Submission

to

Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee

Inquiry into Geographical Differences in Participation in Higher Education

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Inquiry into Geographical Differences in Participation in Higher Education

Monash University Gippsland Student Union Submission

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Introduction

This submission is made in response to the Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee’s call for submissions regarding geographical differences in participation in higher education. The submission will concentrate on participation rates in higher education of people from regional areas and the barriers which must be overcome for regional students to access higher education. In so doing, the submission will focus on key factors affecting the participation of rural students in higher education using the Gippsland campus of Monash University as an example of such demographic with the following key factors being addressed:

1) Transport availability in rural areas

2) Financial support provided to rural students

3) 'Incentives' to encourage students to remain in rural communities

4) Challenges and needs of regional populations
Variations in the number and type of university applications, offers, acceptances and completions in different metropolitan, rural and regional areas.

Regional areas throughout Victoria have much lower University offers available and therefore also fewer enrolments. Part of the reason for this is that the nature of regional and rural areas – being of a lower overall population; but another part of the difference is the amount of external factors that contribute to individual’s lives and restrict their ability to both begin to study at a tertiary level and complete studies at a tertiary level. As a Regional Student Organisation MUGSU Inc deals with a lot of student issues on a day-to-day basis attributable to external factors that are unique to rural areas affecting the ability of students to apply themselves during their studies and to remain studying at a tertiary level. Such external factors as decreased availability of an integrated public transport system, low socio-economic status and a reduced amount of support services available within the community will be addressed throughout the submission as key issues to be targeted by the Government.

The number of University applications, offers, acceptances and completions in metropolitan and regional areas is quite difficult to report on in an exact fashion. Instead, below is an exploration of the participation in Higher Education from regional areas in contrast to that of metropolitan areas within Victoria. All statistics have been taken from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census results and the Monash University enrolments data.

Table 1: Type of Educational Institution Attending (Full/Part-Time Students) for time series between Inner Melbourne (Statistical Region) and All of Gippsland (Statistical Region Sector) – ABS (2007a & 2007b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution attending</th>
<th>All Gippsland</th>
<th>Inner Melbourne</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical or further</td>
<td>4,065</td>
<td>4,910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University or other tertiary</td>
<td>3,977</td>
<td>3,641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other type</td>
<td>880</td>
<td>1,494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type not stated</td>
<td>11,442</td>
<td>10,758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>20,364</td>
<td>20,803</td>
</tr>
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</table>

As can be seen by the above table, there is a vast difference in the amount of the Gippsland population (approx 12% in 2006) and Melbourne population (approx 40% in 2006) attending University or other tertiary institutions on a consistent basis. This should then be compared to the reduced difference in the number of people attending Technical or further education institutions between Gippsland (approx 16% in 2006) and Melbourne (approx 8% in 2006). This indicates that within Gippsland the push for technical education
remains high in secondary schools and within the region as industry based learning continues to be valued by the area.

**Figure 1**: People attending Tertiary Institutions (as a percentage of people aged 15 years and over – ABS(2007c) – focus on Melbourne and Gippsland regions.

Figure 1 is a visual representation of the information in Table 1, but focuses on those within the populations attending Tertiary Institutions. It should be highlighted that within the majority of Gippsland, as little as 0-3% of the population is attending tertiary institutions, with the majority of the region being between 3-8% participation by the population.

Monash University undertakes an Access Monash program where applicants in equity categories and experiencing educational disadvantage are given ‘bonus’ points under the Monash Special Entry Access Scheme (SEAS). Within this program, 57% of applications received are under either the ‘rural or isolated’ category or low socio-economic background. In 2007, Monash awarded all Access Monash Excellence and Equity Scholarships available and all aspects of the program increased from the previous year. In 2007; 4,469 SEAS applications were made, with 257 offers being made by Monash University because of SEAS category. Of these, 187 students enrolled and 53 deferred their studies (Monash University, 2007). The high amount of applications for the program throughout Monash under categories of equity and disadvantage are just one indicator of the need the Victorian population has to be supported by both the Government and educational institutions throughout their studies.
Influences of school retention rates, including enrolments and completions for VCE, VCAL and VET in schools on participation in higher education.

The VCAL and VET programs that run in schools are highly effective in assisting students that aren’t as academically driven to achieve a higher education. The amount of participation in Technical or further education (including TAFE Institutions) within Gippsland in relation to that of Tertiary Education participation within the region illustrates this point effectively.

There appears to be a push within the region to encourage Industry Based learning, with Monash University Gippsland also recognising this need through its Co-op program. The co-op program at Monash Gippsland encourages an ongoing relationship between students within a specific degree and an employer within the industry they are studying towards. This ongoing relationship assists the students to understand the industry and builds relationships between the community and education providers such as Monash Gippsland.

Influences of participation in other post-school pathways, including TAFE enrolments and take-up of apprenticeships or other employment opportunities, on participation in higher education.

It has been observed that the career advice provided within schools should be focused more-so on the many options students have once they complete their studies, rather than the ENTER they require to get into their number one choice of further studies. The amount of alternate pathways that exist within many educational providers today must be shown to students during secondary school to enable them to make effective decisions upon finishing their studies.

Alternative pathways such as the Monash University DoTS (Diploma of Tertiary Studies) program are proving to be an effective means of encouraging students who do not achieve results required to enter Tertiary studies via mainstream VTAC enrolments to have a chance at completing a Tertiary degree. The DoTs program offers students who achieve an ENTER of 50 or more including an English minimum score of 25 but below the Monash cut off of 70 to begin the degree they are interested in, with just one unit per semester altered within their course map to accommodate study skills based coursework to aid the transition to University. According to Monash (2007c), A significant contributor to the Gippsland campus load (EFTSL) is the pathway program DoTS (previously known as DoFS) which increased from 43 EFTSL to 147 EFTSL for 2007.

Monash University also offers places to students who have completed TAFE qualifications previously. This pathway to tertiary studies proves to be an effective means of encouraging students to continue their higher education
pathway and assists students to build their foundation knowledge in an area before continuing to tertiary studies.

**Potential geographic, economic, social, cultural and other influences on university applications, offers, acceptances and completions across Victorian communities.**

There are several potential influences on the individual’s decision to both apply for and complete a University degree within Victorian regional communities such as Gippsland. The major impacts on the Gippsland population that have been observed by MUGSU Inc are highlighted below.

- **Economic status**
  Within regional areas, the amount of individuals experiencing a low socio-economic status is much higher than that of metropolitan areas. This decreased status impacts on the individual’s ability to manage a reduced income whilst studying, alongside any other life commitments such as family, mortgage, rent, travel and other living expenses. If an individual decides to attempt studies (often as an off campus student) then their ability to complete studies and obtain employment that relates to their degree is also affected by their low socio-economic status as the ability to continue with studies is often challenged in a variety of ways, and the high degree of stress and anxiety often directly related to financial problems prevents the individual from applying themselves to their studies effectively.

- **Availability and type of Scholarships and Bursaries**
  Monash University Gippsland offers a wide range of scholarships and bursaries to students, however often the students who really require financial assistance do not fit the selection criteria. Tertiary Institutions seem to allocate much financial support to those students who achieve well academically with a lesser allocation of funding attributed to areas pertaining to equity. Scholarships and bursaries provided by Tertiary Institutions need to reflect the needs of the students attending University, as well as potential students. The government needs to look into ways of encouraging and assisting Tertiary Education providers to financially support higher education students – particularly in regional and rural areas.

- **Public Transport**
  Within regional areas, the ability of individuals to physically attend University is greatly reduced by the availability of public transport to and from such Institutions. As an example of this, below are visual representations of the percentage of the Gippsland populations that use public transport to get to work in comparison to that of Melbourne. It may be commented upon that University class times often don’t coincide with that of the regular work day, however the mere fact that the availability of public transport is much lower within regional areas such as Gippsland is a clear indicator of the restriction this places on individuals requiring such means to attend University.
Figures 2 to 6: Taken from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 2: Baw Baw Local Government area (ABS, 2007d)</th>
<th>Figure 3: Latrobe Local Government area (ABS, 2007e)</th>
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<th>Figure 4: West Gippsland (statistical subdivision) (ABS, 2007f)</th>
<th>Figure 5: Gippsland Commonwealth Electoral Division (ABS, 2007g)</th>
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<th>Figure 6: Melbourne – Urban Centre/Locality. Based on all employed people within the specified area. (ABS, 2007h)</th>
<th>Legend:</th>
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<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Figure 6" /></td>
<td>Per cent</td>
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<td></td>
<td>33 - 41</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6 - 33</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3 - 6</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1 - 3</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>0 - 1</td>
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• **Perception of regional universities**
  Within the state of Victoria, University campuses that are in Melbourne are perceived as having a much higher reputation than those of regional areas. This perception is present within both metropolitan and regional communities, and affects the participation in such Universities by both regional and metropolitan students. Many regional students upon finishing their VCE move to Melbourne to obtain a tertiary degree. The problem with this for regional areas is that it is uncertain as to whether these individuals will return to the regional areas upon completion of their studies – in turn affecting the amount of skilled professionals in regional areas. If government invests in building the support and opportunities available within regional communities and promotes regional secondary schools participation within these communities; then students may value the education they can receive from a regional university more than currently occurs.

**Advantages and disadvantages of participation and non-participation in higher education for school leavers and their families and communities in different metropolitan, rural and regional areas.**

As has been alluded to in previous sections of this submission, the impact participation in Higher Education has on the earning capacity of individuals affects not only the individual, but their family, the wider community and the University. Individuals experience a direct impact on earning capacity through the limited ability they hold to complete studies successfully and maintain employment at a level that is adequate to cover costs of living. This trade-off between ability to earn an income and the participation in higher education causes many within the population to either choose not to participate in higher education at all, or to leave a higher education degree without graduating. The low income generated during higher education affects the support services required within a community and the amount of financial support higher education providers give to students.

The participation in higher education causes individuals within regional and metropolitan areas to remain living at home for a longer period of time – particularly if the institution is relatively close to their parents’ residence. This trend is also a direct result of the inability of individuals to earn an acceptable income whilst completing a higher education degree. The trend also prolongs the amount of time individuals take to get married, start a family and take up mortgages – all of which contribute to the economy, workforce within regional and metropolitan areas.

**Potential effects of geographical differences in participation in higher education on skills shortages and the Victorian economy.**

Within Gippsland, the shortage of skills can be seen as a direct result of the geographical differences of participation in higher education. A shortage of
accountants and skilled tradespeople directly reflects this. This illustrates the importance of programs that incorporate industry training and higher education, specifically in regional areas. A reduced availability of tertiary education in Gippsland has potential to mean less diversification, new opportunities and new enterprises for the region.

Regional areas such as Gippsland rely on new opportunities and enterprises for growth and development, as without these growths present the trends of younger people moving to Melbourne to take up better opportunities will continue. Skill diversification is also of high importance to regional areas as it aids the self-sustainability of such regional areas and improves the complex support a given region such as Gippsland can provide to its population. Skill diversification, new opportunities and enterprises also serve a purpose of encouraging individuals to participate in higher education in regional areas – the perception of an area as growing and supportive goes hand in hand with the perception of higher education providers in the area being respected institutions.

**Strategies to address any barriers contributing to geographic differences in participation in higher education.**

There are several strategies that MUGSU Inc suggests should be implemented by the government to address barriers present that contribute to geographic differences in participation in higher education.

1) **Implement an Integrated Transport plan:** A government supported transport system that effectively meets the needs of regional areas must be implemented through the consultation of higher education providers, student organisations and key community stakeholders. This integrated transport plan also includes effective timing between all public transport forms that takes into account community needs and daily usage patterns.

2) **Improve support provided to higher education providers, student organisations and community support organisations:** Support in the forms of financial support and resources provided are necessary to ensure that critical support networks in regional areas are maintained and improved to meet the needs of each region. Programs that encourage participation in higher education and industry placements must be strongly considered by the government to be implemented and supported on a broader scale.

3) **Improved higher education financial support schemes provided by the government:** The provisions for financial support provided to regional and rural students in particular must be improved to enable these students to participate in; and complete higher education qualifications.

It should also be noted that expanding highly sought after degrees such as Medicine to be available in regional areas is an effective means of both increasing the skill base in regional areas and improving the perceived reputation of regional higher education providers. The Monash Gippsland
campus for example has recently made the Postgraduate Medicine degree available – this has seen an increase in the amount of enrolments at the campus and may in several years time see more medicine research and practitioners entering the region.

Conclusion

Regional and rural higher education providers such as those present within Gippsland require support from the government in several different forms if participation rates are to increase. The need for this to occur is reflected by the lack of opportunities, skilled professionals and tradespeople in Gippsland and the many factors that have contributed to this shortage. Public transport systems, community support and pathways to higher education are all areas where improvement is needed if increased participation in higher education within regional areas is to be achieved. The following recommendations should be noted as key points that MUGSU requests be addressed by the Government.

1) MUGSU Inc notes the importance of regional and rural student organisations and the support they provide students participating in tertiary education. The ability of such student organisations to provide support depends strongly on the funding provided to do so by the government.

2) Integrated transport plans are a necessary part of any regional community that must be reviewed, developed and improved where appropriate; using the feedback and contribution from key stakeholders within the community – including student organisations and higher education providers

3) Financial support in the form of improved level of study allowances such as Youth allowance must be provided to students, specifically regional and rural students to combat impacts of low socio-economic status and lack of ability to generate income.

This submission has been made in response to the Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee’s call for submissions regarding geographical differences in participation in higher education. MUGSU Inc is committed to contributing to the development of support provided to regional and rural higher education providers and regional communities – both Gippsland and Nation wide.
References

ABS (2007a) TYPE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION ATTENDING (FULL/PART-TIME STUDENT STATUS BY AGE) BY SEX FOR TIME SERIES – All Gippsland (Statistical Region Sector – Vic); Commonwealth of Australia www.abs.gov.au

ABS (2007b) TYPE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION ATTENDING (FULL/PART-TIME STUDENT STATUS BY AGE) BY SEX FOR TIME SERIES – Inner Melbourne (Statistical Region – Vic); Commonwealth of Australia www.abs.gov.au

ABS (2007c) People attending Tertiary Institutions as a percentage of people aged 15 years and over – based on place of usual residence, Census 2006: Rural Balance (Urban Centre/Locality) by Census Collection District; Commonwealth of Australia and PSMA Australia. www.abs.gov.au

ABS (2007d) People who travelled to work by Public Transport: as a percentage of all employed people – based on place of usual residence, Census 2006: Baw Baw (S) (Local Government Area) by Statistical Local Area; Commonwealth of Australia and PSMA Australia. www.abs.gov.au

ABS (2007e) People who travelled to work by Public Transport: as a percentage of all employed people – based on place of usual residence, Census 2006: Latrobe (C) (Local Government Area) by Statistical Local Area; Commonwealth of Australia and PSMA Australia. www.abs.gov.au

ABS (2007f) People who travelled to work by Public Transport: as a percentage of all employed people – based on place of usual residence, Census 2006: West Gippsland (Statistical Subdivision) by Statistical Local Area; Commonwealth of Australia and PSMA Australia. www.abs.gov.au

ABS (2007g) People who travelled to work by Public Transport: as a percentage of all employed people – based on place of usual residence, Census 2006: Gippsland (Commonwealth Electoral Division 2007) by Census Collection District; Commonwealth of Australia and PSMA Australia. www.abs.gov.au

ABS (2007h) People who travelled to work by Public Transport: as a percentage of all employed people – based on place of usual residence, Census 2006: Melbourne (Urban Centre/Locality) by Census Collection District; Commonwealth of Australia and PSMA Australia. www.abs.gov.au