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

SUBMISSION FROM THE COMMITTEE FOR BALLARAT:

The Committee for Ballarat facilitates economic and social development within Ballarat and its region to leave a notable and sustainable legacy for the entire community. We are not party-political and work closely with the three levels of government. We identify and work through projects and themes that target priority issues in key areas. We have membership from a wide range of business and community leaders drawn from Ballarat and across the region.

We have a strong interest in this Enquiry, driven by our belief that (higher) education and training are key contributors to regional economic prosperity and social development.

We recognise and appreciate the important and far-reaching roles that our regionally based, multi-sector university, the University of Ballarat, and each of our two regional university campuses, Australian Catholic University and the University of Melbourne, play. They have earned deep regional respect and support for their achievements.

They can do much better, provided they receive additional State and Federal recognition and support.

We have studied the statistics widely available on participation rates across the State, and are acutely aware that location plays a major, unfair role in the likelihood of a capable person participating in and completing studies at a university. The more distant one is from a capital city, the less likely is completion of a degree or higher qualification. This is a major lost opportunity for regional and national development.

The University of Ballarat has demonstrated that their initiatives to improve participation and completion work well. It is bewildering to us that they are significantly under-supported in their aspirations to extend their initiatives and so improve rural students’ success. This is more troubling to us, knowing that it is a State Act that requires them to provide a wide range of professional services to the community and people living and working in central and western Victoria – a wider range than they are presently funded to deliver. How can they hope to do this without significantly increased State resources and advocacy?

We call on the State government urgently to address the inequities by funding directly at higher levels the provisions mandated in the Act, and advocating at local, State and National levels for significantly improved resources and action. We respectfully request:

- State level funding of the local, successful initiatives to promptly elevate the participation rates; and/or strong advocacy at the Federal level for the same;
- State contributions to and strong advocacy for significantly increased Federal resources to allow regionally-based universities to discharge their broader and mandated roles;
- Strong State advocacy for increased or re-aligned Federal resources to secure a significant increase in the numbers of rural and regional students’ attending university following secondary college, for example using the Youth Allowance;
- State initiatives to secure urgently better public transport for regional students seeking to attend regional universities;
- Bipartisan State and Federal action to allocate resources for initiatives that will retain youth in regional areas; and
• Strong State Government advocacy to prospective students, parents and community members throughout Victoria’s under-represented regions on the importance of participation in higher education.

We would be happy to speak further to these issues if required

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