Tuesday, 18 March 2008

Ms Karen Ellingford
Executive Officer
Education and Training Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
East Melbourne  Vic.  3002

Dear Ms Ellingford

Response to Parliamentary Inquiry into Geographical Difference in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education

East Gippsland Institute of TAFE wishes to respond to issues as follows:

Response to (a) and (b)

On Track data published by the Department of Education can provide quantitative information on issues raised.

(f) Potential effects of geographical differences in participation in higher education on skill shortages and the Victorian economy

- There is a lack of adequate transport and infrastructure across East Gippsland
- The impact of floods, fires and droughts has had enormous economic and social repercussions for over three years
- The cost and availability of housing and rental accommodation in Melbourne is a negative
- Young people are often reluctant to go outside their social network
- The retirement culture and mentality in parts of East Gippsland can mean that the region is not focussed around providing opportunities for young people
- There is an attitude across the region where the value of a degree is sometimes questioned
- Young people often have to undertake part time work in multiple jobs often on top of a full time academic work load

(g) Strategies to address any barriers contributing to geographic differences in participation in higher education

- Decrease the HECS fees
- Increase the number of scholarships available to regional and rural school leavers
- Make the guidelines for a youth allowance more flexible for those young people having to leave home to attend universities ie less tied to parental income
- Provide appropriate support mechanisms for regional and rural students
- Revisit the guidelines for the means test on many farmers who are asset wealthy but with limited cash flow affects Austudy/Youth Allowance for their children.
• Increase the number of partnerships of metro based universities with regional TAFE providers through:
  o Utilising existing TAFE infrastructure
  o Increasing the number and range of degrees offered through an auspiced arrangement with a TAFE Institute
  o Reducing fees for those who choose to study in a regional location
• Provide Government funding for the GAP year in an adult learning environment eg Diploma of Liberal Arts

Other comments

• Gather and analyse data on the number of young people going to study from one regional rural to another regional rural area rather than going to Melbourne.
• Economic and social indicators across regional Victoria vary from region to region.
• One size does not fit all.
• Notwithstanding points in (f) and (g) above there are number of young people ‘breaking their necks’ to go to Melbourne.
• As a region we are trying to keep in touch with our young people who leave, the East Gippsland Alumni, in order to encourage them to come back to East Gippsland.

Yours sincerely

Angela Hutson
Chief Executive Officer