Submission and Recommendations to the
Education and Training Committee

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

South West Association of Post Primary Principals
S.W.A.P.P.P.

Colac
29th. April 2008

Parliamentary Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in Higher Education.

We acknowledge the papers prepared by:
• the South West LLEN,
• University of Ballarat,
• Victorian Association of Secondary School Principals (VASSP),
• the Barwon South West Region,
all of which accurately reflect the experiences of schools and students in the South West of Victoria.

This presentation is by:
Mary Pendergast – Principal Warrnambool College (992 students)
Jane Boyle – Principal - Mortlake College (300 students)
Michael Holland – Co-Principal, Colac College (900 students multi campus)
Shane Robertson – Warrnambool College Year 12 student -2007

It is supported by O.G.S.E. secondary schools in the south west.
Each of the Principals will present their “story” and Shane will conclude with his outline of a “student perspective”

A. Warrnambool College:
Located in a city of 31,000 people with a strong farming hinterland. A distinctly mono-cultural population. There are 4 local secondary schools providing for 3,500 secondary age students.

• Deferment increased from 25% in 2001 to 49% in 2007.
• Year 12 2007 – 61% of students were offered a University place, 10% were offered a SWTAFE place and 17% went straight to employment.
• Year 12 2000 – 61% of students were offered a University place, 18% were offered a SWTAFE place and 5% went to employment.
• The majority of the 17% of students who have entered the workforce have entered low skilled jobs in the retail and hospitality sectors, many are employed part time. It is common for students to make the decision to have a “gap year” to raise the money for the Youth Allowance only to discover that it is very difficult to find work with the glut of students with similar plans. This then leaves them short of the required amount to help support their studies. In some cases this leads to another year away from
study, in others it means that they forego their tertiary pathway and seek other options.

An idiosyncrasy of parents in our cohort is that many do not have a tertiary background and anecdotally, their value of a tertiary pathway is not strong. Many parents are very happy for their child to leave school to what they consider a valuable pathway.

An indicator is that the powerful industry base around our city. Midfield Meats is the largest abattoir in the Southern Hemisphere, GlaxoSmithKline / Warrnambool Cheese and Butter, Murray Goulburn and Alcoa in Portland are all significant employers. The apprentice take up rate for Warrnambool is 60 per year.

This has had a detrimental impact on our VCAL programs and to a lesser extent on the local ATC, when employers of students on School based Apprenticeships (S.B.A’s) find “a good one” and encourage them to leave school to begin an apprentice. This then skews the Year 12 figures which, in the main, do not reflect the apprentice take up. This normally occurs in Year 10 or Year 11.

There is a powerful gender difference in that the apprentice profile is predominantly male. There are few VETiS programs which attract young women in our area.

This has a major impact on our retention statistics, which at 49% in 2006, were alarmingly below the DEECD goal.

Many parents view the support of their children into an apprentice program as entirely pragmatic. They view the costs of around $15,000 a year for living and transport and $5,000 average per year for HECS, over three years, when combined with the three years of an apprentice wage with the concomitant supports within this pathway, as adding up to their child being effectively almost $100,000 better off after training.

1. **Comparison Study** – Single mother, income $78,000, mortgage free prior to sons entering university, now owes over $115,000.

She says:

“I have 24 yr old nephew who left school at the end of Year 11 to begin a three year Fitting and Turning apprenticeship. He now fully owns one house and is purchasing an investment property in Melbourne. His wage varies between $95,000 and $150,000 per year.”

“I have a 24 yr old son who has his graduation ceremony this year. He has a substantial HECS debt, for him, I have added around $60,000 to my mortgage - he has been unable to work and last week he wanted to discuss a post graduate degree as he feels that it will be necessary for him to have to fully complete his qualification in Anthropology. He is also likely to enter his industry on around $45,000 pa if he is lucky.

I have another son studying Visual Arts – he has begun his second course after suffering depression in the second year of his first course. He now has three years of HECS debt and is still in Year 1. I pay for every cost these two boys incur – their rent, food, transport, clothes, entertainment etc.
I have a very bright daughter (ENTER 85) who refuses to go to university because she has witnessed the impact of the costs of supporting the boys has had on our lifestyle. She is considering the Army as a way of getting an education without the high costs

Thursday, 7 May 2009

Parent comment:

“My kids have a conscience and they are worried about how we will manage financially if they go to uni”

Trevor, a parent of two boys, one in Year 12, one in Year 11, both in the Select Entry Stream, says:

“My boys will be discriminated against as country students at a city university. It won’t be the HECS. That’s controllable. It’s the accommodation and living costs that will be the killer. I am on a not insubstantial salary but there’s still quite a chance that the boys will need to work before uni in a tight job environment to meet what may be up to 5 years each for them to live at the most appropriate uni to reach their potential”

Student comments:
By far the most common response to questions about why our students defer is:
“I have to get the Independent Allowance otherwise I can’t afford to go to uni”.

2. Other factors include:
2.1 The wish that the local Deakin University would offer a greater breadth in courses – the Primary Teaching, Nursing and Commerce are too narrow and don’t cater for emerging interests. The popular media / animation /Graphics industries are not represented in the course profile.

2.2 Students in the country viewing studying and working in Melbourne as a “rite of passage” in their life experience. Many grow up with the expectation that they will move away quite soon after they complete their secondary experience.

2.3 We have few students attending the University of Ballarat – many students find the lack of direct transport an issue, preferring instead to attend a university “on the train line”.

2.4 The social status of white versus blue collar industries has changed with a shift in status perception that the income determines status rather than the role or the education.

2.5 We support and concur entirely the recommendations submitted through the South West Local Learning and Employment Network (SWLLEN).
B. Parliamentary Inquiry to comment on the effect of geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in Higher Education.

Mortlake College
Located about 218 km west of Melbourne and 50km north-east of Warrnambool, Mortlake is a small rural dependent town of about 1200 people. It services a much larger population but many of these people visit Warrnambool for business purposes.

We are a P-12 College of about 300 students. Although small we experience many situations that are similar to other Colleges.

2007 figures
Of the students who were offered a University Place, only 55% took the offer, and 36% deferred. 8% gained full time employment and 33% were apprentice trainees.

The majority of the 8% who gained full time employment are involved in low skill jobs such as child-care cleaners and supermarket employees. This is especially the case for females. Many are involved in part time work.

Many of the students who have deferred did so with the intention of raising enough money to qualify for Youth Allowance. This is not always successful, especially in a small town such as Mortlake. Employment is not easy to gain.

1. Variations in the number and type of university applications, offers, acceptances and completions in different metropolitan, rural and regional areas.

The most significant factor for students electing to pursue university education is cost. There are many factors that need to be considered in this element. For a student to pursue any university qualification they
must leave home. The cost of accommodation is substantial and often difficult to obtain.

Students and parents have to make careful considerations about where a student can apply to, and if they are able to accept the offer. Often country students will defer for twelve months to ensure they are able to earn independent status. Qualifying for independent status when based in a small rural town is becoming increasingly difficult. The amount the students have to earn for independence status is also quite high and further adds to the burden. The reality of part time or full time work being gained in the local town or in the local area is limited. These jobs have already been taken by people living in the rural community. A downturn and the changing nature of agriculture have a direct impact on the types of part –time work available.

For those students who are successful in gaining the independent status, realistically still have to rely on their parents financially. Melbourne rents are high and will take most of the students’ payment. The alternative is to find part-time work to supplement the allowance and this often can cause difficulties with completing the university work load. Another difficulty with living in flat and rental accommodation is that students find the experience very lonely and the loneliness and isolation often drives students to withdraw from the course to return home to find a job nearer to home.

Some universities have colleges of residence which allow students to live on-campus. For those students whose parents can financially pay for these, (and there are few) the chances of rural students gaining access to these colleges is limited. It is difficult to determine the criteria for selection but many metropolitan students would appear to have priority, or even students living in the close vicinity of the college. (Same suburb!!!!!!!!!!!!)

The other factor which is often difficult to substantiate but information can be collected anecdotally is the lack of confidence the students and their parents have in pursuing tertiary education. Parents who have not had the experience of tertiary education are often reluctant to allow their children to partake in the experience. Excuses such as cost are used and the difficulty of finding accommodation is used but quite obviously, it is a lack of confidence and knowledge.

Most residential colleges charge a non refundable fee for an application. Also it is difficult to understand the ‘politics’ and the ‘pool’ and how these operate. For those parents who have operated in this system before are far more ‘savvy’ about the filling in of these forms.

2. Influences of school retention rates, including enrolments and completions for VCE, VCAL and VET in schools on participation in higher education.

There is clear evidence that school retention has a positive influence on participation in higher education.
Our students participate in VET subjects which add to their VCE results. We have a small number of staff who already takes on many extra duties including VCAL. It is sometimes difficult to give the VCAL students the full curriculum that could be offered because of staffing constraints.

Some of our students completing VET studies are aligning these with an apprenticeship. However apprenticeships which are very difficult to obtain locally are still seen as second level compared to V.C.E.

The local ATC which is situated in Warrnambool is difficult to access. There is no public transport; therefore parents are required to travel there and back. At this stage travel is offered by the ATC, but we have concerns for the funding of such a bus and how long it would be offered. Previous history would suggest that these types of ‘carrots’ are not funded for long periods of time. A further complication for Mortlake students is that any areas they wish to pursue entails the students spending two days from each week at The Technical College. This is not realistic as far as there other studies are concerned. So despite the fact that the ATC should be accessible to our students it isn’t

The local VET programs are still limited to some extent by Cost (although the school funds most of the costs) and work placement. Most of our students have to travel to larger regional towns to gain placements and the schools that exist. Students undertake VET for a number of reasons. Personal interest is an underlying factor. We have been fortunate to have an excellent equine program where students have achieved excellent results and the excellent ENTER scores have been used to assist students to get into their chosen University course. The introduction of VCAL has enabled more students to complete Year 12. Students completing VCAL generally try to go straight into the workforce.

3. 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.

3.1 A considerable number of our students (42% in 2008) pursue apprenticeships and traineeships.

3.2 Some of our students look at TAFE and pre-apprenticeship as viable options. These students tend to be male. There is not much offered for females locally in these areas.

3.3 Once again the reliance on parents to take students to their TAFE provider is difficult both in terms of time and money.
4. Potential geographic, economic, social cultural and other influences on university applications, offers, acceptances and completions across Victorian communities.

4.1 Similar to Warrnambool’s situation there are quite a few unskilled workers who are making good money and therefore parents and students do not see the value of Tertiary education as their parents are making good living without education.

4.2 Some parents constantly question their children leaving home for tertiary qualification, considering the costs especially if the child does not have a ‘burning passion’ for a particular stream.

4.3 Some students who make it to tertiary education will return home because they cannot operate without the support they had experienced both for their studies and socially.

4.4 The drought has had a major impact on the financial health of the area and has made the move from school to uni very difficult – hence the rise in deferrals. As stated earlier, not all deferrals are then taken up.

4.5 Accommodation is expensive and difficult to get. Quite a few students already in Melbourne spend their time “couch hopping”. These stories are quickly circulated.

4.6 Difficult to get to places that offer tertiary courses in their areas of interest.

4.7 Role models – not a high number of local role models who have completed tertiary education.

4.8 Students tend not to get to some University “Open Days” to discuss options. However our experiences of Deakin and Melbourne University have been excellent in making themselves available for rural secondary school students.

5. 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.

5.1 An increasing number of ‘generational poverty’ families that have low expectations and have no family members who have completed tertiary education. It is difficult to break this cycle and needs more than just the school community to assist this problem.
5.2 Rural students have additional financial and social issues if they have to re-locate to pursue further education. Equally obviously family finances play a major role in whether the students are likely to be successful.

5.3 Students choose not to attend university because they are aware of the financial stress they will place on their parents. Often this information is incorrect but they still feel an ‘emotional obligation’ not to put their parents under further stress.

5.4 Rural students have difficulty in gaining access to on-site residences at universities, although this has not been the case for Mortlake College students.

5.5 Accommodation in flats etc, often leave students feeling isolated from a community.

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

6.1 Geography is a significant factor influencing student choice

6.2 Students leaving the district put a strain on the skills in professional fields. Students who are left tend to take up apprenticeships, hospitality, retail, etc. Very difficult to get qualified teachers for an area. Get quite a few applicants then when I point out where Mortlake College is most find another job in Metropolitan Melbourne.

6.3 Very few students who train as professionals come back to the area. (Cost factor again – they can make more money professionally in the cities)

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

7.1 Subsidise living costs for country students and offer long term scholarships for country students.

7.2 Organise a mentor or a ‘support’ for those students moving from the country to the city. We believe that this is a significant factor.

7.3 Give extra allowances for those students who return to their small town with their professional skills.

7.4 Mortlake College has attempted to address some of these barriers by having a 'Melbourne Work Experience' program for Year 11 students as a means of overcoming some of the anxieties rural students have about Melbourne. This program operates for two weeks
in hostel type accommodation and the cost to parents is about $800.00 per student. For many parents the cost is prohibitive.

8. Recommendations
We support and concur entirely the recommendations submitted through the South West Learning and Employment Network. (SWLLEN)

C. Parliamentary Inquiry to comment on the effect of geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in Higher Education.

Colac Otway Schools:
- Colac Secondary College
- (formerly Colac High School/Colac College merged 1/1/2008)
- Lavers Hill P-12
- Apollo Bay P-12
- Lorne P-12 (Surf Coast Shire)

1. Recommendations:

A strong statement emanating from the recent 2020 Summit was that Australia cannot afford to waste the talents and abilities of any of its people. The current under education of year 12 qualified young people, unable to access course of Higher education in Regional Victoria is benefitting neither the community in which the young people live, the skill shortages in professional and trades in many areas or broaden the level of education of the community in which they live. We are presiding over a potential for wastage of talent.

1.1 In order to evaluate the situation fully in regional Victoria, there is a need to understand the significance of the most appropriate geographic area for which data sets are collected. In the case of Colac and Colac Otway Shire, linking aggregated data with Geelong or the G 21 area is regarded locally as not being helpful. Demographic trends for the Colac Otway Shire are different as are the responses of young people in accessing their realistic opportunity for further education and training. The establishment of a ‘region of significance’ has to be an important component of any judgement of the data across the whole region.

1.2 Provision of further education and training opportunities have to be made more realistic and accessible for young people in both University and T.A.F.E. options.

1.3 Research into what enhances these opportunities for an increased number of young people should be the focus and condition for the funding of places of Further Education and Training to encourage enrolment and sustained enrolment to continue to the completion of first Degree, Certificate and Diploma courses. The success of places of higher learning should be reported in much the same way as performance data for schools on an annual basis.
1.4 Government must weigh the costs of not developing the education and skills of its population in rural areas against the costs of improving access to Higher Education. It is clear from work presented in a number of proposals to this Inquiry that costs, perception of cost, change of lifestyle in a new place, lack of support and distance from home are major barriers to our young people. Costs of Accommodation, H.E.C.S., purchase of books and materials, cost of travel and increasing conflict with the necessity to work part time have to be properly addressed and resource allocated to young people and families undertaking Higher education.

1.5 A well developed and implemented community information programme should be developed with key stakeholders; schools, places of higher learning, employers (in a wide range of sectors), professional groups and community groups to focus on the theme of further education and training is a realistic option for our young people in Regional Victoria.

1.6 There should be focussed activities in clusters of local secondary schools and communities to develop Pathways for young people to support and monitor their progress into Higher Education from at least year 9.

1.7 There should be an ‘adopt a school’ (Local Community Partnerships) approach by the places of Higher Education to work with schools, students and families, especially in regional Victoria. This can be developed in many areas of endeavour of learning continuum to include particular expertise, sharing experience for young people and encourage a closer effective connection.

1.8 The ‘On Track’ should be maintained as a valuable research tool for school leavers and extended to longitudinal analysis of the destinations of our young people. ‘On Track Connect’ should be maintained.

1.9 An ‘On Track’ methodology should also be developed for young people through their first degree/ TAFE programme including to the end of their first year post course. This data should be used to inform places of Higher Education of the long range impact of their programmes and to influence practices of retaining young people in their courses.

1.10 There should be a state wide overview facility whose function is to maintain a close and current assessment of the requirements of skills (professional and ‘trades’) and to ensure that communities have realistic access to Higher Education. The inequitable access to Higher Education in regional Victoria must be addressed.

1.11 Where ‘per capita’ schemes to assist connecting potential trainees with employees and Registered Training organizations, there should be a regionally based effective ‘contract overview’ function to ensure that the delivery of quality training is provided. Where these schemes intersect with secondary school delivery there should be common protocols to ensure that trainees receive the highest standard of training that is consistent across all R.T.O.’s

1.12 That a better mechanism for developing community Higher Education provision be developed enhancing opportunities in local communities (say 10,000 plus) through assessing local needs and finding ways of meeting them through flexible delivery including elearning, distance education, improved rural transport, local provision and access to programmes in local secondary schools. Resources should be made
available to achieve this. This would require an independent function (of providers) to develop local needs and opportunities for provision.

1.13 The work of the local learning and Employment networks should be enhanced and their roles extended and funded to work more closely in assessing and supporting the development of training needs regionally and liaising amongst schools and other training and higher education providers, employers other agencies such as GTC’s and N.A.C.’s.

1.14 The work of this Review Committee should establish targets and benchmarks, as is the case for secondary education for participation, retention and educational outcomes based on student and institutional performance which can be reviewed on a regular basis and public policy in this area evaluated and enhanced.

2. COLAC CASE STUDIES

2.1 The data for this geographic area is showing that while young people and schools can attain good educational outcomes. An increasing number of students offered places in both University and T.A.F.E. programmes are deferring and an increasing number not taking up those places after a ‘gap year’. In one recent data set for Colac High School, more young people did not take up their T.A.F.E. opportunities than University places; a figure itself was not good. Increasing numbers of young people.

2.2 The combination of negative factors discouraging young people taking up both University and T.A.F.E. courses and highly active Group Training Companies is retaining young people increasingly in local areas. However the indications are that the level of traineeships is relatively low.

2.3 A CASE STUDY.1

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<th>2004</th>
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<th>2006</th>
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<td># COMPLETED</td>
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<td>83</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>70</td>
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<td>Tertiary Applications &amp; offers</td>
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<td>Tertiary Applicants %</td>
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<td>72</td>
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<td>University offers %</td>
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<td>55</td>
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<td>TAFE/VET offers %</td>
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<td>On track Survey Data April In Education &amp; training</td>
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<td>TAFE/VET enrolled %</td>
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1 On Track data. Colac high School 2004-2007
- Colac High School – now Murray Street Campus of the Colac Secondary College –
- Decreasing number of students enrolled
- Decreasing number of University applications
- Stable % university offers
- % enrolled students declining alarmingly
- % students ‘looking for work’ good.
- Deferrals not good and when added to those who did not respond to ‘offer’ disappointing.

2.4 One Rural Family.
- Professional parents (education, 1 working, 1 managing rural business)
- Family expectations are for children to attain University education
- Three children, 2 enrolled in science/engineering undergraduate courses. 1 still at school.
- For the family the issues are:
  - Costs of accommodation $15,000 at University of Melbourne College for 35 weeks, $8,600 at Deakin (no meals)
  - Costs of books where individual texts can be as much as $200.
  - Effect of H.E.C.S. in the range of $7,000 plus
  - Combined total of $66,000 for one family member and approx. $46,000 for the other – without their food costs. This is basically the entire wage of one the salaried family member for a whole year.
  - And a third child anticipated to enrol in 2 years.

- This family’s income level is just above that which would enable Federal Government support and also just above the level which would attract scholarships.
- As with many other rural families, the assessed value of their property far exceeds the value of production, particularly in drought conditions.
- The family reports the loss of two of its ‘worker’ in the farm at key times and putting pressure on the remaining family and business costs to employ others.

2.5 For Many other Families
- 40% of families in Colac Otway shire live in designated ‘Neighbourhood Renewal Areas’.
- Data for many of the smaller rural communities around Colac shows much worse SES and demographics.
- In many families in the lower SES groups, completing year 12 is often a major triumph and this may be the first time a young person has achieved year 12 in that family.
- The notion that there are other opportunities in Higher Education for most of these families is remote. Anecdotally, it is quite common for young people from lower SES families not to want to trouble their parents with Higher education aspirations.
- The structures for application for Youth Allowances to support young people can be complex. The 34 page booklet is a real blocker to all but the hardiest traveller through the system. This was pointed out as a major obstacle even to professional families.
Colac Overview. This chart was developed to present to the Colac Otway Shire and subsequently O.T.T.E to combine demographic and training needs in a proposal for additional T.A.F.E. hours.

1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

CAPACITY BUILDING IN OUR COMMUNITY

WE ARE A COMMUNITY WITH

74 % males, 65% females have no qualifications beyond year 10.
Level of parental education has been identified by Professor Richard Teese in a state-wide study into indicators of disadvantage for student learning.
This is now used by D.E.E.C.D. for ‘equity funding’ for Student Resource package
Our community has low levels of expectation and the effect is generational and increasing.

WE ARE A COMMUNITY WITH

Colac Otway Shire has 40% or residents in Neighbourhood Renewal areas – three projects in Colac.
The only other ‘projects’ in BSW Region 28 are in Corio.
School retention, participation and education levels are part of the indicators disadvantage
These families typically do not access educational opportunity beyond school level, where completion rates are lower than elsewhere.

WE ARE A COMMUNITY WITH

Very low levels of formal TAFE delivery – 60,000 hours.
In comparison with smaller rural communities, Colac has much less and at greater distance from nearest TAFE outlets.
A growing need for local delivery of further education and training

We are a Community with

VERY LOW LEVELS OF ACCESS TO FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- Our qualified school leavers do not take up their further education and university options due to access and cost factors
- High deferment and non response rates 50% students defer, 20% deferrals take up their options.
- High drop out rates from university and TAFE places

We need……….. Social Justice for our young people and access at least equal to that of other similar communities ….

Access to Further Education and Training

- Support for schools to continue their excellent work in the community
- Provision of community based support programmes for students in transition from school to further education and training
- LOCAL access to TAFE programmes in Colac through a recognized significant provider
- Opportunity for university courses articulated with Cert IV level TAFE programmes for year 1 degree programmes in selected areas.

Appendix 1. Colac Otway Shire.

The Colac Otway Shire is the second largest shire in the South West of Victoria, with 21,300 people in an area of 3,530 square kms. It has a good spread of population from rural service centres to coastal holiday towns and villages, so basic human services are reasonably accessible. Roads are generally very good. Some 12,000 people live in the main centre Colac, and 1,200 in Apollo Bay, with a large influx to the coastal centres over the summer season. Inland centres are Beeac, Barramunga, Barwon Downs, Beech Forest, Birregurra, Carlisle River, Cressy, Elliminyt, Forrest, Gelligbrand, Lavers Hill and Swan Marsh. Coastal centres are Kennett River, Marengo, Separation Creek, Skenes Creek, and Wye River.

There is substantial and growing economic activity, mostly based on primary production – farm and forest – and the processing of products. In agriculture this is primarily dairying, but in this environment and location relative to markets there is untold opportunity for diversification of production and further treatment locally. There is no direct university and very limited TAFE provision in the Shire and compared with like centres elsewhere in country Victoria local participation rates are low. For more general adult education provision there has long been a centre in Colac, successfully offering adult and further education, and it is considered that it should retain its core purpose.

It is now considered that a wider range of skills training, and possibly some specialized university course,
are needed, especially for those in employment and/or with personal time constraints. Time, cost and transport deficiencies are very real access barriers.

In response to these considerations, the Shire appointed consultants to review all available information and define the task, then established a representative Education Steering Committee, chaired by an experienced educationist, to investigate ways to provide for future needs in training and post-compulsory education, and recommend structures for any organization. The Committee included representatives from the Shire Council, educational institutions, industry and other users of trained personnel. 3

Appendix 2.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 4
Proposal to the state Government for the provision of additional training Hours in the Colac Otway Shire.

The Colac Otway Shire, accepting its responsibility for local government in the fullest sense, has assessed education and training in the region and is hereby applying for 100,000 hours of TAFE training provision. The decision to do so is based on assessment of the present opportunities and participation in training against a background of economic potential for the area. It has concluded that further training of the presently employed, and better preparation of those of all ages contemplating employment, would be a sound investment and be socially beneficial.

The area managed by the Shire is sustained by a strong natural

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3 Proposal to O.T.T.E. re additional T.A.F.E. Hours, Education Steering Committee, Colac Otway Shire 2006.
4 Proposal to the State Government for the provision of additional training hours in the Colac Otway Shire. May 2005

resource and human capital base: agriculture and forestry, with product processing; some manufacturing; transport services; wholesaling and retailing for the local and wider community and human services. The Shire has a population of more than 21,000 people, about half in the main centre, Colac. There is a sound educational base through good primary schools and five secondary schools. Post-compulsory provision is limited: some TAFE (provided from Geelong and Warrnambool) and Adult and Community Education in Colac and no direct provision of university courses. It is now considered that a wider range of skills training, and possibly some specialized university courses, are needed, especially for those in employment and/or with personal time constraints. Paradoxically, Colac has cities roughly an hour’s travel to the west, north and east that are rich in educational offerings, however for employed people and those with families the cost of accessing these providers is not only in money but in time. Group study is the preferred option, while acknowledging on-line is a useful adjunct and valuable for very isolated people.

The Shire, in considering its responsibility has worked with the South West Local Learning and Employment Network (SWLLEN) to commission studies which have shown under-involvement by people in post secondary education, has gained the support of local industry for new initiatives to address future needs for in-service training and has appointed a representative local Committee to propose a way forward. The Committee has recommended that a higher education skills centre (HESC) be established under the aegis of the Shire, effectively operated by the people and having close connections with the other educational activities in the town. It has preferred this to the
traditional arrangement of having a distant institution establish a campus, but recommends management of the HESC be contracted to a major institution with a strong track record in servicing rural areas. The HESC should access a wider range of courses than the managing institution, and even those provided by more distant rural or city institutions. It would also have a role in identifying providers of very specialised needs and putting local people in touch, that is, be an educational network operator. Courses should be offered as required rather than permanently established on a continuing basis i.e. provision should meet demand.

It is believed this innovative arrangement should combine the benefits of experienced management and the HESC being a creature of the local community. The HESC Committee may in turn have direct representation on the managing body’s Council. The close links to the local community should assist assessment of training needs of industry/commerce on the one hand and educational aspirations of people on the other.

These would be crystallised into courses of study needed, and identification of an institution prepared to offer each particular one. Though the HESC is seeking a quota of TAFE teaching hours from the Government (and from elsewhere a small tertiary student quota) it recognises that many of the courses will have to be full fee paying, in the case of skills upgrading, substantially by the employer. As much as possible it will use existing facilities in collaboration but will need assistance in setting up so the Shire will seek an establishment grant.

This is essentially a community effort, and is in harmony with the Brack’s Governments vision: “Government Priorities: Growing Victoria Together” which includes: ‘by 2010 we will be a State where: innovation leads to thriving industries generating high-quality jobs; all Victorians have access to the highest quality health and education services all through their lives’.

The Shire accepts the challenge to be part of this.

Appendix 3. 5

Terms of Reference

The Victorian Parliament’s Education and Training Committee is required to inquire into and report no later than 30 June 2009 on the geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education.

The Committee will be exploring the reasons for and impact of such differences and would be interested in receiving comment on:

- variations in the number and type of university applications, offers, acceptances and completions in different metropolitan, rural and regional areas;

It is believed that there is a clear and worsening difference in all of these aspects based on long range data from VCAA, VTAC and On

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5 Education and Training Committee Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education
Track based on data from the schools in the Colac Otway Shire. Our own comparisons with metropolitan based data would indicate significant difference between the opportunities for our young people in comparison with their metropolitan counterparts.

- **influences of school retention rates, including enrolments and completions for VCE, VCAL and VET in schools on participation in higher education;**

  Schools are implementing courses provide ‘multiple outcomes’ in V.C.E., V.E.T, V.C.A.L. AND S.B.A’s in the Colac Otway Shire. This has had a positive impact on retention and participation rates. However most recent real retention data is showing. The cost to schools of providing these courses and the recently changed Student Resource Package has reduced available funding from secondary schools with good retention rates.

  The requirements for example in V.E.T. and V.C.A.L. of specific training and associated costs are becoming prohibitive for schools. Lack of formal T.A.F.E. provision in Colac reduces the opportunities and creates a self fulfilling downturn of meeting of local skill enhancement.

  Lack of available transport to established T.A.F.E. provision in Geelong, Warrnambool and Ballarat make options for provision beyond the cost of schools and families. The capacity of smaller secondary schools in the shire to provide for smaller groups and at the same time transport them to available programmes is minimal.

  The requirements for structured workplace learning for V.E.T. / V.C.A.L. and costs of establishing it is beyond the financial capacity of schools. Currently the work of Commonwealth funded of Local Community Partnerships, outside their established scope is the only way local schools can retain a S.W.L. programme. This has to be addressed.

- **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;**

  Local observation is that while these are not good, they are increasing while University opportunities are declining.

- **potential geographic, economic, social, cultural and other influences on university applications, offers, acceptances and completions across Victorian communities;**

  It is unrealistic to expect that local provision of a comprehensive range of Higher education be arranged. However the barrier to young people, and others, in taking up these opportunities contributes to the lack of professional qualifications and other areas of training in regional areas. We are already experiencing shortages in a wide range of professional and ‘trade’ based qualified people.

- **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;**
advantage of participating in Higher education benefits the individual and if from a regional area has a better chance of returning to a country area at some time in their working lives.

- The advantage of not participating perversely may people qualified at a low level post year 12 but perversely over qualified for the field of employment available.
- The disadvantage of non participating generally obviously reduces the pool of people with appropriate qualifications in regional centres.

- **potential effects of geographical differences in participation in higher education on skills shortages and the Victorian economy;**
  - and

  There is already a marked degree of disadvantage in some regional areas in educational provision as demonstrated for example by the regionally based collation of year 12 performance outcomes. Correspondingly there will be an inequity in those hoping to qualify for higher education. Couple this to the factors producing a lack of opportunity and the compounding effect is dramatic.

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

  PLEASE SEE SUGGESTIONS AT THE HEAD OF THE COLAC OTWAY SECTION AND OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS PAPER.
## Key Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are students from different geographic areas (eg regions, suburbs, or localities) in Victoria…</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... more or less likely to apply for university?</td>
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<tr>
<td>... more or less likely to receive or accept university offers?</td>
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<tr>
<td>... more or less likely to complete a university course once they enrol?</td>
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<th>Is this because students from different geographic areas…</th>
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<tr>
<td>... stay at school for longer, or leave earlier?</td>
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<tr>
<td>... choose different subjects or courses at school?</td>
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<tr>
<td>... choose different post-school pathways (eg TAFE, apprenticeships, or employment)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>... have greater or fewer university campuses/courses available in their community?</td>
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<td>... are affected by other factors, such as economic, social or cultural issues?</td>
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<th>What effect does going to university (or not) have on…</th>
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<tr>
<td>... students from different geographic areas in Victoria?</td>
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<tr>
<td>... their families and communities?</td>
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<tr>
<td>... skills shortages and the Victorian economy?</td>
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| What could be done to address any barriers to university participation for students from different geographic areas? |