SUBMISSION FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF BALLARAT: SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

About the University of Ballarat:
The University of Ballarat is the only regionally headquartered, dual sector university in Victoria. Its Act mandates that the University must provide for the "educational, cultural, professional, technical and vocational services to the community and of persons living and working in Central and Western Victoria." The University draws students from across a broad area of regional Victoria including the communities of Ballarat, Ararat, Stawell, Horsham, Nhill, Hamilton, Maryborough, Warrnambool, Portland, Bacchus Marsh, Bendigo, Mildura and Swan Hill. All of these communities have significantly lower participation rates in higher education than the national average. The University of Ballarat, with its 22,000 students, has the highest proportion of regional students (72 per cent) as a percentage of its Commonwealth load of any university in Victoria and of all regional universities in Australia. Approximately three in every four of its undergraduate Commonwealth funded students find their first employment in regional and rural areas following graduation from the University of Ballarat.

The University of Ballarat welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education. Accompanying this submission are two detailed reports which provide data and background material in support of the findings, observations and recommendations made below.

Using the terms of reference for the Inquiry as a guide, and the data in the attached reports as a basis, the University of Ballarat:

1. Agrees with the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission that “…access to education, including higher education, is a basic need of rural people. Education is now recognised as being one of the three factors, along with long life and reasonable income, that are fundamental to positive human development. Lack of access to educational opportunities conversely leads to economic and social marginalisation.”¹

2. Finds that, by any measure, the geographic differences (especially between rural and metropolitan Victoria) influence the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education and these influences are significant, iniquitous and becoming greater, with rurality, socio-economic status and gender combining to produce the greatest educational disadvantage in Victoria. On average, students completing secondary education in regional and rural Victoria have a two in three chance of not participating in higher education compared with their metropolitan counterparts who have a greater than one in two chance of going to university, with the trend showing that the gap is widening between rural and metropolitan Victoria.

3. Notes that University of Ballarat researchers, in a separate report to the State Government of Victoria in 2007, have found that this educational disadvantage experienced by students in regional and rural areas of Victoria is compounded due to the “precarious state of many rural communities, the decline of services, fewer transport options, disaffection of young people, youth depression and suicide, rural insecurity, low morale caused by drought and rural contraction, low incomes, unemployment, increased risk taking, drug abuse and unsafe sexual activity among the young, retreat of professionals to large towns and cities, high unemployment and poor community

University of Ballarat: Submission to Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry

health." The University of Ballarat researchers further note that it is a "miracle" that educational outcomes in regional and rural areas of Victoria are as good as they are given these circumstances.

4. Finds that regional and rural families in Victoria have a significant influence on shaping the aspirations of their children in relation to higher education and, using our own data, has identified that seven in 10 students on Commonwealth Supported Places (HECS) at the University of Ballarat are the first members of their family to attend university. Further, from its own research studies, the University has found that students from regional and rural Victoria compared with their metropolitan counterparts have (a) lower aspirations to undertake higher education studies, (b) are more likely to pursue employment options at the completion of their secondary schooling, (c) come from schools which generally have lower year 12 retention rates, and (d) are more likely to defer their enrolment into higher education institutions with one in five rural and regional students currently deferring their university studies compared to one in every 16 metropolitan students.

As part of this Parliamentary Inquiry, "strategies to address ... differences in participation in higher education" are also sought. The University of Ballarat is in an ideal situation to make a series of recommendations in this regard, given that it is Victoria’s only dual sector university headquartered in regional Victoria. The University itself is making an important contribution to redressing the low participation rates from regional and rural Victoria through a range of initiatives which include:

The University of Ballarat Rural Education Entry Program (REEP): REEP allows current VCE students from regional and rural communities to be considered for a place at the University based on their overall ability and potential to succeed, rather than just their ENTER score. One of the key benefits of this entry scheme is that regional VCE students can apply for a place at the University through their Secondary School with their application based on a report and recommendation from their School Principal. Under the REEP initiative, students are offered a provisional place at the University in early December.

Rural Outreach at the University of Ballarat: The University has established a rural outreach project with the aim of improving the participation of regional students in higher education. In 2007, the project sought to raise student aspirations about higher education, presented information about university life and provided practical advice on matters such as moving away from home and student finances. Over a seven week period, the project involved 60 separate presentations in 42 regional and rural schools and was delivered to approximately 1300 students in Years 10, 11 and 12. Fifty-eight University of Ballarat students, as “ambassadors”, participated in the school visits. In addition,

2 Barry Golding, Clem Barnett, Mike Brown, Lawrie Angus and Jack Harvey (2007) ‘Everything is Harder’: Participation in Tertiary Education of Young People from Rural and Regional Victoria, University of Ballarat, Ballarat.

the project also piloted parent information sessions through regional and rural areas of Victoria.

Providing Funding Support for Regional and Rural Students: The University has had a long history of supporting students from regional and rural areas of Victoria. With the 2005 implementation of Commonwealth Learning Scholarships, the University of Ballarat provided complementary scholarships that targeted low income students and students moving from rural areas to study. The program has been reviewed and expanded after each round, and has resulted in extending the provision of University equity scholarships and the offering of 100 drought scholarships and a free computer scheme in 2007.

The University of Ballarat Student Transition Program: The University has in place a Mentoring and Transition Program for commencing students, to enhance social networking, to break down isolation, and to assist with transition to the University, catering especially for those who are first generation university students and those from rural and isolated areas. This program includes matching every commencing student with a trained and paid student mentor, who is usually a second or third year student.

All of these initiatives and programs have been evaluated and their success has been validated in enhancing the participation of regional and rural students in higher education, and in retaining these students once at university. With the exception of the Commonwealth Learning Scholarships and some seed funding for the rural outreach project, all of the initiatives are funded by the University without support of the Federal or State Governments. Clearly, with appropriate funding, the University could do much more to assist with redressing the declining regional and rural participation rates in higher education given that it has six campuses in regional Victoria: in Ballarat (3), Ararat, Stawell and Horsham. This, therefore, leads to the first recommendation to the Inquiry:

**Recommendation #1:** That the State Government of Victoria secures from the Commonwealth a commitment to provide regionally-based universities with additional funding to assist with their important role in rural communities and that the State Government of Victoria also provides a funding loading to its regional universities to assist with activities and programs to enhance higher education participation rates in rural areas of the State.

In *Backing Australia’s Ability*, the Federal Government acknowledged that higher education providers in regional areas play a “critically important role in the economic and social life of their communities which goes far beyond traditional educational activities.” The Government has also recognised “the unique contribution made by regional higher education institutions and campuses to their local communities and to students from regional and rural areas.”

It is acknowledged by the Commonwealth that regional universities face higher costs as a result of location, size, history, less potential to diversify revenue sources, smaller capacity to compete for fee paying students, and fewer opportunities for commercial partnerships. Accordingly, the introduction of “regional loadings” by the Commonwealth was intended to offset these additional costs for regional universities. In the case of the University of Ballarat, the annual regional loading it receives from the Commonwealth is approximately $1.3 million representing 0.07% of its total revenue (in 2007). However, for the University of Ballarat,
with its six regional campuses, there are significant cost factors in providing university education in a regional setting and these include:

1. The financial disincentives for choosing to introduce high cost courses in response to genuine need, such as in the health sciences, engineering, etc, where student intake numbers would be lower than in metropolitan campuses;
2. Significant costs incurred in undertaking the University's community obligations as specified in its Act;
3. The additional costs of having a large percentage of domestic students (70 per cent) as first generation university students creating cost burdens for the University in its support of these students through their studies; and,
4. Embedded structural rigidities relating to staffing and course profiles where there is a necessity to offer the same course on different campuses and where economies of scale are difficult to achieve.

In response to the 2006 Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities, the University of Ballarat carried out a number of financial assessments. These were based on 2005/2006 data in terms of the approximate additional running costs for the University using as the base derivative the total number of students at the University being serviced from just from one regional campus rather than from multiple campuses. The increased additional costs were assessed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Expenditure (2005-06)</th>
<th>Component Costs for Running Regional Campuses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>3,668,843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>4,545,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>1,213,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>2,820,657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal/Governance</td>
<td>1,358,755</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>2,236,192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Administration</td>
<td>2,255,230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Services</td>
<td>552,536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching/Academic Staff</td>
<td>51,780,364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities Management</td>
<td>6,030,616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>605,057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning &amp; Quality</td>
<td>524,424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>77,591,107</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Component Costs for Running Regional Campuses</strong></td>
<td><strong>21,005,744</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The University of Ballarat maintains four separate libraries across its six campuses, it has to operate a car fleet on each campus; it has a staff complement at each of the campuses; and it has to maintain and manage the facilities at each of the campuses. On this basis, the Victorian Inquiry concluded that “higher education in rural and regional areas is … relatively more expensive to provide than urban education” and that, for the University of Ballarat, these additional costs “may be closer to 30 to 35 per cent” of its total costs given the diseconomies of scale that are involved for an institution such as the University of Ballarat.

The annual regional loading from the Commonwealth is just over $1.3 million for the University of Ballarat and the loading from the State Government is $800,000. These are relatively modest contributions which do little to offset the additional costs in running and maintaining six regional campuses of the University of Ballarat, or assist the University in
being more proactive in redressing the low participation rates in higher education in regional and rural areas.

**Recommendation #2:** That the State Government of Victoria secures from the Commonwealth a commitment to change the regulations of the Youth Allowance so that more students from regional and rural areas of Victoria are able to participate in higher education immediately following their secondary schooling.

There is now overwhelming evidence that the lack of access to, and the real value of the Youth Allowance, contribute to the low participation rates in higher education amongst the 18-25 age group in regional and rural areas of Victoria. The recent work by Naomi Godden\(^4\) concludes that “many regional young people cannot access Youth Allowance income support due to stringent eligibility criteria, suggesting causation to low regional tertiary participation.” Godden indicates that the annual cost for regional young people to study away from home is estimated at $15-20,000 a year which is often out of reach of many people in rural communities. Because the Youth Allowance eligibility is assessed against their parents’ assets and income this is “particularly inequitable for farmers or business-owners, because their assets (including land) provide income and cannot be sold.” Godden found in her research that “the enormous financial burden on families to support their children, and strict Youth Allowance eligibility, cause some families to resort to desperate means to ensure their children are financially supported” at university.

There is now general consensus that Centrelink’s definition of ‘Independence’ as an eligibility criterion for the Youth Allowance “does not reflect the regional experience” with the age of 25 being too high. Moreover, to be eligible under Centrelink’s *Workforce Participation* criterion, young people have to have been “out of school at least 18 months and have earned 75 percent of the maximum rate of pay under ‘Wage Level A of the Australian Pay and Classification Scale’ in an 18 month period ($18,525 at October 2007).” Godden’s research concluded that, “to meet the income target, regional young people … defer their studies for one to two years to work [which explains the] disproportionately high regional deferral rates … [and] an increased likelihood they may not return to tertiary education, having broken the continuum of study and adapted to a new lifestyle and income.”

The situation for rural and regional students is further compounded by the fact that the Youth Allowance is currently 20 per cent below the poverty line which, as Godden indicates, “forces students to either live in poverty or work long hours while studying, affecting their educational performance, wellbeing and connection with family. Further, many [regional] students lose their Low Income Healthcare Card after holiday work.”

Researchers from the University of Ballarat have also found that “many rural and regional young people and their parents are unaware of the requirements for qualification for Youth Allowance. Many parents simply do not have the ‘savvy’ or awareness of ways of ‘working the system’ and securing support payments that could possibly make a huge difference in judgements about whether leaving home to attend university was financially

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feasible.” Their findings are not dissimilar to those of Godden leading to the conclusion that, in regional and rural areas, there are “overwhelmingly negative attitudes towards Youth Allowance [because] the eligibility criteria are far too strict, and Youth Allowance does not address the needs of regional Australians, creating a barrier to tertiary education.”

**Recommendation #3:** That the State Government of Victoria secures from the Commonwealth a commitment to introduce a range of funding strategies which specifically target regional and rural students and which assist with the retention of youth in regional areas.

The 2006 Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into *Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities* provided some distressing statistics about the net migration flow of young people in the 18-25 age group from regional and rural communities in Victoria. In Melbourne, for instance, 85 per cent of people in this age group who were born in Melbourne are still living in Melbourne. In regional Victoria, only 55 per cent of those in this group continue to live in regional communities in this State and the trend is not improving. This is on top of other trends identified in this earlier Parliamentary Inquiry which showed that: the percentage of 18 year olds in regional communities in Victoria who attend university is about half that of their Melbourne counterparts; likewise, the percentage of those in the regions engaged in some form of post-secondary education and training is, again, about half that of those who live in Melbourne; and the percentage of recent school leavers in regional Victoria who have applied to defer taking up a place at university is more than four times that of their Melbourne counterparts. Many of the findings and recommendations from this 2006 Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry are still awaiting attention or implementation with several relevant to this current Inquiry including:

- Reducing HECS for full-time, undergraduate students who attend universities which are headquartered in regional Australia as a mechanism for redressing the low participation rates and the net migration flow of people to capital cities and as an incentive for those in capital cities to move to regional Australia to attend university;
- Providing additional funding assistance to students in regional universities, many of whom are unable to access part-time and vacation employment at the same level as their capital city counterparts;
- Provision of project funding to regional universities to assist them in discharging their legislative obligation to meet the education, training and research needs of the regions they serve; and
- Targeted funding where there are specific regional skill and workforce shortages such as in apprenticeships and in teaching, nursing, allied health, engineering and the sciences.

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**Barry Golding, Clem Barnett, Mike Brown, Lawrie Angus and Jack Harvey (2007) ‘Everything is Harder’: Participation in Tertiary Education of Young People from Rural and Regional Victoria, University of Ballarat, Ballarat.**
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18 March 2008
RURALITY AND PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

BACKGROUND

Since its inception, the University of Ballarat has operated within the Australian higher education equity framework which has had the overall objective of ensuring that Australians from all groups in society have the opportunity to participate successfully in higher education; with the result being a change in the balance of the student population to reflect more closely the composition of society. This policy framework required all publicly funded universities to plan and report annually on efforts and progress towards greater equality of higher education access and outcomes for particular groups in the community.

These groups were first identified on the basis of their under-representation in higher education in the 1990 Federal policy document *A Fair Chance for All: Higher Education That's Within Everyone's Reach*. The policy direction was refreshed in the 2003 policy statement *Our Universities: Backing Australia’s Future*, where the stated goal was to remove barriers to access to higher education for all Australians, with a particular focus on assisting groups experiencing significant educational disadvantage. People from rural backgrounds, isolated backgrounds and low socio-economic backgrounds have been three of the ‘equity’ groups thus identified and targeted over this period.

At the University of Ballarat, the participation of students from rural and low socio-economic backgrounds has been well above state averages, given our location and target catchment. Between 2002 and 2006, the enrolments of commencing students from regional backgrounds has averaged between 69.9% and 74% while the proportion of commencing students from low socio-economic backgrounds has been between 19.2% and 24.4%.

NATIONAL, STATE, REGIONAL AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVES

National Perspective

Despite an overall expansion of higher education in Australia, differential participation rates between community groups continue to exist. One of the under-represented groups is students from isolated, rural or regional locations.


Key findings include:

1. On a per capita basis, for every ten urban people who attend university, roughly six rural/isolated Australians do so. The isolated group is one of the most under-represented equity groups in Australian Higher Education.

2. Student perspectives and attitudes to Higher Education were shaped by:
   • family socio-economic background;
   • whether students are living in urban or rural communities; and
   • the distance from home to the nearest university campus.
3. On average, rural students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are significantly less likely than urban students to believe that:
   - a university course would offer them the chance of an interesting and rewarding career; and
   - that their parents want them to do a university course.

4. Rural students are significantly more likely than urban students to believe that:
   - a university qualification is not necessary for the jobs they want;
   - their families cannot afford the costs of supporting them at university;
   - the cost of university fees may stop them attending; and
   - there is no point in their going to university.

5. Rurality and lower socio-economic status combine to produce the greatest educational disadvantage.

6. The attitudes of rural students towards the relevance and attainability of Higher Education are mainly a result of their personal socio-economic circumstances and the rural community context in which they live.

7. Overall, the educational disadvantage of rural students is the result of twin effects; they are more likely than urban students to perceive ‘discouraging’ inhibitors, while at the same time they are likely to experience lower levels of ‘encouraging’ factors.

Interestingly, the report noted that effects of these powerful social influences are apparent well before the final years of senior schooling or eligibility for higher education entry.

**Victorian Perspective**

The University of Ballarat draws a significant proportion of its undergraduate enrolments from across country Victoria. As a regional university, it is arguably better placed to deal with matters related to regional or rural needs.

Despite Victoria’s relative geographical compactness, the Victorian data in relation to participation rates largely mirrors the national picture.

**On Track Destinations of School Leavers (2006)** provides a comprehensive analysis of the destinations of Victorian students from Years 10, 11 and 12 shortly after they leave school. The data was based on VTAC data and on a telephone survey of 32,343 Year 12 completers from the 2005 school year in Victoria and examines two basic dimensions – education and training, as well as reasons for discontinuing further education.

For Victoria, the destinations of Year 12 or equivalent exit students from 2005 were:
- 46.1% into degree-level programs in university
- 16.3% into Certificate IV, Diploma or Advanced Diploma VET programs
- 4.1% into Certificate I or II (some III) VET programs
- 5.4% into apprenticeships
- 3.8% into traineeships
- 20.1% employed
- 4.1% looking for work.

The patterns associated with the completion of Year 12 studies and the destination of students is a result of a number of forces. The forces that underlie the aggregate data need to be examined to build a full picture in relation to Victorian school leavers and country Victorian leavers in particular.
Figure 1 examines the relationship between socio-economic status (SES) of Year 12 leavers (based on student residential address) and tertiary application rates. The data reveals significant variations between the SES groups, with those from lower SES backgrounds having relatively lower aspiration levels which translate to this group being less likely to apply for tertiary entry.

**Figure 1: Mean tertiary application rates in schools, grouped by SES**

![Graph showing mean tertiary application rates in schools, grouped by SES.](image)

*Source: On Track Figure 16 Mean tertiary application rates in schools, grouped by SES p21*

Lower tertiary application rates ultimately translate into lower entry rates. Figure 2 examines the relationship between a student’s SES background and university enrolment and demonstrates that students from higher SES backgrounds across Victoria are more likely to actually enrol in university studies. It shows, for example, that of the male Year 12 completers in the lowest SES quartile, only 31% enrolled in university as compared to 58% of male Year 12 completers in the highest SES quartile.

**Figure 2: Percentage enrolments at university, by quartiles of SES and gender**

![Graph showing percentage enrolments at university, by quartiles of SES and gender.](image)

*Source: On Track Fig 23 Enrolment at university, by quartiles of SES and gender p28*
The combined effect of differential achievement and socio-economic factors results in a pattern of marked social inequality in post-Year 12 destinations. Figure 3 starkly reveals the impact of socio-economic status on destinations. Not only are students from poorer backgrounds less likely to go to university (approximately 40%), but other forms of training (TAFE/traineeship) do not fully compensate for social inequalities in entry to tertiary education. Only 72.3 percent of students from the poorest backgrounds, compared to 81.7 percent from the most advantaged homes built on their Year 12 through further education and training – and they studied at a less advanced level.

Figure 3: Destinations of all Year 12 or equivalent completers, by SES quartile

Source: Adapted from On Track Table 8 Destinations of Year 12 or equivalent completers, p20

The destinations of young people who have completed their Year 12 vary greatly and this appears to be influenced by where they live. Figure 4 examines the transition of school leavers to university education and its relationship to the different labour force regions.

Figure 4: Percentage of students entering university, by labour force region

Labour Force Region
Source: On Track Fig. 54 Main destinations of school completers (including deferrers), by gender p52

Students from metropolitan backgrounds are far more likely to enter university with an average of 46 percent of metropolitan students entering higher education at the completion
of their secondary education. Students from country Victoria were clearly less likely to enter university with approximately 33 percent making the transition.

In contrast, country Victoria had the highest rates of students terminating their education and training upon completion of Year 12. Only the Mornington Peninsula region, which has a large rural component, matched the country regions in terms of the proportion that entered the labour market directly (see Figure 5). Overall, there was a 14.6 percent gap separating country Victoria from metropolitan Melbourne in the proportion of Year 12 leavers entering the labour market.

**Figure 5: Percentage of students in employment or looking for work, by labour force regions**

![Bar chart showing percentage of students in employment or looking for work by labour force region.](source)

Source: Based on On Track Table 15 Education, training and workforce destinations of the Year 12 cohort, by labour force region p55

**Regional Perspective**

Figures 4 and 5 reveal that the percentage of students enrolling in Higher Education courses at the University of Ballarat from the central region of Victoria is significantly less than the state average, while those in employment and those seeking employment are higher than state averages.

The University of Ballarat draws heavily upon Victorian country areas as a source of enrolments. Table 1 summarises the geographical sources of Victorian student enrolments at UB in Higher Education over the period 2000 to 2004 and for 2006.

For the period 2000-2002, 48 percent of enrolments to undergraduate programs at the University of Ballarat from Victorian students came from the Central Highlands region. There was a significant decrease in enrolments from the Central Highlands region in 2003 to only 40 percent which reduced again in 2004 to 38.4 percent of enrolments from Victoria. Overall, this represents a decrease from 225 students in 2000 to only 108 students in 2004.

Table 1 also reveals that course enrolments from the Barwon region have also increased. In 2000, enrolments from the Barwon region comprised just below 12 percent of all Victorian enrolments and increased to 14.9 percent in 2004.
Although the Loddon region has approximately 2,000 Year 12 students, course enrolments varied from just under 4 percent to 5 percent from 2000 to 2004. A similar variation in percentages is evident from Wimmera course enrolments (4 percent to 5.8 percent) and the Western district (4.8 percent to 6.4 percent). Outside of the Western half of Victoria catchment area enrolments are minimal - Goulburn (2.3 percent to 2.8 percent), Gippsland (1.2 percent to 2 percent), East Gippsland (0.6 percent to 1.1 percent) and Ovens (0.9 percent to 1.4 percent).

Table 1 reveals that the proportion of students entering the University of Ballarat from the Melbourne statistical division has progressively risen. In 2000, enrolments from Melbourne totalled 285, but by 2004 this had grown to 335 students.

The 2006 data confirms the stronger presence of Melbourne-based students as a proportion of total enrolments and the continued slip in enrolments from the immediate Central Highlands catchment area. Enrolments from the Mallee, Western and Wimmera showed an encouraging upward movement, however actual student numbers are still small.

**Table 1: Enrolments to UB Higher Education (%) by statistical division of origin – 2000 to 2004 and 2006**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commencing student origins</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballarat (resides in Central Highlands)</td>
<td>34.94</td>
<td>36.39</td>
<td>35.76</td>
<td>32.35</td>
<td>31.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Highlands (not Ballarat)</td>
<td>13.08</td>
<td>12.26</td>
<td>12.90</td>
<td>7.82</td>
<td>7.30</td>
<td>29.90*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Gippsland</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gippsland</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>3.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goulburn</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loddon</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallee</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>16.57</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>18.07</td>
<td>19.84</td>
<td>22.65</td>
<td>21.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ovens</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>2.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western District</td>
<td>6.39</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>8.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wimmera</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>6.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria Total (%)</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Ballarat and Central Highlands combined


As shown in Figure 6, the percentage of commencing undergraduate students from the area defined as the UB region increased slightly between 2004 and 2005. The percentage of commencing students from rural and regional Victoria also increased slightly, with 75 percent of UB commencing DEST-funded students coming from rural and regional Victoria in 2005.
Overwhelmingly, the University of Ballarat draws its students from essentially rural backgrounds.

In reviewing the University’s data, based on the DEST indicators, the University of Ballarat Equity Report (2006) noted that:

- 78.2 percent of enrolments were from students belonging to one or more equity groups
- 21.5 percent of enrolments were from students from low SES Victorian postcodes
- 72.0 percent of enrolments were from students from rural or isolated postcodes.

In 2006, the University of Ballarat’s Equity Outreach Project undertook a pilot study where a survey into intentions regarding Higher Education was undertaken in three schools from the Mallee region.

The value of surveying Year 12 students was that they had already made choices about what they would be doing immediately after completing Year 12. The pilot sample was conducted in the latter part of the school year and depended on the availability of Year 12 students in these schools. The timing of data collection resulted in a large variation in response rate depending on the students available and competing commitments at the pilot schools.

In the same year, the pilot study was extended to Year 11 students from a cluster sample of secondary schools in the western half of Victoria and sixteen schools in the Central Highlands/Wimmera and Western regions about their attitudes to post secondary education. The pilot surveys involved a total of 835 students and achieved an overall response rate of 65 percent.

Students could choose more than one response in a number of given questions and this often resulted in a response rate of greater than 100 percent. Nevertheless, it is worth reviewing the results from both surveys, as summarised in Table 2, as they offer richer information and help us to understand issues facing students wanting to go to university.
Table 2: Students Intentions post secondary schooling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 11 Students</th>
<th>Year 12 Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Go to university</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get an apprenticeship</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get a traineeship</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to a TAFE college</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do some other study or training</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for work/get a job</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Defer</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: University of Ballarat Equity Outreach Project Year 11 and Year 12 Survey Results 2006

There appeared to be some indecision among the Year 12 cohort with a number of students giving multiple responses and some (12 percent) still unsure of their plans for 2007. The majority of students (86 percent) were hoping to go to university, while over half (62 percent) said they would look for a job or travel (58 percent). For the students indicating a desire to enter a university, 42 percent of respondents said they would be the first in their family to go to university.

While the majority of Year 11 students said that they would continue their secondary schooling, a significantly smaller proportion aspired to university studies compared with their Year 12 counterparts. Once the hurdle of completing Year 11 is overcome, student aspirations appear to rise.

Those students who said they would not continue secondary schooling after Year 11 (7 percent) were asked to indicate why they were not continuing their secondary education. Many students gave multiple responses but the main factors influencing students’ decisions to leave school seem to largely relate to career choice and their desire to find work and earn their own money:

- want to earn their own money (81%)
- want to get a job, apprenticeship or traineeship (78%)
- have a job, apprenticeship or traineeship (65%)
- don’t need Year 12 for further study or training (56%)
- want to do study or training not available at school (51%).

Other reasons for not completing secondary school relate more to achievement and external pressures:

- don’t like school (63%) or not doing very well at school (49%)
- teachers (13 percent) or parents (21 percent) suggesting they should leave school
- financial pressures making it hard to stay at school (27 percent)
- having Year 12 won't help them get a job (29 percent).

These responses generally indicate a focus on the short term and perhaps a lack of understanding of the role that Higher Education may play in their future lives.

Research indicates that several factors come into play in guiding decisions about Higher Education and that these influences are apparent well before the final years of senior schooling or eligibility for university entry. It has also been suggested that student destinations are influenced by a social/family context.
Summary

In summary the major conclusions drawn from an analysis of the On Track Data and surveys conducted by the University of Ballarat are:

- Student aspiration as measured by the application rate to enter university programs is related to socio-economic background, with those from higher SES background being more likely to apply for Higher Education programs.
- Students from higher SES backgrounds across Victoria are more likely to enrol in university studies.
- Students from lower SES background were more likely to pursue employment options at the completion of their secondary education.
- The University of Ballarat draws a high proportion of its undergraduate students from rural Victoria and rural Victoria has a generally lower SES profile compared with metropolitan Victoria.
- Factors influencing the decision not to enter further education relate to:
  - career choice and their desire to find work and earn their own money
  - pressure (real or perceived) from teachers or parents suggesting they leave school
  - further studies will not help them get a job
  - less than positive school experiences
  - financial pressures
- The students’ families can have a significant influence on shaping their aspirations in relation to further education.
- Students identified the career, lifestyle and personal opportunities associated with university enrolment.
- A significant proportion of the families identified in the survey have not experienced further education and Higher Education in particular.
- Considerable variations occur in relation to student destinations across schools.
- Advice from schools are important in shaping students’ attitudes to post secondary school options.
- It appears that many students from rural backgrounds have an aversion towards debt.
One of the persistent inequities in Australian Higher Education is the relatively low participation rate of people from rural or isolated backgrounds. In Victoria, rural students, as a proportion of their population, are under represented in Higher Education. While other identifiable groups have increased their proportional representation, rural student participation has remained relatively steady.

Traditionally, lower participation has been explained in terms of lower access to tertiary institutions (a distance factor) and the cost associated with relocation. Whilst these remain important factors, research suggests that the forces that cause this imbalance are more complex. This section explores the reasons for Year 12s not continuing in education and training and examines possible barriers to Higher Education.

In the first instance lower transition rates to Higher Education and other post secondary school studies can be attributed to generally lower apparent retention rates across country Victoria. While there are overall increases in Year 12 completion rates in Victoria, the gap, in percentage points, between the completion rates of urban and rural students has remained reasonably steady.

Figure 1: Apparent Retention Rates Years 7-12

![Bar Chart](image)

Source: Department of Education & Training Feb School Census 2007

Figure 1, drawn from the latest Department of Education and Training data, shows that metropolitan schools achieved an average retention rate of 85.2 percent while, for their country counterparts, the figure was 68.6 percent. Within these figures there are regional variations. For example, for the Grampians Region (which includes many of the University of Ballarat’s catchment schools), the retention rate was 67.6 percent whilst Loddon/Mallee recorded a non-metropolitan high of 70.3 percent. Country Victoria has consistently had lower retention rates compared with metropolitan schools.

Lower retention represents the first hurdle in overcoming lower rural participation in further education. Students simply do not reach the necessary prerequisite education level to enter tertiary studies and this correlates with the generally lower aspiration levels of entering further
education across the rural sector and a corresponding higher aspiration for employment options.

Even if students continue their education to the completion of Year 12, variations occur in the transition preferences of students. This can be partially explained by the nature of the programs undertaken by students in the last two years of schooling. The education strand chosen by students represents a second hurdle in raising participation rates in Higher Education.

Vocational Education and Training programs in schools (VETiS) are increasingly popular and enable students to combine VCE studies with certificate based vocational studies.

After school, VETiS students were more likely to enrol in Certificate IV-level or above programs (21.3 percent compared to 15.1 percent of non-VETiS students), slightly more likely to enrol in on-campus basic or skilled VETiS courses (4.7 percent compared to 3.3 percent), and approximately twice as likely to start an apprenticeship or traineeship (12.6 percent compared to 6.2 percent). More VETiS students entered the workforce with no further education or training (24.6 percent as against 18.0 percent).

Enrolment in VETiS programs do not preclude entry into Higher Education programs, however there is a tendency to stream students towards more vocational outcomes. Figure 2 below illustrates the streaming effects of VETiS enrolments.

**Figure 2: Destinations of Year 12 completers by study strand**

![Graph showing destinations of Year 12 completers by study strand](image)

*Source: On Track Destinations of Year 12 or equivalent completers, by senior certificate, study strand and gender (Table 7)*

In recent years an alternative strand, the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), leading to a VCE qualification was introduced. The strand attempts to cater for students wanting more of a ‘hands on’ approach to the post compulsory years of schooling. Over a brief period of time VCAL has grown significantly. Figure 3 (over) illustrates the growth.
As shown in Figure 2, the destinations of VCAL completers are very different from that of VCE (both VET and non VET) completers. This is not surprising, given the different orientation of the VCAL group – one which leans towards employment and training rather than Higher Education. For Victoria as a whole, the single largest destination for the VCAL respondents is employment-based training (37.7 percent), with 30.4 percent entering apprenticeships and 7.3 percent entering traineeship.

Only 1 percent of VCAL students made the transition to a Higher Education program. Enrolment in VCAL (and VETiS programs to a lesser extent) guides students to employment and training options. Students simply do not have the background or predisposition to enter Higher Education courses. The data also shows that those schools with a relatively high proportion of VCAL enrolments to VCE study strands (and to a lesser extent VETiS), inevitably have low Higher Education enrolment rates.

The movement of students into the different strands for their VCE years is not a random event. Decisions about the post compulsory years typically take place towards the end of Year 10 studies and are a result of a complex set of factors including aspirations, perception about the purpose of the post compulsory years and the influence of parents and the influence of the school in guiding students towards differing strands.

Variations also occur in the rate of applications to tertiary institutions. Socio-economic background has been suggested as the major determining factor in relation to the application rate.

Figure 4 (over) further examines the relationship between SES and University and TAFE offers.

As both achievement and advantage decrease, university offers drop from above 80 percent to below 40 percent, while TAFE/VET offers increase for the school completers from the poorest families and with the lowest GAT scores (but barely exceed 50 percent for any group). Victorian data clearly showed that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are, on average, less likely to apply for post secondary education placements compared with those from higher socio-economic backgrounds.
Judgement can be made about a student’s level of achievement using the General Aptitude Test (GAT) as a guide. The GAT, undertaken by all students attempting a VCE Unit 3/4 sequence, is a test of general knowledge and skills that students are likely to have built up through their school years.

Figure 5 illustrates the effects of achievement on tertiary offers based on VTAC application rates for schools. As the achievement level of Year 12 students falls, so too does the rate of tertiary offers.

Taken together, the inescapable conclusion is that low SES is related to relatively low achievement and this translates to lower rates of tertiary offers.

Using On Track data it is possible to examine the rate at which Year 12 completers apply for tertiary placement. Extracting the latest On Track data for schools reported, and grouping
this information on the basis of the University of Ballarat’s catchment regions, it is evident that there are variations within a given catchment region and explanations for these variations are probably due to a combination of socio-economic and community influences.

Figure 6 summarises the application rates for the 2006 Year 12 completers and shows that the average application rates for schools within a defined geographical area ranged from a high of 73 percent (Western) to a disturbingly low of 59 percent (Wimmera). To draw conclusions from these figures without longitudinal data is dangerous, however the Wimmera region has been particularly drought affected, creating additional financial and human resource pressures on those reliant on agriculture.

**Figure 6: Percentage of Year 12 completers applying for tertiary places**

![Bar chart showing application rates for different regions.](chart.png)

*Source On Track 2006. Extracted from data presented in Appendix 2*

Applying for tertiary entrance inevitably places the student into the VTAC application process. This requires an ENTER score and this eventually translates into either entry or non entry to tertiary education. For some, the ENTER score may not be sufficient to get into their preferred course. Figure 7 (over) examines differences in tertiary offers made to those who applied for tertiary placement and, using University of Ballarat’s catchment regions, examines the differences on a geographical basis.

Again, geographical differences are evident. For example, on average, 58 percent of Year 12 applicants from Central Highland’s schools were offered a university place and 83 percent were offered tertiary placement. This contrasts starkly with Wimmera schools where the average rates of offer were 80 percent and 97 percent respectively.

It is interesting to note that whilst the schools identified within the Wimmera cluster had the lowest rate of application for tertiary places, those who did apply were more likely to receive a tertiary placement offer. It is almost as though there were two groups within these Wimmera schools – those who make a choice of not pursuing tertiary studies and another group who have tertiary aspirations that translate into relatively healthy ENTER scores and therefore tertiary placement.
Based on the On Track telephone survey, Figure 8 examines differences within the region with respect to the percentage who actually take up university offers.

As we drill down into the data we find that schools from the Mallee cluster are more likely to take up their university offers with 39 percent doing so, whilst their Central Highlands counterparts had a take up university offer rate of only 31 percent.

The reasons for these rates differences are varied. In the absence of qualitative data we can only speculate as to why these figures vary. Possible explanations include:

- students are unclear or uncertain about their future – they enter the tertiary application process because ‘it’s the thing to do’
- there may be a change of heart post application
- some students may have taken up employment possibilities and
- others may take a gap year and defer.
Based on the On Track survey data, Figure 9 examines employment and deferment options across the University of Ballarat’s catchment area.

**Figure 9: Percentage of Year 12 completers employed, looking for work or deferring**

![Graph showing percentage of Year 12 completers employed, looking for work or deferring across different regions.]

Source: On Track Table 15 Education, training and workforce destinations of the Year 12 cohort, by labour force region p55

Year 12 completers in the area covered by the Central Highlands, for example, were far more likely to consider their employment options which are consistent with the relatively low tertiary offer and university take up rate (Figures 7 and 8). Deferment was considered a relatively sound option for students within the Wimmera and Mallee areas. Possible explanations for this higher rate of deferment may be related to the economics of challenging rural conditions.

Figure 10 summarises the most recent published findings as to why students do not continue studying with respect to Victoria as a whole.

**Figure 10: Reasons for not continuing studying**

![Bar chart showing reasons for not continuing studying by gender.]

Source: On Track. Figure 48 Reasons for not studying: Year 12 completers by gender p46
Within the broader group of all Year 12 students not in post school study are those who defer a tertiary place. Figure 11 examines the reported reasons.

**Figure 11: Reasons for not studying: Year 12 students who deferred a tertiary place**

![Bar chart showing reasons for not studying]

Source: On Track. Figure 50 Reasons for not studying: Year 12 students who deferred a tertiary place p48

The motives of deferrers were similar to other Year 12 completers who did not undertake further study. The single biggest motive for Year 12 completers deferring their study offer was the perception of ‘readiness’, which affected almost two-thirds (63.5 percent) of the group, however the difficulty of supporting oneself while studying weighed heavily (43.5 percent) and the costs of study also deterred 39.4 percent. Travel too was a factor, with 29.6 percent citing a problem of too much travel, while a further 33.7 percent agreed that costs of travel were a barrier to taking up their study offer.

A gap year can be a very valuable experience for many Year 12 leavers giving them the opportunity to ‘sort things out’, experience an environment other than an educational one and to develop skills that will take them forward.

More and more school completers are deferring and this is particularly so for rural students.

On July 4th, 2007 The Age reported ‘Uni costs turn rural students off’ and stated that: ‘…country students are more than twice as likely as their Melbourne peers to defer university, and increasingly blame their decision on the growing cost of university life’. The report, based on the On Track survey, showed that while more than half of Melbourne-based students enrol at university straight out of school (52.1 percent), the country figure is 33.9 percent and that one in six school graduates from regional Victoria who won a university spot this year chose not to enrol, compared with just one in 15 from Melbourne.

The report identified country students were much more likely to be turned off by the high cost, and the fact they had to leave home to study and concluded: ‘Thirty-seven percent of regional students told the survey for State Government initiative On Track they were waiting to qualify for an independent Youth Allowance before studying, compared with 15 percent of city students. The easiest way to qualify is by earning about $18,000 over 18 months before starting’ and ‘…They have got into the strategy of taking a year off to earn enough to qualify for the independent Youth Allowance’
Deferment can cut both ways. Gaining access to the Youth Allowance for example can provide a solid financial base to commence further studies, however, given the strong disposition of rural students to seek work and earn an income, the gap year may lead to changed intentions. The gap year can easily stretch to a gap decade and beyond.

When the effect of achievement is excluded, the reasons given by school completers for not entering into tertiary education continued to vary across groups from different socio-economic backgrounds (Figure 12). In the highest GAT achievement band, the financial considerations associated with further study unsurprisingly weighed more heavily on Year 12 completers from poorer backgrounds and to a lesser extent, travel considerations were more likely to be a factor with these respondents.

Figure 12: Reasons for not studying: highest achievement group (GAT quartile), by quartiles of SES

![Chart](image)

Source: On Track 2006 Figure 51 Regional differences in reasons for not continuing in education or training p49

There are also regional differences in the reasons given by school completers for not continuing in education. These differences appear to partially relate to different levels of access to education and training institutions, but economic factors associated with isolation and with the socio-economic profile of different regions also have an impact. This regional perspective indicates that barriers associated with access and socio-economic pressures tend to affect young people living in the country more than those living in the city.

Year 12 completers not in further study were asked to consider the reason(s) for not continuing study by agreeing or disagreeing with statements such as ‘the costs of travel are a barrier’. Aggregating responses results in factors that influenced their decisions (+) whilst disagreement resulted in factors not considered influential (-).

Figure 13 shows that different levels of proximity to educational institutions play a key role in the decision of young people to enter into further study or training. Year 12 students living in non metropolitan areas clearly were more likely to identify the need to move away from home, costs of travel or the need to travel long distances in order to reach education providers as a reason for no longer being in study or training. For many students living in rural settings, the
necessity of supporting oneself was also more likely to be nominated as a barrier to further study.

The On Track survey reveals that school leavers within the Central Region were apparently less influenced by the extent and cost of travel as a barrier to tertiary education, while having to leave home to take up studies was reported as a relatively minor barrier.

**Figure 13: Travel and distance as barriers to further education and training, by region**

Source: On Track Figure 60 Travel and distance as barriers to further education and training, by region p57

It is interesting to note that students from rural backgrounds were more likely to identify the (direct) cost associated with undertaking further studies as a barrier, as shown in Figure 14.
Whilst tuition and associated course costs for a given course of study are not appreciably different between institutions, rural students certainly perceive course costs as an issue. The data does not provide reasons for these differing perceptions however it is reasonable to speculate they relate to socio-economic backgrounds and cultural beliefs.

The On Track survey provides useful information and indicates that geographical location resulting in distance and cost barriers are obviously two important considerations in deciding whether or not a Year 12 completer moves to Higher Education.

Summary

- Students from country Victoria have lower aspirations to undertake tertiary studies and are more likely to pursue employment options at the completion of their secondary schooling.
- Within the country student cohort there are regional differences in relation to their aspirations.
- Lower retention rates exist in country areas and this is most likely associated with lower aspiration for higher education and the short term goals of gaining employment.
- Student choices in relation to the program they undertake can have a significant impact upon their post secondary education options. In some instances a strand of VCE will foreclose on higher education options at least in the immediate future.
- There is a correlation between the socio-economic background of students, their VCE achievement, and their aspirations (as measured by their tertiary application rates). Low SES is related to relatively low achievement and this translates to lower tertiary aspirations.
- Students from country Victoria were more likely to defer their enrolment into tertiary institutions.
- Through the On Track survey, it has become increasingly apparent that there are three main categories of reasons for not being in further education or training:
• Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds were more concerned with job security, had relatively lower aspirations to high status jobs, had less inherent interest in further learning and expressed concerns about the cost and debt associated with further education. UB surveys confirm these findings.

• Students from rural areas could identify the career, lifestyle and personal opportunities associated with university enrolment. UB surveys confirm these findings.

The most significant challenge in lifting the higher education participation of rural students and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds is to find ways to strengthen the factors that encourage participation in higher education life as a means of moving to an interesting and rewarding career, while at the same time mitigate the perceived discouraging factors.