13th March 2008

Mr Geoff Howard
Chair
Parliamentary Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education

Dear Sir

Our organisation is unique in that we are a large community owned and managed Adult and Community Education (ACE) centre which has established the first Victorian Independent School (Albury Wodonga Community College) within our organisation. What we have is a ‘Village of Learning’ with students co-existing with adult and retired learners, children’s services and a number of other community based programs. Our School is small having between 60-80 students, who are offered only Year 11 or 12 under a VCAL model.

What is different is that these students are entirely re-entering secondary education as they have all previously left other Government or Independent Schools and they are all unemployed.

Our success rate has climbed in our two years of operation from

- 27% successful completion Year 11 (2006)
- 41% successful completion Year 12 (2006)

To

- 72% successful completion Year 11 (2007)
- 84% successful completion Year 12 (2007)

I reiterate that these are all students who had previously disengaged from secondary education.

So that said, here is a short response to the issues we see from our viewpoint and given that the majority of our students live independently and require a high level of support to assist their health, social, financial and ultimate employment or further education aspirations.

We see that:

1) Small number of providers (both secondary and higher education) in rural areas, limits choice in subject areas and qualifications, therefore viable pathways to higher education are not apparent, or available.
2) Rural students lack access to specialist streaming.

3) Access to transport is a big impact on rural students. In some rural areas (if there is a service at all), bus times do not coordinate with class starting/finishing times which means students are either required to arrive exceptionally early, or late. At the end of the day they might be required to leave class early, or wait long periods of time for transport.

4) Rural students might receive a 'bonus' on the ENTER score, but this does not alleviate the financial costs of study. Being encouraged to attend a rural university does not necessarily mean they can access their preferred course.

5) Offering a 'bonus' on an ENTER score decreases the status of the course

These points are offered for your consideration

Yours sincerely

Rodney Wangman
Chief Executive Officer