Parliament of Victoria Education & Training Committee

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

A written Submission by the South East Local Learning & Employment Network Inc. on behalf of members of the SELLEN network and particularly including the views of the City of Casey & Cardinia Shire -

The Committee will have been presented with a considerable range of data and interpretations of that data from both education and training experts and local practitioners. We do not wish to replicate this information, much of which we have seen and whose findings we would support.

Rather, we want to put to the Committee the factors we believe constitute barriers to further education and training for young people in Melbourne’s South East, focusing particularly on the City of Casey and Cardinia Shire.

In passing, we note that these two local government areas constitute two of the fastest growing municipalities in the state, are amongst the fastest growing municipalities in the nation and between them comprise over 60% of the 33,6361 students who were undertaking their secondary schooling in the South East in 20072.

On average, over the past five years for which we have reliable data, 32% of students who completed Year 12 in the City of Casey and Cardinia Shire took up a university place and began their tertiary studies.

The state average for actual enrolment in university is 47.4%.

Some commentators take the view that the 15.4% disparity between the two figures can be explained primarily by cultural and socio-economic factors. This view has some support from the local TAFE enrolment (actual) figures – which in the City of Casey (38%) and Cardinia Shire (39%) are higher than the state wide average of 29.6% Year 12 completer TAFE enrolment.

Certainly, the demographic profile of the two municipalities shows strong middle and upper trade or supervisor employment levels rather than the professional and para-professional profile that would be more clearly linked to higher university uptake.

However, this is a circular argument.

To cut cleanly through this argument, the City of Casey and Cardinia Shire encompass areas of relatively affordable and available residential land in designated residential growth corridors.

Consequently, it is expected that these areas would be settled by lower and middle rather than upper income earners. And, as a further consequence, these families

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1 SELLEN 2007 Careers & Transitions Survey (unpublished data) – the difference between these figures and the ABS youth data for the South East can be attributed to the different ways in which the data is assessed. The SELLEN survey figures include all students attending secondary school and other education providers with the SELLEN service region. This includes students who may reside outside of the region.

2 City of Casey – 43% & Cardinia Shire 17%
would be less likely (based on well established research, particularly by Richard Teese of the University of Melbourne) to have strong “aspirations” towards tertiary (and particularly university) study.

As a consequence, and at its most simple (in the case of the City of Casey and Cardinia Shire), young people are less likely to attend university due to their geographic location. And, according to the available data, more likely to attend TAFE or undertake further (non-university) training.

The unanswered question is whether this lower level of university enrolment is due to socio-economic-cultural verities and so the current situation is meeting everyone’s needs OR whether there is an equity issue underlying the low university – high TAFE enrolment data for the City of Casey and Cardinia Shire.

We would argue that it is the second – barriers of access and adequate preparation – which drive the data we see for the outer South East. We would argue that despite the occupational and socio-economic demographic prevalent in the outer south east, young people in this area aspire no less to access to a university education but are blocked by inequitable structures that surround them.

Certainly, we see high tertiary application rates (77% of City of Casey Year 12 completers applied for a tertiary place and 76% of Cardinia Shire Year 12 completers applied for a tertiary place in 2007) relative to the actual uptake of places. This means that fewer applicants for tertiary places in the outer south east have their tertiary training aspirations met compared to young people in other areas.

These equity concerns have geography – broadly defined - at their base. Aside from the geography of affordable land and homes, there are a range of other geographic drivers.

Key amongst them is the lack of local access to university. And, in the case of Cardinia Shire, of any post school training facility.

In this, we echo the view of the Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN that students have fewer University campuses/courses available in their area. 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.

Bob Birrell of Monash University noted in a recent study that the profile for further education in the City of Casey is really very discouraging –

In the seat of Holt - - - which covers Melbourne’s outer south eastern suburbs of Narre Warren and Cranbourne, only 19.9 per cent of this age group attended a university and 49.2 per cent were not participating in any type of education.

and put the responsibility for the most part on geography –

However, socioeconomic status is not the only determinant of education attendance. There is also a clear ‘inner versus outer’ metropolitan attendance

3 Half of Australian youth aged 18-20 are not in training –
divide which is only marginally related to the socioeconomic status of the electors. The data show that there are relatively low education participation levels in the home-owning, but modest income outer suburban mortgage belt electorates. This applies whether the seats are held by the Labor or Liberal parties. This outcome partly reflects the financial pressures on the families in question and thus the difficulties students face in financing their education and partly the relative inaccessibility of educational institutions in these areas.

The situation in Cardinia Shire is even more discouraging.

With the honourable exception of the extensive vocational training facilities provided to their students by Pakenham, Emerald and Koo Wee Rup Secondary Colleges and – to a lesser extent - St Francis Xavier College there is NO tertiary, further or post school training or education facility in the area.

None.

This fact has been noted by Peter Kirby in the ground breaking Kirby Report which sought to reshape post compulsory education in Victoria back in 2000 and has been noted again and again in submissions and presentations to government.

It is a well documented fact that the presence of a tertiary institution in a community promotes a certain culture or impetus towards learning for the broader community and provides a vibrant community atmosphere. As an example we can point to the current VicUrban planning for the revitalisation of Dandenong which cites these considerations in their planning for education and training institutions within the City of Greater Dandenong precinct for precisely these reasons.

Currently, the City of Casey and Cardinia Shire have no local, accessible tertiary presence which drives this sort of community engagement and provides a visible community lifelong learning reference point. This, we would argue, lessens the general community value held for learning.

This can be seen in a number of measures but particularly in the school engagement and disengagement data for the two municipalities we are presenting and overall data on the skills and qualification level of the population.

In the City of Casey, 69.6% of 15-19 year-old school leavers were fully engaged in work or non-school study, compared to 71.6% in the Southern Metro Region and the Victorian State average of 71.9%. Furthermore, 17.0% were disengaged, compared to 15.3% in the Southern Metro Region and the Victorian State average of 15.4%.

In relation to skills, 48.8% of employed persons working in Casey worked in highly skilled occupations compared to 54.9% in the Southern Metro Region and the Victorian State average of 56.3% we also see that 45.2% of persons aged 25 years and over had tertiary or TAFE qualifications, compared to 53.4% in the Southern Metro Region and the Victorian State average of 50.7%.

4 Lesser only because St Francis Xavier does not offer enrolment in VET courses outside of their school population whereas the others do – in fact with over 200 VET enrolments at St Francis, it has a very high VET engagement profile.

The data for Cardinia Shire provides a similar profile, with 67.6% of 15-19 year-old school leavers fully engaged in work or non-school study, compared to 71.6% in the Southern Metro Region and the Victorian State average of 71.9%. Furthermore, 18.1% of 15-19 year old school leavers were disengaged compared to 15.3% in the Southern Metro Region and the Victorian State average of 15.4%.

Again, and not surprisingly, 52.0% of employed persons working in Cardinia worked in highly skilled occupations compared to 54.9% in the Southern Metro Region and the Victorian State average of 56.3% and 47.4% of persons aged 25 years and over had tertiary or TAFE qualifications, compared to 53.4% in the Southern Metro Region and the Victorian State average of 50.7%.

A further measure of this culture of low educational aspirations can be seen in the available school retention data with 71% of 17 year olds in Cardinia and 72.8% of 17 year olds in Casey still attending school – well below the state and regional averages.

As stated earlier, we would argue that a key reason for these low educational attainment, retention and qualifications data resides in the lack of post schooling education and training infrastructure which in turn is directly linked to the geographic location of the youth population in these areas and the consequent distance from examples of life long learning pathways.

The On Track survey reports of the State Government have for a number of years listed key reasons for young people not continuing in education post year 12. Chief amongst these reasons have been distance, cost and “fatigue” after completing year 12.

Of these there main reasons, distance and cost impact most directly on students from Melbourne's outer south east.

On the basis of the above information and perspectives we would argue strongly that students from the outer Melbourne South East do not access university because they have fewer university campuses/courses available in and around their community, tend to leave school earlier than in other regions and choose different post school pathways. We believe these three elements are connected and relate directly to the lack of local further education and training facilities whose absence is in turn linked to the distance from “the centre” of the City of Casey and Cardinia Shire.

Two other areas of concern briefly rate a mention. Both areas are ways of thinking outside of the current parameters of schooling and schooling completion pathways and may provide an innovative way forward to resolve some of the issues around the nexus between geography and tertiary study.

1. Careers services and support to senior secondary students. Whilst this is not directly on the issue of geography and tertiary access and entry rates it is of concern to the South East LLEN and many of our partners that the MODEL of careers and pathways support to young people is inadequate to the task of fully preparing our graduating senior school students for the post school lives. The high rates of university application – cited above – are broadly indicative of a system that values university entry over and above all other post school options.

6 Community Indicators Victoria, Well Being Reports - http://www.communityindicators.net.au/wellbeing_reports
7 2006 ABS data
Further, our local, internal survey work gives us the perspective that these support services are clearly not being adequately provided to local students –

In State Government funded schools, the average full time staff loading for career and transition services (MIPs and Careers) across all surveyed schools was 44%, with the lowest at 5% and the highest 100% (that is, one full time position). Study programmes such as VETiS and VCAL were provided with an average time allocation of 21% (or the equivalent of one day a week), with the lowest being 4% and the highest 80%. On the other hand, the Catholic sector schools resource allocation to career and transition services actually decreased from 2006 to 2007 with 45% allocation to career and transitions and 19% with study programme. This is a drop of almost 6% on average across the programmes. Independent schools also show the same trend with career and transition services allocation dropping from an average of 47% to 29% although time allocation to study programmes has actually increased from 14% in 2006 to 20% in 2007.

At a time of close focus on skills and labour market gaps when students need these services more then ever - and with the sharply increasing youth population in the Outer South East - these figures are of concern.

South East LLEN Careers and Transition Services Survey, Unpublished data, 2007

2. In the past we have called for an official “gap year” program during which Year 12 school leavers can refresh their minds and – without guilt or pressure – spend a year doing things other than studying. As noted above, a regular feature of the On Track survey work of the Victorian Government is the reporting by Year 12 completers of “study fatigue” as one of the reasons for not continuing their education. A gap year would provide a chance for Year 12 completers to consider their further study options, seek experiences in the career areas they are considering and make positive choices about returning to study. This program would be of particular benefit to young people in the Outer South East area given the paucity of local study options and their need to consider closely further study due to time, distance and cost factors.

Recommendations

We would recommend the following –

1. The establishment of a post school further education and training facility in Pakenham or Officer as a matter of urgency;

2. A vigorous and extensive community engagement campaign by Monash University Berwick, including the on-going hosting of senior school activities and delivery of a range of senior secondary school study seminars and subject specialities to familiarise local senior school students with the University;

3. The extension of the role of Monash Berwick to “host” local students by enrolling them locally in a broad range of distance learning undergraduate degrees and providing these students with access to ITC equipment, study groups, seminar and tutorial groups and guest lecturers;

4. The radical extension of “HECS” scholarships to local (Casey and Cardinia) students by Monash (and – over time – other) University in tandem with the opportunity to study a range of disciplines off campus as outlined above;
5. Strong state government support – through support of a range of local government and community agency projects - for the active delivery lifelong learning policies by Cardinia Shire and the City of Casey.

6. The trialling of a non-school based Careers Services\(^8\) delivery model in Melbourne’s Outer South East to better align education, training and study aspirations with local social and infrastructure realities and to support career pathways planning not only for those community members in school but for all community members.

7. Piloting of a Year 12 Completers “gap year” program with a view to promoting to Year 12 school leavers across the state over time.

Paul Di-Masi  
Chief Executive Officer  
South East Local Learning & Employment Network Inc.

\(^8\) Careers Services models exist for consideration in both the UK and New Zealand, providing careers services contracted directly to schools but also to the broader community.