Submission from Grahame & Lynda Code
On behalf of their family
To the Parliamentary Inquiry into the geographically differences in the rate in which the Victorian students participate in higher education.

Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education

g) strategies to address any barriers contributing to geographic differences in participation in higher education.

Our family live at Donnelly’s Creek Road, Aberfeldy via Erica, 3825, which is in Gippsland. We live 40 kms. (one hour) from the nearest primary school; 76 kms. (one hour, twenty minutes) to the nearest secondary school and 103 kms. (one and three quarter hours) from the nearest university, Monash University, Gippsland. Therefore, our children are registered with the Distance Education Centre, Victoria and have studied through primary and secondary sections to gain their education.

Unfortunately the career directions our children are interested in are not provided by the Monash University, Gippsland.

We believe that there should be a far greater range of tertiary subjects available by distance education in Victoria to offset the current gap. Even if the whole degree cannot be offered off campus, there are certainly unit components of any degree course that can be easily offered by the distance education method. Both the Deakin University and Monash University, offer tertiary distance education courses, but what we do not have is the capacity for individual units to be undertaken off campus.

Having had our daughter leave home to pursue a tertiary education course four years ago, we can speak from our own experience. Beth undertook a Bachelor of Music at Monash University, Clayton, no unit of this degree was offered off campus. From a rural area to send your daughter at aged 17-18 away to a university some three hours drive, and 200 kms. distant, is a harrowing experience for the child, the parents & the siblings. The resulting trauma of this has a detrimental affect on the child wishing to undertake the particular study and in the family relationships.

We are convinced that many more units of courses can be offered off campus with perhaps study blocks of a week or so, each semester.

Another problem of considerable worry to families, is that of accommodation. Finding board for your child away from home is never easy and in our experience hostel
accommodation with accredited parents, should be available to rural students enabling them to feel more comfortable and acceptable by their peer group. Too often young students have difficulty making friends and gain acceptance by the use of hotels and other meeting places which are not always advisable. We have seen rural students from our neighbourhood come to grief with drug addiction, partially brought on by social isolation and loneliness. In the case of our daughter, the only satisfactory accommodation we could find was to board her with a good family some distance away from the university but unfortunately there were no students of her own age group in the immediate vicinity and she was in many ways, socially and academically isolated.

We believe there should be greater flexibility for rural students giving them the choice of attending a lecture on Monday late morning and then Friday early afternoon, enabling the students to get home on public transport more easily at the weekends. All too often students are isolated from their brothers and sisters and friends by the intransigence of city based universities who do not understand and address the needs of rural students.

Another major problem for students is the financial commitments they find necessary in providing rent or board for themselves. Many of them find they need to obtain a job to be able to pay their living expenses and survive, as well as completing a full university study load. This puts a lot of extra strain on the student and can affect their performance.

We believe strongly that universities and other tertiary institutions need to be able to offer their units by distance education where appropriate, not offering the degree itself as the only alternative at that particular institution.

So we want consideration by tertiary institutions on a unit basis not on the degree in total.

Grahame & Lynda Code