Ms Karen Ellingford  
Executive Officer  
Education and Training Committee  
Parliament House  
Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002  
etc@parliament.vic.gov.au

5 March 2008

Dear Ms Ellingford

Re: Parliamentary Inquiry into Geographical Differences

The Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE (BRIT) is a large and diverse regional provider of high quality vocational education, training and assessment services. The BRIT is 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, Kerang, Kyneton and Maryborough. BRIT also delivers training to Justice Department regional facilities in Castlemaine, Maldon and Malsmsbury.

Our submission is based on statistical information collected in the normal course of business, and supplemented by input by students, staff and community members. It is likely the issues that BRIT has observed are common to all regional institutes, to varying degrees.

Our key observations were:

- Geographical distance from training impacts on the student in the areas of enrolment ease, access to assistance when needed, access to library and photocopying, childcare and computing access (see submission for more details)

- High percentages of our students travel some distance to study. Some 40% of students’ residences are 20 km or more from the campus of study. In the trades area 5% of our students travel from Echuca to Bendigo. A number of students travel from Deniliquin to attend classes in Bendigo, a distance of 160 km.
• Travelling and parking costs (particularly around the Bendigo City Campus) are expensive for students. Petrol prices are higher and travel distances longer in the regional areas.

• Drought/Climate Change has impacted on student numbers from outlying areas.

• Internet access to broadband declines rapidly with distance from Bendigo. This will relates to availability and affordability.

• Students travelling some distance find childcare difficult (BRiT at the Bendigo City location has its own centre and is able to offer limited places)

If you require any further information concerning our short submission, please contact Jack Carr, Research Officer, on phone number: 03 5434 1448 or alternatively via post at: Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE, 136 McCrae Street, PO Box 170, Bendigo 3552.

Yours sincerely

Louise Harvey
Chief Executive Officer
Directorate