years 11 and 12?

**Mr BASTIAN** – All five of them.

**Ms MUNT** – So there are five junior campuses that feed into the senior campus. Okay. You said that 410 of your students go on to tertiary study – and I can't recall if you also said how many wanted to go on to tertiary study that didn't get a place. Do you have any idea of that?

**Mr BASTIAN** – Yes. I think it was something of the order of 700 who put in an application, 410 gained a pathway, 134 gained a pathway and deferred, so about 150 missed out.

**Ms MUNT** – Was that because they had low TER scores, or because the scores went up?

**Mr BASTIAN** – No. Primarily it was as a result of having pretty low TER scores that didn't give them access to the sorts of pathways they were looking for. Out of that cohort some gained TAFE course access through the year, but didn't do it through the formal VTAC application process at that stage.

**Ms MUNT** – We heard from La Trobe earlier on, who said that quite a deal of their entrance comes from your secondary college; there is a fair proportion of students who actually come from your school. So I am worried about five secondary schools feeding into your Years 11 and 12 and also feeding into La Trobe and their figures. They say they are prepared to accept around 500 as an over-enrolment because that is just the way the system works; or if there are another 500 added to that because of the changes because of the Nelson report – that leaves 1,000 places virtually that won't be filled. As you are the major feeder into that system, it is going to have a dire impact on you, I would imagine, and the five schools that feed in to your secondary college. I am just wondering what your thoughts are on the impact of this? How will it really impact on you and the five – particularly as you are getting up to 89 per cent retention? It seems to be, in plain English, a disaster in the making.

**Mr BASTIAN** – The reality is for our students in regional and rural Victoria the prospect of moving to Melbourne to pursue a tertiary pathway is one that a few will take up, but a large percentage won't. And if we are facing cutbacks of whatever the order might be locally, then that will have a significant impact on the capacity of young people in regional centres like Bendigo and the rural areas serviced by Bendigo to access a tertiary pathway. Because for some they will simply say, "If I can't get access to it through places like Bendigo, then I can't do it" or "I won't do it" for whatever the reasons are. And a lot of them are financial reasons; there are significant financial barriers associated with relocating to Melbourne to take up tertiary studies.

**Ms MUNT** – I think the Melbourne courses probably have quite high enters that will go up further, and high attrition rates. Have you spoken to your students who are coming up to alert them that they may have to think closely about their pathways?

**Mr BASTIAN** – We have had some initial discussions with our students, particularly through our course counselling and our School to Work team, to recognise that these sorts of things are going to unfold; and I suppose it is also a matter of preparing them for a variety of pathways and opening their eyes to the prospect that to do this course may mean that instead of doing it in Bendigo, as you can now, that the option is that you have to move to Melbourne, and try to work with students to try to overcome some of those barriers.

You can work to overcome some of the inhibitions that might be there, and the fears about going

to live and work in Melbourne and so forth, but the financial aspects are quite significant. I am not sure that we have the capacity to address those in our work with students.

**Ms MUNT** – A dreadful loss to the local community, too.

**Mr BASTIAN** – An enormous loss to the local community, absolutely.

**The CHAIR** – Thank you, Graham. We must get back to Melbourne; it's a couple of hours drive. We wish you well with your results this year.

**Mr BASTIAN** – December the 15<sup>th</sup> will come around very quickly.

**The CHAIR** – I am sure they will be very impressive. Thank you again for your contribution.

**Witness withdrew**

**Committee concluded**