Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education by GIPPSLAND EDUCATION PRECINCT, CHURCHILL

Purpose of this Submission
The Board of Management of the Gippsland Education Precinct believe that this organization was established to address some of the issues which have been included in the Terms of Reference of this Parliamentary Inquiry. Although the Precinct has been functioning for only around three years a number of measures have been put in place to increase education and employment for students in this region, which are considered likely to be of interest to this Inquiry.

Background
The Gippsland Education Precinct (GEP) is a partnership of the major providers of education, training and employment for young people in the region. The multi-sectoral campus comprises five partners- Monash University, Kurnai College, GippsTAFE, Gippsland Group Training and Latrobe City. The GEP was established in 2004 in a purpose built facility located on the campus of Monash University Gippsland in Churchill. Students began attending classes at the GEP in 2005 and the first graduates emerged at the end of that year.

The GEP was an initiative of the Victorian Government with three broad goals:

- Address the low educational and employment outcomes of young people in the Gippsland region, with particular emphasis on the Latrobe Valley;
- Tackle high levels of youth disengagement and low level of transition from school to tertiary education, training and employment;
- Redress the drift of secondary students to institutions outside the local area.

Key Features of Gippsland Education Precinct
Through its single facility the GEP is able to link year 11 and 12 students with Gippsland Group Training, GippsTAFE and Monash University, all of whom have a presence on the campus. GEP is able to provide the ability for students to transfer between courses and allow year 11 and 12 students to customize their education to best meet needs, interests and abilities. The facility provides:

- An extensive range of articulation pathways between different sectors-secondary school, TAFE, Group Training and University.
- Direct entry into Monash Gippsland undergraduate courses for students who study at the facility and meet the appropriate pre-requisites.
• Access to a challenging accelerated learning program for high achievers.

• A natural bridging program for international students who are looking for safety, English language skills and innovative pathways to continue their education in Australia.

The Precinct has specific programs aimed at school leavers and those looking to continue their education in the region including:
• Customized vocational programs for those not in the secondary school system.
• A Certificate of Professional Studies (Monash and GGT) for students currently in employment who wish to undertake tertiary studies but do not the necessary educational background. This parallels the Diploma of Foundation Studies which is for school leavers.

Also available are programs to better support all students. These include:
• Career planning assistance as a result of innovative pathways between secondary school, TAFE, GGT and Monash University.
• A strategic on-line environment offered by the latest ICT systems. Within this environment, students have access to more computers, are able to access the system from outside the centre and have the opportunity of using methods specifically designed for on-line learning.

• A student support service built upon the existing university model and accentuated by local Latrobe City programs that encourage growth and independence...

Factors which Impact on Rates of Student participation in Higher Education

Transport
Access to skills training in the country is often hampered by lack of transport. This also flows onto higher education. In Gippsland the major growth areas are in the western end of the region in towns such as Warragul, Drouin and Pakenham and it is extremely difficult to encourage students seeking tertiary education to travel eastwards to Monash Gippsland and other education facilities located in the Latrobe Valley. They therefore tend to gravitate to facilities in the city. Students from South Gippsland have no public transport and even students from central and east Gippsland are often face the need to change transport to access facilities at Churchill through the limited public services provided. More students have to live away from home, either in rented or on-campus accommodation, adding to the cost of their university education.
**Socio-economic status**

One of the biggest factors influencing the rate of participation in tertiary education is the socio-economic background of students. Professor Richard Teese has studied factors influencing student performance and has identified the student socio-economic status as the single biggest factor influencing student performance. If we accept that SES is lower in regional areas, then it follows that VCE performance and ENTER scores will also be lower. A higher proportion of country students come from lower socio-economic and other equity categories, making it harder for them to afford to go to higher education. This is particularly the case in the Latrobe Valley since the privatization of the power industry which forced the exodus of skilled workers and resulted in an influx of families seeking low rentals caused by the economic downturn. An indication of the low socio-economic status of many people was that there were four urban renewal projects in the Latrobe City municipality. Structural & generational unemployment resulting from the loss of jobs in the power industry has increased resistance to tertiary education through family pressure to remain together.

The co-relation between socio-economic status and academic success has been reflected in the number of local students moving on to tertiary studies. Rural students who do move to tertiary institutions in Melbourne also suffer a high degree of isolation from families and friends and are more likely to have difficulty completing their course.

**Buoyant Labour Market**

The current buoyant labour market with high demand for workers and good money, even for unskilled labour is reducing the incentive for local students to pursue tertiary education. Add this to the fact that, in many families, tertiary education is not a high priority as previous generations have earned good incomes from trades and had the benefit of skills training and ongoing employment in the power industry.

**Deferrals**

An increasing number of students are deferring a university place in order to save some money and qualify for independent status for Centrelink benefits which can amount to $18,000 per year. It is extremely difficult for a student who has been receiving an income to forgo this to return to study. This can lead to some of these students being lost to the system and not pursuing higher education.
Reduced Pool of students for Tertiary Education
In the Gippsland region there are a high proportion of students studying VCAL and VET in secondary schools. This has the effect of increasing the students able to pursue a career in the trades & traineeships but diminishes the pool of people who may qualify to enter Higher education. The emphasis on skills training rather than academic qualifications may be a cultural hangover from the boom days of Latrobe Valley and the demand for skilled tradesmen and technicians.

Lower ENTERS by Country students
As outlined above, students from country areas, in general, achieve lower ENTERS than their metropolitan counterparts, thereby reducing their options and access to University places.

Some suggestions for addressing these issues include requiring all universities to have special entry schemes whereby regionalism and remoteness are recognized and allowance is made in ENTER scores. Another response could be to provide more scholarships for country students to study at universities.

The reintroduction of cadetships, bonded scholarships or studentships to pay students an allowance while at university and then guarantee them a job after a fixed period if they serve in regional areas, is a worthwhile consideration. This is a practice currently used with medical students and previously in education and could be extended to other careers.

What GEP is attempting to do to address these issues
The following are some of the programs that the GEP partners are using to encourage students to move on to tertiary studies.

The Student Access Monash (SAM) program is aimed at encouraging tertiary participation by providing student tutoring for Kurnai students by Monash University students. As well as one on one tutoring, workshops, classes and study skill sessions are conducted to increase students, knowledge of university as a study option. Financial support in the form of scholarships is provided for selected students. In 2007 the enrolment of students from Kurnai to Monash University increased from 16 in 2006 to 30.

Diploma of Tertiary Studies (DOTS) This course is offered on a one year full time basis during which time students complete eight units of study. Two are generic introductory units and six are electives drawn from a selection of units from different faculties. The diploma is a qualification in its own right, but also
offers graduates automatic entry to any Bachelor level degree at Monash University Gippsland campus. It also credits or advances standing towards a full Bachelor’s degree in some faculties, a full year’s credit towards a Bachelor degree.

Enhancement Studies This program is for high achieving students and enables them to study a Monash first year university sequence as part of their year 12 program which will gain extra weighing on their ENTER score. Some tutorials are conducted on the GEP campus while others at Monash. University staff are involved in delivering some of these units.

Co-op Program, This program conducted by Monash University and Gippsland Group Training, formally integrates students’ academic studies with related paid work experience. Students are able to put classroom knowledge into practice through seven months of employment over the course of their degree. This includes 24 weeks of continuous employment in their final year. Key benefits to students are the financial incentives that allow them to continue their education while at the same time gathering relative work experience, while for employers there are major recruiting benefits.

Vocational Pathways. There are a number of Vocational pathways conducted between Kurnai College, GippsTAFE and Gippsland Group Training which provide students with formal qualifications for employment but can also be used as basis for further study.

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