South East Development (Melbourne) Area Consultative Committee

Submission to the Parliament of Victoria Education & Training Committee

Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education

Background

South East Development (Melbourne) Area Consultative Committee (SED) is part of an Australia wide network of 54 Area Consultative Committees (ACCs). The network is funded through the federal Department of Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government (DITRDLG).

The ACC network provides an important link between the Commonwealth Government and rural and metropolitan Australia. The ACC Charter requires that we respond to issues within our regions and provide a conduit to Government on local social and economic conditions.

ACCs identify and foster opportunities for sustainable regional development. This can be through informing local business about Government initiatives, supporting regional skills development, assisting with economic development or employment opportunities and by providing access to a pool of federal funding.

Region

SED’s region covers nine local government areas, the cities of Bayside, Casey, Glen Eira, Greater Dandenong, Frankston, Kingston, Port Phillip and Cardinia and Mornington Peninsula Shires.

The SED region contains 1.1 million people, nearly a third of Melbourne’s total population (currently estimated at 3.6 million people). To put SED’s regional population into context, it is almost three and a half times the population of the nation’s capital, Canberra.

The wide spread of the region means that it is an extremely diverse, complex mix of demography and geography. SED has grouped the municipalities into three clusters which have the following defining characteristics:

i. The inner cluster - An established, residential group of municipalities with areas of affluence, but also small pockets of disadvantage – the Cities of Port Phillip, Bayside and Glen Eira.

ii. The central cluster - An industrial group of municipalities that provide employment for surrounding municipalities but have areas of high unemployment, disadvantage and ethnic diversity – the Cities of Kingston, Greater Dandenong and Frankston.

iii. The outer cluster - A group of municipalities experiencing accelerated growth, which comprise the south eastern residential growth corridor, have a tourism base but also have an interface with rural and agricultural areas – the City of Casey and the Shires of Cardinia and Mornington Peninsula.
The SED region is home to three campuses of Monash University, one at Caulfield, one at Berwick and one at Frankston and there are also 2 TAFE’s namely Chisholm and Homesglen. It is also has three LLENs – the Bayside Glen Eira Kingston LLEN (BGKLLEN), the South East LLEN (SELLEN) and the Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN (FMPLLEN).

Response

In order to provide the Committee with a brief response SED has synthesised information provided by the 3 LLENs located within the SED region and from the Monash University Campuses at Berwick and Frankston.

Glen Eira, Bayside, Kingston

This area has a higher socio-economic demographic than the other sub regions and consequently Year 12 completion rates are higher. In addition more Year 12 completers go on to University level study than the other 2 areas and on a statewide basis.

For example, the proportion of school leavers in these municipalities that receive a degree-level university offer has increased by 5% from 47.8% of the 2002 cohort to 52.8% of the 2006 cohort of year 12 completers.

These municipalities are home to a Monash campus and a TAFE, but beyond their boundaries aspiring university graduates can choose from multiple higher education options, namely Deakin, Swinburne and Monash.

The higher rate of university entrants means that there is a lower than average transition or pathway to vocational training in this region. The BGKLLEN response summarises the reasons: In our regions there are a number of key barriers for students who choose to pursue a non-university post school choice:
• Parental pressure to pursue University rather than vocational trade qualifications
• Parental desire for their children to ‘do better than them’, hence steering them away from traditional industries
• Outdated parental perceptions of the traditional trades
• Some schools limit parental access to careers workshops that provide current industry information
• School streaming and limited access to applied learning options in the senior years of secondary school

Dandenong, Frankston, Mornington Peninsula

These municipalities have experienced lower than average university enrolments since 2003 (38% compared to the State average of 47%). Surprisingly, the City of Greater Dandenong has experienced a sort of renaissance with 59% of Year 12 school leavers going on to University in 2007, compared to 33% in 2003. (State average rates 47.4%) Although Greater Dandenong residents may not apply for or participate in higher education due to social or economic issues, they are nevertheless somewhat advantaged by having easier road and public transport access to Swinburne, Monash and Deakin campuses.

However, in Frankston the data indicates that young people are less likely to apply for university and this is exacerbated by lack of adequate public transport connections, particularly in relation the campuses at Frankston and Berwick.

The Monash Peninsula campus is located approximately 1.4kms from Frankston Railway station abutting the Leawarra Railway station on the Frankston - Stony Point railway line. Access to the campus via train and buses is limited. The electrified train line terminates at Frankston with a very limited, infrequent and slow service to the campus via the Stony Point line. Currently local bus services are also inadequate with infrequent service to the campus.

Upgrading of public transport on the Monash Peninsula campus would make the campuses more accessible to people living within the region. It has been suggested by Monash University that the electrification of the train line to the Leawarra Station and a bridge over/under the rail line for road traffic, would considerably improve access to the campus from surrounding areas.

According to the FMPLLEN students from Frankston and Mornington Peninsula are also more likely to enter full time work rather than continue on to university than their Victorian counterparts – 7.8% compared to 5.9% for Victoria and there are significant differences in the rates of participation in part time work. Part time work is a destination for 13.2% of Frankston and Mornington Peninsula Year 12 completers, compared to 7.7% for Victoria.

The FMPLLLEN notes: Early school leaving remains an issue for FMPLLLEN area students particularly when combined with the high labour market participation of youth, including participation in part time and casual work. Research indicates labour market participation by FMPLLLEN young people is the highest in the State and is supported by a local economy where retail and hospitality provide the key employment opportunities.
Casey, Cardinia

These municipalities have experienced and continue to experience rapid growth. Both soft and hard infrastructure are struggling to keep up with the accelerated residential development. Vocational training rates are higher than average but retention rates are lower as are university enrolments. Deferral rates are also higher, particularly in the outer growth areas.

The SELLEN argues that it is issues of access and equity which drive the low university participation rates evident particularly in Casey and Cardinia. Primarily, there are fewer tertiary institutions to choose from and those that exist have limited offerings.

*The Berwick campus of Monash University has a very limited range of courses and is not established as a local university but rather as an additional campus of an existing university and so students at the Berwick Campus of Monash University are just as likely to come from Clayton or St Kilda as they are to live in Berwick or Pakenham.*

**Summary**

The south eastern part of the region is the geographical area which poses the most concern regarding student participation in and access to higher education. Greater Dandenong, Frankston, Casey, Cardinia and the Mornington Peninsula continue to have lower participation rates in higher education - there are clear differences in applications, enrolments and attendance when compared to the southern municipalities.

In summary, some of the reasons for these geographical differences are as follows:

- Socio-economic status - families and individuals cannot afford the impost of financing a tertiary education, particularly in a region that has pockets of high socio-economic disadvantage.
- The tyranny of distance – the geographical location of the tertiary institutions is too far or awkward for individuals residing in Cardinia or on the Mornington Peninsula.
- Public transport – transport to and from the institutions is either non-existent or is difficult to access. Without a car, it can become impossible to access higher and further education.
- Educational aspirations – life-long learning expectations are often different in the interface areas, as has been noted by a number of the LLENs, with individuals opting for casual and part time work in place of further education.
- Lack of engagement by higher education with the community – restrictions posed by ENTER scores and the focus on the global learning community rather than the local learning community has meant that higher education in the south east region of Melbourne has struggled to connect with communities that are economically disadvantaged and disengaged from education.

In many municipalities it is the combinations of these factors that exacerbate the lower level of university enrolment for Melbourne’s south east region.