Victorian Parliament's Education and Training Committee: comments on the geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education from the Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE (BRIT).

This brief submission provides input mainly on points 3, and 5.

**Scope:**

1. variations in the number and type of university applications, offers, acceptances and completions in different metropolitan, rural and regional areas;
2. influences of school retention rates, including enrolments and completions for VCE, VCAL and VET in schools on participation in higher education;
3. influences of participation in other post-school pathways, including TAFE enrolments and take-up of apprenticeships or other employment opportunities, on participation in higher education;
4. potential geographic, economic, social, cultural and other influences on university applications, offers, acceptances and completions across Victorian communities;
5. advantages and disadvantages of participation and non-participation in higher education for school leavers and their families and communities in different metropolitan, rural and regional areas;
6. potential effects of geographical differences in participation in higher education on skills shortages and the Victorian economy; and
7. strategies to address any barriers contributing to geographic differences in participation in higher education.

**Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE (BRIT)**

BRIT is a large and diverse regional provider of high quality vocational education, training and assessment services, located in Northern and Central Victoria, operating across 25,000 square kilometres (which is about one tenth of the State) and servicing a population of approximately 220,000 plus people. BRIT is one of Victoria’s largest regional TAFE Institutes, delivering over 2.3 million student contact hours of training annually. The BRIT footprint extends for between one and one and half hours drive in any direction from Bendigo. Many apprentices from NSW attend trade training in Echuca.

There are campuses in Bendigo (City and Charleston Road), Castlemaine, Echuca, Kyneton, Kerang and Maryborough. BRIT also delivers training to Justice Department regional facilities in Castlemaine, Maldon and Malsmbury.

BRIT has strong links into communities through the strategic and active development of a partnership approach.

The Institute has four teaching centres, each with a distinct focus. These are Health Pathways and Community Services, Business and Design, Construction and Engineering, Land Food and Manufacturing.

BRIT also offers a wide range of both part-time and short courses customised to suit students interested in anything from hobby and personal development programs right through to Industry

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Compliance courses. These courses are delivered as flexibly as possible to reduce the cost to the student and meet their needs without compromising on quality. Only the BRIT campuses in Bendigo operate profitably, while all of the other campuses are cross subsidised. The regional campuses meet equity and community service obligations to make training more accessible to these communities.

BRIT can lay claim to having developed a significant number of successful partnerships within the service delivery area which, in some cases, has extended our capacity to deliver on a national and international platform, particularly in the Assets and Agricultural sectors.

Climate change and drought have had a significant impact within the BRIT footprint, with dairy, dryland, and horticultural pursuits, being directly affected, but these factors also affect a much wider range of industries which support them, thereby affecting the entire local economy. Water issues and allocation have also been impacted, and it is only with the completion of a 50 km pipeline from the Goulburn system, that Bendigo’s water has been secured.

Comments:

BRIT has recently undertaken a Student survey which can provide some insight into the number of students who travel to study at our various campuses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance Travelled to Attend TAFE</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5 kms</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9 kms</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>22%</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 to 19 kms</td>
<td>137</td>
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<td>20 to 39 kms</td>
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<tr>
<td>40 to 99 kms</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 or more kms</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that over 40% of our surveyed students travel 20 km or more to attend BRIT.

When the survey data is further analysed to see if travelling impacts on the student experience we find the following:

The perceptions of the students travelling less than 20 km is different to the group travelling more than 20 km.

Students travelling the greater distance (greater than 20 km) register lower levels of satisfaction with:

- Enrolment, finding it more difficult
- Show lower measures in team measures
- Feel less positive on personal development measures
- Feel less assistance is available when needed
- Have less access to Childcare
- Have less access to Library and copying services
• Find getting suitable parking more difficult (the cost in addition to petrol is also an issue)
• Feel lower levels of satisfaction with recognising prior learning (RPL)
• Feel less involvement with the Student Association

Students travelling more than 40 km express particular dissatisfaction with access to computers and software. This may reflect the poor nature of telecommunications infrastructure in some parts of the region. The expense of bandwidth is also an issue.

Only 2% of those surveyed indicated they were attending TAFE because they missed out on a University place.

Student and Community Comments:

Students have commented:

• “having to travel 80km’s each day is an expensive exercise and then having to pay for parking and or parking fines add extra costs to the overall learning experience. It would be more than beneficial for BRIT to arrange some sort of parking space/or once off fee (sticker) system to help this problem”

• “higher rate of living away from home allowance, and travel allowance”

Not only is the cost of travel an impediment to participating in training and education, but the availability of such travel is also an issue. Students who don’t have a private car are simply unable to access many training programs or support services. Recent changes to train timetables have improved this slightly, but with students coming from a wide-range of rural localities, this problem continues to exist for many.

For example, attendance at a pre-app course at Charleston Road Campus (four days a week) was made more difficult by distance - course commenced at 8.00am, train from Castlemaine didn’t get in to Bendigo Station until approx 8.15 and then student needed to get to the Charleston Road Campus. By the time the student got there it was 8.30-8.45. Mother of student did drive from Castlemaine to Charleston Road to get the student into the class by 8.00am. Student did not complete the pre-app course due to not being able to get to class at the appropriate time by using public transport. The mother could not drive the student to class every day due to petrol costs and the distance travelled (over 100km there and back).

In a further example, a student from Maryborough studying for the Diploma of Youth Work was struggling to attend classes due to rising petrol costs. They decided to catch the bus to Castlemaine and train to Bendigo. She found she was getting into Bendigo on time, but getting back to Maryborough too late. This student is now looking at studying in Ballarat.

Community Comment:

Comments below were provided by a training organisation in Echuca:

“Limited job prospects in the area create apathy and kids leave school early.

TAFE/Apprenticeship and other professional pathways now require higher entrance criteria eg: literacy- limiting access to many who would have once transitioned into Trades.

The adult education institutions in Echuca are full of students completing courses that will never lead to jobs. After a while they realise it’s a waste of time and become totally disillusioned.
In fact the whole systems; job network providers, RTO’s, schools encourage people into these useless courses with no outcomes.

Limited employment prospects/ limited range of courses affect everyone. Families who can afford it, still have kids that fail uni because of isolation issues. Other parents can’t support a child away from home. Cost of travel. Travel is a significant barrier for the young or struggling. Transport is expensive, difficult to arrange, and impossible with dependants. Unskilled positions are very competitive. Here in Echuca to get any job, they need their own transport.

Greater links with industry (will help). If people commit to training they need a result”

Comments from Maryborough:

“The main problem in Maryborough is Transport to Bendigo. As we don’t offer many courses (because achieving a viable number of students is difficult) at Maryborough clients are unable to attend courses in Bendigo due to no public transport between the two and the cost of petrol (which is higher in regional areas).”

Analysing Information from Postcodes:

An additional source of information is available by comparing the home postcodes with the site of study. While for country students, because they often leave their home address as that of their parents, it is somewhat unreliable, it is a good indicator of the need to travel (or move) to gain qualifications. Postcodes in Regional areas are less precise, for example the postcode 3551, could indicate any direction around Bendigo. This data relates to 2007, and government funded training. The postcode data is consistent with the survey findings.

The data show that not unexpectedly, each of the campuses tends to draw most of their enrolments from the immediate surrounding postcode areas.

Bendigo draws in students from all postcode areas in the footprint.

Apprentices in many areas need to attend Charleston Road Campus in Bendigo for later year training, and in other courses where specialist facilities are located in Bendigo.

For students attending the Bendigo Charleston Road Campus – about 40% of enrolments come from the Bendigo postcodes (3550 and 3554) and about 10% are from Golden Square (3555). Enrolments from Castlemaine (3450) are 5% and Echuca (3564) 6%, respectively.

For students attending Bendigo City campus –about 50% come from the Bendigo postcodes (postcode 3550 and 3554) and around 10% from Golden Square (postcode 3555). The rest come from further away.

Climate change - Drought and water resources, the impacts on the agriculture/horticulture sectors: Issues for vocational education and training, undertaken by Dr Sue Foster for Regional TAFES.

Material extracted from this 100 page report, which interviewed people in BRIT’s footprint as part of the study, is very informative.

" Young people in regional centres may also be disenfranchised from the industry and are generally disengaged from further study. A smaller proportion of students from regional Victoria engage in Year 12 and post-school study and those that do go on need strategies to support themselves. They may take a ‘gap’ year to qualify for Austudy. That is to show that they are self-supporting and to earn the money required ($17,000 in 17 months) to support an application for an independent Austudy allowance. They have less disposable income during drought, but they have to leave home to go to
the city for study. They live at city prices, but with country incomes, which is quite a significant expense. On Track shows that deferral rates have increased and some do not return to study. For those who do choose to go on to university, there are fewer options available in regional Victoria relative to metropolitan Melbourne. There is a long tradition of students leaving home to attend university in the city. This comes at significant expense for parents, which is difficult to sustain in times of drought.

“some can study in local areas – but there are a limited range of program options, and they want to go to the City. This costs parents around $20,000 per annum per child, which is out of the range of many (Dry-land farmer)”

School students can’t afford the cost of VET programs in drought times. (These costs can be many hundreds of dollars.)

The impact of drought is increasingly felt by youth. They have grown up in a drought period and have experienced an extended period of limited resources in families and the broader community. Communities must develop ways of retaining young people so that they can manage in a recovery. TAFE is largely, but not exclusively, directed to delivery of accredited qualifications. This activity has some relevance for building capacity. It adds to the skills base that people bring to drought events.

Training for skill demand, skill shortages and changing industry occupations is an ongoing role for TAFE. TAFE can extend its traditional role to contribute to developing the capacity of individuals and communities to manage drought. These extended roles include: providing community leadership; brokering information; as well as working with other agencies to deliver a comprehensive suite of training that is relevant to the needs and learning styles of the range of client groups.”

Internet Coverage: From the 2006 Census data a selection areas indicates how variable coverage is within Bendigo and the surrounds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of internet connection</th>
<th>Strathfieldsaye - Junortoun</th>
<th>Greater Bendigo</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Household internet connection)</td>
<td>2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enumerated data</td>
<td>number</td>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Total households</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Household internet connection)</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>Greater Bendigo %</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Broadband connection</td>
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<th>Heathcote - Rural East</th>
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<th>Greater Bendigo %</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Dial-up connection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other connection</td>
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<td>0.6</td>
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<td><strong>Total households</strong></td>
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<td>100</td>
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</table>

Broadband speed is considered the minimum for delivery of contemporary training.

**Regional roads:**
A recent study by the RACV, and reported in the Bendigo Weekly (see Appendix 1) has found that regional roads are sub standard.

Fuel prices are generally greater than Melbourne, see Appendix 2. Students from northern areas have substantially greater fuel prices, see Swan Hill graph.
Appendix 1:

Bendigo Weekly Issue 546 : 29 February 2008

Our roads 'simply not up to scratch'

By Anthony Radford

An RACV report tells district drivers what many already know ..

VICTORIA'S peak motoring body has labelled Bendigo's major highways as unacceptable and not up to scratch.

The RACV will today unveil its report card into the conditions of Bendigo's major country highways.

In a five-star rating system, the McIvor Highway to Axedale, and the notorious Northern Highway from Elmore to Heathcote and Heathcote to Pyalong rated just two stars.

The Midland Highway to Elmore, from Harcourt to Ballarat and the Pyrenees Highway to Ararat also received two stars as did the unduplicated section of the Calder Highway between Harcourt and Elphinstone. Most of the rest of the Calder to Melbourne received four stars.

The Calder to Mildura and most of the Loddon Valley Highway to Swan Hill received a three-star rating, with a small section north of Durham Ox rated as only two stars.

The only one-star ratings in Victoria were two sections of the Great Alpine Road near Harrietville and Ensay.

RACV traffic and transport chief engineer Peter Daly said the Bendigo area's major roads were "simply not up to scratch".

"The Calder Highway between Bendigo and Mildura rated only three stars, which is totally unacceptable for such an important and busy road," he said.

"A total of 94 crashes and four deaths have occurred on this road in the past five years and many of these could have been prevented if the road had more modern in-built safety features."

"While much of the Loddon Valley and Wimmera highways, west of Bendigo, performed a little better with a three-star rating, the good news is that most of the Calder Freeway between Melbourne and Bendigo rated four stars.

"However, there are some lengths that rated lower and require im-mediate improvements."

There were 15 deaths on the Calder between Bendigo and Melbourne from 2001 to 2005, from 210 crashes. Between Bendigo and Kerang there were six deaths from 38 crashes and two people died between Bendigo and Ballarat from 42 accidents.

Mr Daly said upgrades were urgently required to bring the low-rating sections on all substandard roads in the Bendigo area up to modern safety standards.

The star system is based on inherent safety features. Developed by RACV and the Australian Automobile Association, it assesses how road design helps prevent crashes from occurring and minimises severity of crashes.

Mr Daly said while general road quality was a vital safety factor, the majority of low safety ratings reflected the proliferation of roadside hazards, such as trees, poles, walls and embankments.

Almost 11,000 crashes occurred on regional roads with a speed limit of at least 90 kmh between 2001 and 2005, with 7193, or 66 per cent, involving run-off-road crashes resulting in 338 fatalities.

Trees were the main potential serial killers (2603 crashes), followed by embankments (862) and fences and walls (470).
Appendix 2:

Melbourne
Average Weekly Prices for the 12 Weeks to Sunday, 2 March 2008

Bendigo
Average Weekly Prices for the 12 Weeks to Sunday, 2 March 2008