

Aspirations towards higher education

I remember talking to a year 12 student at Cranbourne Secondary College a couple of years ago and asking her was university study for her and she came back and said, 'Oh, give it a go, I'm only a Cranbourne kid, I couldn't go to Monash.' That to me indicates part of the challenge that we are facing, which is really about aspiration and seeing university as a realistic option that is for everybody.²⁸⁵

The aspiration to go to university is a critical prerequisite to higher education participation. Unless an individual has some interest in university study, they are unlikely to apply for or accept a place in higher education. Where higher education aspirations are strong, individuals and their families may be willing to make significant sacrifices to make dreams of attending university a reality, while for students with weaker aspirations, barriers to higher education participation are likely to have a more decisive influence.

The Committee recognises that 'high' aspirations need not be university aspirations. Throughout the inquiry, the Committee heard from highly motivated secondary students who had made considered decisions to pursue opportunities other than higher education, based on a clear understanding of their options, interests, talents and learning styles. Furthermore, some participants suggested that aspirations towards higher education may be too well developed in certain areas of Victoria, and that efforts should be made to promote a wider range of post-school options.²⁸⁶ Nevertheless, while acknowledging the value of alternative pathways, the Committee has focused on the potential to raise aspirations towards higher education, as one means of lifting the participation of under-represented groups.

The nature and formation of aspirations

The Committee heard that university aspirations arise from an array of attitudes and beliefs about the relevance, value and attainability of higher education. Any attempts to raise

²⁸⁵ Professor P. Steele, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Campus Coordination and Academic Director, Berwick and Peninsula Campuses, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 41.

²⁸⁶ For example, Bayside Glen Eira Kingston LLEN, Written Submission, March 2008, 4; Ms V. Virgato, Career and Transition Coordinator, Eastern Industry Education Partnership, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 29; Professor E. Harman, Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 16.

aspirations towards higher education must be informed by an understanding of the nature of aspirations and how they are formed.

The nature of aspirations

University aspirations are closely related to attitudes and beliefs about the relevance and intrinsic value of higher education. In his research on the aspirations of senior secondary students, James found substantial differences in young people's perceptions of the intrinsic worth of university study. For example, young people reported different levels of interest in the subjects they could study at university, and different views on the extent to which university offers opportunities to meet interesting people and broaden one's personal outlook.²⁸⁷

The university aspirations of students are often based on perceptions of the rewards that flow from higher education qualifications. The Committee heard that some young people and their families lack an understanding of the opportunities that come from a university education, or are uncertain of the benefits.²⁸⁸ Again, James' research has linked aspirations to beliefs about the qualifications required in a chosen occupation and the potential of higher education to lead into an interesting and rewarding career.²⁸⁹ Young people without university aspirations are less likely to see higher education as a good investment for the future.²⁹⁰

University aspirations rest on a belief that higher education is a realistic and attainable choice. The Committee heard that for some young people, university has never been a consideration. A telling phrase used recurrently by participants was that for these young people, university is simply 'off the radar'.²⁹¹ This perception that university is not even an alternative for consideration may form at an early age. In a study conducted by the University of Ballarat, some regional and outer urban students reported 'always' having known that they would not go to university.²⁹² Similarly, one young person told the Committee that she had not thought about university study because 'it has never been an option I thought I had'.²⁹³

At a later age, aspirations can be affected by actual or perceived practical constraints, such as distance and costs.²⁹⁴ A number of participants argued that when attending university is difficult and expensive, it may be seen as an unrealistic option that is not even worthy of genuine consideration. Mr Glenn Stewart, Executive Officer, Murray Mallee LLEN, stated

²⁸⁷ Richard James, *Socioeconomic Background and Higher Education Participation: An analysis of school students' aspirations and expectations* (Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002).

²⁸⁸ For example, Ms J. Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Support Services, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 4; Professor R. Larkins, Chair, Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 21; Mr M. Horn, Senior Manager, Research and Policy Centre, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 53; Mr D. Conley, Youth Services Coordinator, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 6; Ms L. Bartlett, Regional Youth Affairs Consultant, Barwon Adolescent Task Force, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 39.

²⁸⁹ Richard James, *Socioeconomic Background and Higher Education Participation: An analysis of school students' aspirations and expectations* (Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002), 32.

²⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 27.

²⁹¹ Ms S. Brennan, Chief Executive Officer, Upper Yarra Community House, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 36; Mr S. Dwyer, Coordinator, Peninsula Training and Employment Program, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 11; Mr I. Whitehead, Former School Principal, Written Submission, May 2008, 2.

²⁹² Associate Professor B. Golding, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, University of Ballarat, Appendix B to Written Submission, February 2008, 32.

²⁹³ Ms J. Cairns, Student, Community VCAL, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 13.

²⁹⁴ For example, Gippsland East LLEN, Written Submission, March 2008, 4; South West LLEN, Written Submission, April 2008, 6; Ms J. Rose, Manager, Policy and Projects, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 10; North Central LLEN, Written Submission, May 2008, 12.

that increasing financial barriers are shutting off university aspirations, thereby decreasing motivation and achievement.²⁹⁵ Mr Andrew Symons, Post-compulsory Programs Coordinator, Lakes Entrance Secondary College, described this attitude among students at his small rural school:

When I asked ... 'Why aren't you thinking of uni?', they all said, 'I cannot afford it', and that is the end of the story, they do not even want to discuss it ... Across the range there it is just the perception that it is too expensive, the HECS fees intimidate them, particularly the cost of accommodation when they move away. They are quite happy just to stay around Lakes [Entrance], working at the local takeaway or supermarket or some of that sort of short-term employment.²⁹⁶

The Committee heard that when young people do not see university as a realistic option, they will instead 'put their energies and enthusiasms into other areas'.²⁹⁷

The sense that university is a realistic option is also related to individuals' beliefs about their own academic capabilities and their preparedness for university. Several participants told the Committee that many capable young people from disadvantaged backgrounds lack confidence in their academic abilities, and believe that they would not be able to gain entry to university, or to succeed in higher education.²⁹⁸ As the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals noted, students aspiring to higher education 'have to believe that they can go to university and that they can succeed'.²⁹⁹

As discussed in Chapter 3, research has also linked achievement at school to the formation of university aspirations. Examining On Track data on academic achievement and study plans, Teese et al concluded that 'low achievement appeared to "switch off" any potential interest in further study'.³⁰⁰ Similarly, in a recent study for Universities Australia, researchers from the Centre for the Study of Higher Education found that achievement, school completion and educational aspirations are 'significantly interrelated'. They concluded that while the relative influence of each cannot be accurately determined, low achievement is probably the 'precursor' for early school leaving and lower educational aspirations.³⁰¹

The Committee heard that some young people in low socioeconomic status areas may have little confidence in the attainability of higher education not only for themselves, but for their community. Youth support organisation Western Chances told the Committee that even capable students in the disadvantaged western region of Melbourne can believe that higher education is beyond them:

Many of the students ... thought that most higher education was not a real option for them. They believe that they will not be able to get into courses; that university is just for 'rich private school kids' and so on. Our trainers observed several very intelligent students who believe they could never get into a university like Melbourne, Monash or Victoria [University].³⁰²

²⁹⁵ Mr G. Stewart, Executive Officer, Murray Mallee LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 10.

²⁹⁶ Mr A. Symons, Post-compulsory Programs Coordinator, Lakes Entrance Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 39.

²⁹⁷ Mr B. Ridgeway, Principal, Rosebud Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 51.

²⁹⁸ For example, Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 10–11; Western Chances, Written Submission, August 2008, 17.

²⁹⁹ Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Written Submission, March 2008, 8.

³⁰⁰ Richard Teese, Kira Clarke and John Polesel, *The On Track Survey 2007 Statewide Report: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2007), 48.

³⁰¹ Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, *Participation and Equity: A review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people* (Canberra: Universities Australia, 2008), 3.

³⁰² Western Chances, Written Submission, August 2008, 17.

Of concern to the Committee was a report from an interface council describing recent consultations in which some primary school children commented that they would not be going to university 'because they came from a certain suburb or area of Melton'.³⁰³

Forming aspirations

Throughout the inquiry, participants talked about how aspirations are formed and the different factors that influence a young person's decisions about post-school pathways. The formation of aspirations is also the subject of a substantial body of research in the education, career development and psychology fields. Both the existing research and participants' evidence to the inquiry highlight the complex nature of aspiration formation. The Committee heard that family background and the school and community environments contribute to the formation of aspirations.

There was widespread agreement that family background exerts a strong influence on young people's aspirations. Professor Richard James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, told the Committee that family background was the most important influence on aspirations and achievement:

What you have got are intersecting family factors, community factors and school factors that go into shaping a young person's achievement at school, their aspirations and all those kinds of things, and we know that most of the effects come from family in the first instance.³⁰⁴

One recent review of the literature on families, young people and their post-school plans noted that such studies consistently identify family background as a major influence on young people's post-school intentions.³⁰⁵ Families influence young people's planning through explicit advice or assistance, the passing on of values, expectations and assumptions, and through young people's observations of family members' experiences.³⁰⁶

Socioeconomic status background

Among the family background factors influencing aspirations, socioeconomic status was emphasised most strongly by inquiry participants. Socioeconomic status is a measure that refers to a combination of income, education and occupation. In particular, the Committee heard that young people whose parents have attended university, or who work in professional occupations, are more likely to attend university than those who do not have a family history of participating in higher education.³⁰⁷

The Committee heard that families with a history of participating in higher education and professional occupations are generally 'oriented' towards university. They have university aspirations for their children, often tending towards high-status institutions and courses.³⁰⁸

³⁰³ Shire of Melton, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

³⁰⁴ Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 14.

³⁰⁵ Jennifer Bryce and others, *Australian young people, their families and post-school plans: a research review* (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2007), 6.

³⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 6–7.

³⁰⁷ For example, Mr G. Allen, Chair, Country Education Project, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 25; Mr B. Baker, Convener and Member and Ms L. Watt, Member, South West Regional Youth Affairs Network, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 11, 13; Mr B. Neal, Principal, Monivae College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 17; Ms C. Alpey, Deputy President, MONSU Peninsula, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 35; Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 10.

³⁰⁸ For example, M. Holland, Principal, Murray Street Campus, Colac Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 34; Cr V. Knight, Deputy Mayor, Mildura Rural City Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 28; Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, Written Submission, March 2008, 10.

Some university and secondary school students described how a family history of higher education made it appear to be a 'natural' choice, with other alternatives given little or no consideration. Ms Amanda Colahan, Student, Victoria University, described this process:

My parents have given me and both my sisters a fund to go to university, so not going to university was never a consideration. They did not force us or push us into any particular course or pathway. It just seemed like the natural thing to do—from high school you go on to university—and I guess that not going was never considered.³⁰⁹

Others commented that there is a presumption in some families that university education is a sensible thing to do, and it is assumed from an early age that children will probably attend university.³¹⁰

Conversely, the Committee heard that some parents who have not attended university place little value on higher education and, at times, may actively discourage university aspirations.³¹¹ Professor Kay Lipson, Dean, Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale Campus, Swinburne University of Technology, remarked that parental support for university study is limited in Melbourne's outer east:

We actually find that there is little parental support for students going to tertiary education. Our recruitment people say that parents are often proactively saying, 'Why would you want to do that? I am all right and I haven't got those qualifications'. So it has been quite difficult to get that culture that tertiary education has a value.³¹²

Similarly, some regional participants told the Committee that parents often encourage their children to pursue an apprenticeship rather than university, based on reasoned consideration of the financial costs and benefits of available pathways.³¹³ This might also be the case where there are local work opportunities that do not require university qualifications. Another participant commented that some parents who are unemployed perceive that 'any job is a good job' and are supportive of their children leaving school early for part-time employment.³¹⁴

Participants' views are supported by a substantial body of research that examines the relationship between socioeconomic status and the educational and occupational aspirations of Australian young people. Importantly, studies have suggested that a majority of senior secondary students from all socioeconomic status backgrounds aspire to university,³¹⁵ and to employment in professional or managerial occupations that generally require post-school qualifications.³¹⁶ In James' survey of approximately 7,000 year 10, 11

³⁰⁹ Ms A. Colahan, Student, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 40.

³¹⁰ Mr B. Baker, Convener and Member, South West Regional Youth Affairs Network, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 13; Mr G. Cameron, Managed Individual Pathways Coordinator, Sunshine College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 3–4; Ms S. Powell, Student, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 40.

³¹¹ For example, Shire of Melton, Written Submission, March 2008, 2; South West Association of Post Primary Principals, Written Submission, April 2008, 2; Australian Catholic University, Written Submission, March 2008, 2–3; Equity and Access Unit, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 9–10; Victorian Farmers Federation, Written Submission, March 2008, 3; Western Chances, Written Submission, August 2008, 16.

³¹² Professor K. Lipson, Dean, Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale Campus, Swinburne University of Technology, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 23.

³¹³ Ms M. Pendergast, Principal, Warrnambool College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 28; Mrs J. Boyle, Principal, Mortlake P-12 College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 31; Ms S. Holcombe, Year 12 Student, Kurnai College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 49.

³¹⁴ Ms P. O'Connell, Executive Officer, Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 27.

³¹⁵ Richard James, *Socioeconomic Background and Higher Education Participation: An analysis of school students' aspirations and expectations* (Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002), 25.

³¹⁶ See, for example, Adrian Beavis, David Curtis and Niola Curtis, *What do students know about work? Senior secondary students' perceptions of the world of work* (Sydney: The Smith Family, 2005), 6; Karen Walker, 'Aiming high: Australian school leavers' career aspirations and implications for career development practice,' *Australian Journal of Career Development* 15, no. 2 (2006): 56.

and 12 students, more than 60 per cent of respondents reported that university was their preferred post-school option.³¹⁷ A similar survey conducted by Victoria University found that university was the preferred pathway of students from low, medium and high socioeconomic status backgrounds in Melbourne's western region.³¹⁸

Similarly, research has shown that regardless of socioeconomic status, most parents want their children to do well in life, and have a similar level of involvement in their children's career development.³¹⁹ This was also reflected in the contributions of young people to the inquiry, several of whom told the Committee that their parents would be supportive of whichever pathway they chose. The Committee also heard from some young people whose lower socioeconomic status background spurred them on to participate in higher education. Parents who did not attend university may be eager for their children to enjoy higher education opportunities that they themselves did not have. Similarly, young people may be inspired by their parents' hard work to make the best of their education.

Nevertheless, there are important differences in the aspirations of young people from different socioeconomic backgrounds. In James' survey, 52.9 per cent of students from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds and 59.3 per cent of those from medium socioeconomic status backgrounds expressed a preference for university. However, more than three-quarters (76.8%) of students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds said that they would prefer university.³²⁰ In the Victoria University survey, students from higher socioeconomic status backgrounds were also more likely to report that they wanted to participate in higher education.³²¹ Moreover, students from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds express less confidence in their academic abilities,³²² and in the likelihood that they will actually go on to attend university, than those from higher socioeconomic status backgrounds.³²³

Family cultural background

Family cultural background was also seen by both students and educators as an important influence on values and post-school aspirations. The Centre for Multicultural Youth noted that despite, or perhaps because of, their pre-settlement experiences, migrant and refugee young people often have high educational and occupational aspirations.³²⁴ It was thought by some participants that parents with an Asian background tended to value schooling and post-school education highly, encouraging university aspirations.³²⁵

At the same time, however, young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds may face particular difficulties that can impact on aspirations. For refugees whose prior education may have been severely interrupted, learning in a mainstream school and in a new language can be challenging. For those who struggle to achieve in this context, aspirations may be

³¹⁷ Richard James, *Socioeconomic Background and Higher Education Participation: An analysis of school students' aspirations and expectations* (Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002), 25.

³¹⁸ Victoria University, Written Submission, April 2008, 39.

³¹⁹ Jennifer Bryce and others, *Australian Young People, their families and post-school plans: a research review* (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2007), 6.

³²⁰ Richard James, *Socioeconomic Background and Higher Education Participation: An analysis of school students' aspirations and expectations* (Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002), 25.

³²¹ Victoria University, Written Submission, April 2008, 30.

³²² *ibid.*, 43.

³²³ Richard James, *Socioeconomic Background and Higher Education Participation: An analysis of school students' aspirations and expectations* (Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002), 31.

³²⁴ Centre for Multicultural Youth, Written Submission, August 2008, 6.

³²⁵ Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Written Submission, March 2008, 5; Ms L. Steele, Principal, North Campus, Sunshine College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 2.

lowered.³²⁶ Young people might also be frustrated and put off by the difficulty of navigating the complex pathways into higher education.³²⁷

The Committee heard some suggestions that schools could inadvertently limit higher education aspirations by encouraging young people from refugee or migrant backgrounds into vocational programs. The Centre for Multicultural Youth noted that while these programs are appropriate for some, others report feeling 'written off' and as though they are not being offered a range of options.³²⁸ The Committee heard that some teachers may have a discouraging effect where they have low academic expectations for these young people.³²⁹ Similar pressures may also come from some parents. Mr Shaun Robson, Acting Executive Officer, Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, suggested that some newly-arrived African families tend to push their children towards the employment or trades, even if the children themselves are interested in pursuing higher education.³³⁰

School and community environment

While family background was generally viewed as the most important influence on aspirations, other aspects of the environments in which students interact were also identified as important. Several participants argued that the mix of pupils at a school influences school culture and, in turn, helps to shape young people's aspirations. Two government schools suggested that competition from private schools currently makes it difficult to build a culture of high educational aspirations.³³¹ A submission from Lakes Entrance Secondary College stated that parents with high expectations often enrol their children in private schools outside of the local area, meaning that the remaining students are not exposed to the 'example and expectations' of that cohort.³³² Another participant made a similar point in relation to selective government schooling, arguing that 'aspirations sit in a culture', and that this culture is affected when the high-achieving, motivated 'pilot students' are removed.³³³

Wider community values and perceptions regarding education and learning might also influence the formation of aspirations.³³⁴ The Committee heard, for example, that many regional areas have a strong tradition of early workforce participation and on-the-job learning, rather than academic education.³³⁵ The Committee was concerned that some local government representatives described their municipalities as lacking a 'learning culture', noting that education and training are undervalued, and levels of innovation and creativity are low.³³⁶

As in families, young people may be influenced simply by what they observe in their local community, as well as by explicit culture and values. Mr Michael Hill, Principal, Upper Yarra

³²⁶ Centre for Multicultural Youth, Written Submission, August 2008, 6.

³²⁷ Ms N. Nyuon, Student, Bachelor of Arts, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 46.

³²⁸ Centre for Multicultural Youth, Written Submission, August 2008, 6.

³²⁹ Ms N. Nyuon, Student, Bachelor of Arts, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 47.

³³⁰ Mr S. Robson, Acting Executive Officer, Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 July 2008, 39–40.

³³¹ Lakes Entrance Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 1; Bendigo Senior Secondary College, Written Submission, March 2008, 4.

³³² Lakes Entrance Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 1.

³³³ Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 19.

³³⁴ Australian Catholic University, Written Submission, March 2008, 2–3.

³³⁵ Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 14.

³³⁶ Bass Coast Shire Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 4; Mr B. Graham, Director, Strategic Development, Wellington Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 3; Mr S. Kozlowski, Chief Executive Officer, East Gippsland Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 7.

Secondary College, described how young people tend to repeat the patterns that they observe around them:

... they see what their family are doing in their occupations, they see what their friends are doing, what is happening down at the local football club, so we see a repetition of those vocations.³³⁷

A related issue is the stimulus provided by the presence of educational and occupational role models within the local community or within the young person's social circle.³³⁸ Many participants highlighted the importance of community role models who have participated successfully in higher education, arguing that the presence of role models provides indirect encouragement to young people.³³⁹ Conversely, a lack of role models in the community can impact on young people's awareness of available career options, both by reducing their exposure to role models in everyday life, and by limiting the opportunities available for university related work experience.³⁴⁰

The importance of role models was emphasised by a number of participants from non-metropolitan areas. Many rural and isolated areas have a low proportion of adults in the local community who hold a higher education qualification and those who do generally work in a limited range of occupations.³⁴¹ Concerns were raised in the Mallee region about the removal of a CSIRO research facility in Merbein, with participants arguing that the loss of the 'top-end intellect' from the community would be detrimental to student aspirations.³⁴²

Students with a university campus in their community might be expected to be more inclined to aspire towards higher education. However, the Committee heard conflicting evidence from participants about the extent to which the presence of a university campus and other educational institutions influences community culture and aspirations. With reference to the municipalities of Casey and Cardinia, the South East LLEN argued that without local, accessible tertiary institutions, education is undervalued and engagement in learning is low.³⁴³ Mr Mick Murphy, Executive Officer, Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN, claimed that educational facilities make an important contribution to aspirations in the local area:

There has been a great deal of research, even around the world, in relation to location of facilities matching local aspiration, and it is very clear—we see that in Victoria, and we can even see it on a micro scale in Gippsland—that there is higher participation and higher aspiration centrally where we have facilities like a campus.³⁴⁴

³³⁷ Mr M. Hill, Principal, Upper Yarra Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 43.

³³⁸ For example, vicCentral Highlands Area Consultative Committee, Written Submission, March 2008, 8; Mr L. Parrott, Croydon, Written Submission, March 2008, 1; Frankston Learning City Stakeholder Network, Written Submission, March 2008, 2; Gannawarra Shire Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 8; Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Written Submission, March 2008, 5–6; Equity and Access Unit, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 11; Ms R. Kava, Chief Executive Officer, Gannawarra Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 3; Dr K. Brotchie, General Practitioner, Mount Beauty, Written Submission, February 2008, 1.

³³⁹ Mrs V. Love, Parent, Inverloch, Written Submission, May 2008, 4; Mr R. Boucher, Principal, Swifts Creek Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 32; Mr S. Kozlowski, Chief Executive Officer, East Gippsland Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 8; Mr M. Hill, Principal, Upper Yarra Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 43; Mr K. Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 46.

³⁴⁰ Bendigo Senior Secondary College, Written Submission, March 2008, 4; Ms D. Howcroft, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 65; Ms N. Nyuon, Student, Bachelor of Arts, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 47.

³⁴¹ Mr P. Brown, Executive Officer, Country Education Project, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 24; Ms J. Crealy, Coordinator, Reconnect Program, Gippsland Lakes Community Health, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 19.

³⁴² Mr G. Stewart, Executive Officer, Murray Mallee LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 11; Cr V. Knight, Deputy Mayor, Mildura Rural City Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 30; Mr K. Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 48.

³⁴³ South East LLEN, Written Submission, May 2008, 3.

³⁴⁴ Mr M. Murphy, Executive Officer, Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 13.

Supporting this view, a representative of the South Gippsland and Bass Coast LLEN emphasised the negative impact that the withdrawal of courses or campuses may have on aspirations within regional communities.³⁴⁵

On the other hand, some participants suggested that the presence of local campuses appears to have a limited effect on higher education application rates and participation rates in regional areas.³⁴⁶ Professor Kay Lipson, Dean, Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale Campus, Swinburne University of Technology, also suggested that it may be overly simplistic to link student aspirations to the presence of a local university campus:

Around the student aspirations area I think the issues are very complex ... here in Lilydale it is our experience that it requires a lot more than sticking a university in a region to raise your student aspirations.³⁴⁷

The potential contributions and effects of campuses located in regional and outer urban areas are discussed in Chapter 6.

Geographical differences in aspirations

The Committee received evidence to indicate that there are geographical differences in aspirations towards higher education. A number of participants pointed to lower university application rates in some parts of Victoria as indicative of lower aspirations for higher education. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Committee found significant geographical variations in the rate at which Victorian school leavers apply to university, with application rates substantially lower in regional Victoria and interface areas than in metropolitan areas. Across metropolitan regions, application rates were lower in low socioeconomic areas.

However, a range of factors influence the decision to make a university application, not all of which relate to personal aspirations. Therefore, although application rates suggest likely differences in aspirations, in themselves, they are not proof of geographical differences in aspirations. While geographical differences in aspirations have not been precisely quantified, research evidence and the contributions of inquiry participants nevertheless suggest that differences in aspirations are an important contributor to geographical differences in the rate at which Victorian students participate in higher education.

Raising aspirations towards higher education

As recognition of the importance of aspirations has increased, universities, researchers and policymakers in Australia and internationally have turned their attention to the question of how educational aspirations among various groups might be lifted. Strategies for raising aspirations were a central topic of discussion throughout the inquiry, with participants describing a number of existing and potential approaches. These reflected strategies aimed at improving student awareness of higher education possibilities, as well as initiatives to promote university as a preferred post-school destination. However, the Committee also heard some concerns about the presumption that aspirations for university study should be raised.

³⁴⁵ Mr D. Roche, Executive Officer, South Gippsland and Bass Coast LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 12.

³⁴⁶ Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 13; Dr H. Coates, Principal Research Fellow, Australian Council for Educational Research, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 3; Professor R. Larkins, Chair, Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 20.

³⁴⁷ Professor K. Lipson, Dean, Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale Campus, Swinburne University of Technology, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 18.

Concerns about raising aspirations towards higher education

The Committee found that some schools from areas under-represented in higher education were cautious about attempts to raise aspirations for university study. Mr Leon Bishop, Principal, Lilydale High School, highlighted the tension between lifting aspirations and respecting the culture and attitudes of students and their families. He argued that there is a danger in 'pushing that high aspiration message all the time', because it may imply 'You're doing something wrong here'.³⁴⁸ Mr Gary Allen, Chair, Country Education Project, presented a similar view when he related his experience as principal of a non-metropolitan school:

We often got frustrated that the kids were not being aspirational and did not want to go on to university, and we were trying to do things to encourage them to do so. But at certain times we had to stand back and question our values. Was it right that we should be putting that value on these students when they were perfectly happy and contented with the path that they were going in?³⁴⁹

Similarly, one study outlined in a submission found that secondary teachers in non-metropolitan and interface areas sometimes feel torn between their own positive orientation towards academic education, and their sense that focusing on the university pathway is 'not working in the best interests' of many students.³⁵⁰ The Committee notes that these concerns may often be related to perceptions that vocational pathways are undervalued.³⁵¹

The views of schools in this regard are reflected in Victorian Government policy. A representative of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development told the Committee that the department is careful not to favour aspirations towards higher education in promoting completion of year 12 or equivalent:

If anything, we downplay that, because we say that the aspiration to complete year 12 or equivalent is not just about going to university. There are many valuable and useful pathways. In its work the department is always careful to say it is not just about university access. It is about TAFE access, it is about apprenticeships, it is about employment. It is about the full range of things that completing schooling or the equivalent of schooling equips young people to do.³⁵²

Rather than specifically promoting higher education for under-represented groups, the Department encourages schools to recognise the diversity of aspirations among students.³⁵³

The Committee acknowledges participants' concerns and affirms the importance and value of vocational pathways. While the Committee does not believe that all young people should aspire to higher education, it does believe that all young people should have the opportunity to give genuine consideration to university as one of a number of worthwhile post-secondary options. The Committee is of the view that the promotion of university is not incompatible with the promotion of other post-school destinations. Indeed, the Committee has encountered many schools which are inspiring students to appreciate the value of a range of pathways.

³⁴⁸ Mr L. Bishop, Principal, Lilydale High School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 46.

³⁴⁹ Mr G. Allen, Chair, Country Education Project, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 23.

³⁵⁰ Associate Professor B. Golding, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, University of Ballarat, Appendix B to Written Submission, February 2008, 35.

³⁵¹ For example, Ms J. Devereaux, Executive Officer, Wimmera Southern Mallee LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 3-4; Mr P. Brown, Executive Officer, Country Education Project, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 25; South East LLEN, Written Submission, May 2008, 4.

³⁵² Mr G. McLean, General Manager, Youth Transitions Division, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 July 2008, 6.

³⁵³ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), 'Whole school – responding to student diversity (Curriculum Planning Guidelines – Phase 2: Planning and Resourcing)', DEECD, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/curriculum/preptoyear10/guidelines/phase2/ws/respondstuddiv.htm> (accessed 28 May 2009).

Career education

Throughout the inquiry, the Committee received a great deal of evidence about career education in Victorian schools. Career education at school is one of the most significant sources of information for young people about the complicated array of post-school education, training and employment options, including university. It may be even more critical for young people who have fewer alternative sources of information about university in their family and peer networks.³⁵⁴ The Committee does not believe that career education should push students in one particular direction. It recognises, however, that career education can influence aspirations by raising awareness of the range of available opportunities, encouraging students to consider a variety of options, and illuminating the various pathways by which students may be able to reach their goals.

Career education in Victoria is a complex and diverse field. The Victorian Government has identified student pathways and transitions as one of three student outcome areas in which schools should strive for continual improvement.³⁵⁵ A key Department of Education and Early Childhood Development program in this area is the Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) program. The Australian Government also plays a complementary role in career education through its Career Advice Australia initiative. Schools have a leading role in the delivery of career education, and education and training providers, industry and community organisations also provide or facilitate career education, often in partnership with schools.

The Committee heard that Victorian career education is now 'better and bigger' than it has been in the past.³⁵⁶ The Committee was impressed by some examples of good practice in Victorian schools. At Kurnai College at the Gippsland Education Precinct, students had outstanding access to information and opportunities in a wide range of pathways. The Committee heard that over the period from 2005 to 2007, the school had seen an 18 per cent increase in the number of students making a transition to tertiary education, with approximately half of this increase to higher education and half to TAFE study.³⁵⁷ The Committee was also particularly impressed with the commitment of careers teachers and the range and quality of career education resources at Benalla Secondary College and Ouyen Secondary College.

Nevertheless, evidence suggests that there remain some areas for improvement in career education in Victorian schools. A strong theme emerged in the inquiry that there is still variation in the amount and quality of career education provided in Victorian schools.³⁵⁸ Similarly, a review of the MIPs program in 2005 found that there was strong support for the program, but variation in its implementation and effectiveness.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁴ Ms J. Matthews, Project Officer, South Gippsland Bass Coast LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 52–53; Mr M. Horn, Senior Manager, Research and Policy Centre, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 53, 55.

³⁵⁵ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development* (Melbourne: DEECD, 2008), 26.

³⁵⁶ Ms L. Toddun, Facilitator, Glenelg Local Community Partnership, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 34.

³⁵⁷ Mr R. Juratowitch, Principal, Gippsland Education Precinct Campus, Kurnai College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 5.

³⁵⁸ See, for example, Mr D. Paproth, Deputy Regional Director, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 41–42; Mr G. Allen, Chair, Country Education Project, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 30; Mr B. Wright, Executive Officer, Highlands LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 5.

³⁵⁹ The Asquith Group, *Review of Managed Individual Pathways in Government Schools: Final Report* (Kew: The Asquith Group, 2005), 3.

Up-skilling career educators

One area of concern was the differing levels of expertise and qualifications amongst career educators. Participants noted that career teachers do not necessarily have formal qualifications in career education.³⁶⁰ Ms Kristen Burt, Careers Adviser, Padua College, estimated that approximately half of the career educators in the Frankston and Mornington Peninsula region hold a career education qualification.³⁶¹ Some participants suggested that all career teachers should hold such a qualification.³⁶² The Committee supports the view that career educators require specialised skills and knowledge and should be appropriately qualified. It therefore recommends that the Victorian Government phase in a requirement that all career teachers will have completed a postgraduate qualification in career education or equivalent training, in order that all students have access to expert assistance in planning their post-school pathway.

The Committee heard that many career educators are involved in strong networks and undertake relevant professional learning. Nevertheless, the need for better access to ongoing professional learning for career teachers was also raised,³⁶³ with some participants commenting that career teachers can find it difficult to stay abreast of education and training developments and opportunities.³⁶⁴

The Committee notes that the Victorian Government currently supports professional development for career educators by offering 20 Career Education Scholarships annually to enable career teachers in government schools to undertake a Graduate Certificate in Career Education and Development.³⁶⁵ Ms Anne Trickey, Executive Officer, Careers Connection, told the Committee that there was strong interest among career teachers in these scholarships, as well as career education scholarships offered by the Australian Government.³⁶⁶ The Committee supports the further expansion of these scholarship programs as one means of increasing the opportunities available to career teachers to build their professional expertise. Additionally, the Committee recommends that ongoing professional learning opportunities be offered to all career educators in Victorian government schools.

The need for more information about higher education

While some argued that career education often focuses too heavily on university pathways, the Committee heard that information provided to students with university aspirations can be inadequate and narrowly focused.

The Committee heard that students aspiring to attend university want access to detailed information about courses, and active advice and assistance in choosing a course. The Committee heard from tertiary students who had chosen courses without complete

³⁶⁰ Equity and Access Unit, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 12; Ms K. Burt, Careers Adviser, Padua College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 52.

³⁶¹ Ms K. Burt, Careers Adviser, Padua College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 52.

³⁶² For example, Ms K. Burt, Careers Adviser, Padua College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 52; Ms C. Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 7.

³⁶³ Australian Catholic University, Written Submission, March 2008, 4.

³⁶⁴ Mr G. Stone, Interim Executive Officer, Northern Mallee LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 38; Equity and Access Unit, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 12; Ms A. Trickey, Executive Officer, Careers Connection, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 24.

³⁶⁵ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), 'Career Education Scholarships Program,' DEECD, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/senssecyouth/careertrans/careerscholarships.htm> (accessed 3 June 2009).

³⁶⁶ Ms A. Trickey, Executive Officer, Careers Connection, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 24.

knowledge of teaching and learning styles,³⁶⁷ career outcomes³⁶⁸ or course content.³⁶⁹ Some young people also suggested that career teachers are not always knowledgeable about the range of university courses³⁷⁰ and offered little or no advice about what courses students might choose.³⁷¹ Several young people advised the Committee that they would have benefited from more advice and guidance when choosing a course. One regional student argued:

Country students are often simply encouraged to get some form of tertiary education, regardless of what it may be. I was encouraged to go to university, but my educators did not seem to have much of a suggestion as to what I should do ... I compare this with a lot of my Melbourne friends who were encouraged to do career-oriented courses to suit their abilities, i.e. commerce, accounting, law, medicine.³⁷²

Ms Sue Webb, Manager, Peninsula Campus, Monash University, told the Committee that in her experience working with secondary students, she had been surprised to find that even high-achieving students wanted more assistance to choose a university course.³⁷³

Many participants also argued that young people are sometimes given inadequate information about the range of entry points into higher education, instead receiving guidance that is narrowly focused on Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER) requirements.³⁷⁴ The Committee heard that this emphasis on the ENTER could cause young people to 'give up' their aspirations if they do not achieve the desired score.³⁷⁵ In particular, it was commonly thought that TAFE pathways into higher education are sometimes under-explored and should be more heavily emphasised in schools.³⁷⁶ On the other hand, the Committee heard that students in some socioeconomically disadvantaged areas of

³⁶⁷ Mr I. Lewis, TAFE Student, RMIT University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 36.

³⁶⁸ Mr B. Perry, Student, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 36.

³⁶⁹ Ms S. Powell, Student, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 36.

³⁷⁰ Ms A. Colahan, Student, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 36; Ms L. Davis, Student, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 36.

³⁷¹ 'Lauren' quoted by Ms G. Ferrari, Executive Officer, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 10; Ms L. Davis, Student, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 36; Ms J. Kettle, Councillor, Colac Otway Youth Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 25.

³⁷² 'Lauren', quoted by Ms G. Ferrari, Executive Officer, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 10.

³⁷³ Ms S. Webb, Manager, Peninsula Campus, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 41.

³⁷⁴ Dr L. Wilkinson, Executive Officer, Gippsland East LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 13; Ms E. Shepherd, Project Officer, Greater Green Triangle Area Consultative Committee, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 34; Mr B. Baker, Convener and Member, South West Regional Youth Affairs Network, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 11; Mr M. Keates, President, MONSU Peninsula, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 33; Ms H. McNamara, Manager, Strategic Planning, Rosebud Campus, Chisholm Institute of TAFE, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 60; Monash University Student Union Peninsula, Written Submission, May 2008, 4; Mr B. Wright, Executive Officer, Highlands LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 4; Ms S. Webb, Manager, Peninsula Campus, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 41–42. Ms C. Alphey, Student, Monash University, Peninsula Campus, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 30; Mr J. Mills, Year 12 Student, Kurnai College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 49.

³⁷⁵ Mr B. Baker, Convener and Member, South West Regional Youth Affairs Network, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 11; Mr J. Mills, Year 12 Student, Kurnai College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 49; Ms T. Johnson, Year 12 Student, Kurnai College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 49.

³⁷⁶ Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, March 2008, 6; Ms H. McNamara, Manager, Strategic Planning, Rosebud Campus, Chisholm Institute of TAFE, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 60; Mr M. Keates, President, MONSU Peninsula, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 33; Dr L. Wilkinson, Executive Officer, Gippsland East LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, Mr J. Mills, Year 12 Student, Kurnai College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 49; South West Regional Youth Affairs Network, Written Submission, April 2008, 2; Mallee Family Care, Written Submission, March 2008, 10; Mr B. Baker, Convener and Member, South West Regional Youth Affairs Network, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 11.

Melbourne are generally well informed about TAFE pathways.³⁷⁷ This argument is supported by the higher application rates for TAFE courses in these areas.

Participants highlighted other 'plan B' university entry options that students should be aware of, such as enabling programs, the completion of initial units through Open Universities Australia, or repeating year 12. While the Committee heard from a number of universities and TAFE institutes about their efforts to publicise specific information about such pathways,³⁷⁸ it is important that career educators advise students of opportunities so that young people 'will know [what] to look for when they are trying to make these decisions'.³⁷⁹ Full information about pathways into higher education might also encourage university aspirations by reinforcing the sense that university is a realistic and achievable goal.

Allowing sufficient time for individualised support

Given the complexity of post-school choices, it is not surprising that both students and career educators emphasised the importance of one-on-one discussion. Ms Leanne Healey, MIPs Coordinator, Maffra Secondary College, commented that one-on-one discussion provides opportunities for both information and emotional support:

No matter how many quirky products or websites or whatever are made available to the kids, it is the one-on-one time and the reassurance and the building of that self-confidence. That is the crucial part of any program for a school. It cannot be replaced by websites or DVDs.³⁸⁰

Ms Anne Trickey, Executive Officer, Careers Connection, observed that 'adult conversation one-on-one' also enables young people to discuss their aspirations more openly than they are able to in group activities.³⁸¹

The Committee heard that career educators often have an additional role in advising senior secondary students not simply on where to go, but on 'how to get there'.³⁸² In non-metropolitan and outer urban schools, career educators often provide information and advice on practical matters associated with moving away from home, including student finances and accommodation options. Ms Healey summarised the expansive duties of career educators in regional schools:

There is no problem with counselling the students on what is available for them; that is not an issue. But what has happened over the last seven years is that I have had to spend a lot more time in not only doing a plan for what courses they could do but now a plan for how they are going to get there, a deferral plan, a plan with mum and dad to educate them in the whys and wherefores of funding and processes. I am just spending so much more time on the successful transition.³⁸³

Various other individuals involved in career guidance, from across non-metropolitan, interface and disadvantaged metropolitan locations, also described providing intensive and

³⁷⁷ Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008.

³⁷⁸ Wodonga Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, March 2008, 3; South West Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, April 2008, 7; Ms Jan Golden, Executive Director, Education Programs, Gordon Institute of TAFE, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 70; Ms S. Webb, Manager, Peninsula Campus, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 41–42; La Trobe University, Written Submission, March 2008, 12.

³⁷⁹ Ms H. McNamara, Manager, Strategic Planning, Rosebud Campus, Chisholm Institute of TAFE, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 60.

³⁸⁰ Ms L. Healey, Managed Individual Pathways Coordinator, Maffra Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 45.

³⁸¹ Ms A. Trickey, Executive Officer, Careers Connection, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 27.

³⁸² Ms K. Hodge, Later Years Manager, Maffra Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 45; Ms C. Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 6.

³⁸³ Ms L. Healey, Managed Individual Pathways Coordinator, Maffra Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 42.

time-consuming guidance on scholarships and special entry schemes.³⁸⁴ In remote areas, schools may also play a greater part in preparing students for the social and emotional transition to university by providing opportunities to develop links outside the local community.³⁸⁵

Students who had received individualised support from a career adviser reported positive experiences of career education.³⁸⁶ Conversely, students who had limited access to individualised assistance were less satisfied, and told the Committee that they were left with unanswered questions about universities, courses, study costs and career outcomes.³⁸⁷ The Committee notes that participants' views accord with previous research findings that students prefer a 'responsive, individualised service' that moves beyond 'simply providing a book with course or employment information' and offers 'greater assistance in making sense of the vast array of information available'.³⁸⁸ A recent report based on data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth found that of all types of career education activities, students in years 10, 11 and 12 found individual conversation with a career teacher to be the most useful activity.³⁸⁹

The MIPs program, introduced in 2001, aims to provide this type of individual assistance to senior secondary students in Victoria. MIPs is intended to help students manage their post-school transitions, and develop the skills and knowledge to navigate career pathways throughout life. To this end, all students 15 years and over in government schools are provided with an individual pathway plan and associated support, including individualised discussion of their career aspirations and the study required to reach them. Additional support is provided to students considered 'at risk' of disengaging from school or not making a successful transition. Students participating in youth pathways programs in TAFE institutes or Adult and Community Education (ACE) institutions also have pathways plans.³⁹⁰

A 2005 review of the MIPs program found strong support for the initiative amongst schools and key partners.³⁹¹ Likewise, the program was endorsed by a number of inquiry participants. School-based participants told the Committee that MIPs had 'really hit pay dirt', helping students to clarify their aspirations and improving post-school outcomes.³⁹²

³⁸⁴ For example, Mr G. Cameron, Managed Individual Pathways Coordinator, Sunshine College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 6; Ms C. Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 6; Mr G. Stone, Interim Executive Officer, Northern Mallee LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 38; Ms F. Harley, Manager, Chances for Children, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 30.

³⁸⁵ Mr R. Boucher, Principal, Swifts Creek Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 33; Ms P. Nunan, Principal, Werrimull P-12 School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 51.

³⁸⁶ Mr R. Monaghan, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 18; Ms L. Thorburn, Year 12 Student, Kurnai College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 47; Ms J. Billingsley, School Captain, Benalla College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 3.

³⁸⁷ Ms K. Billington, Year 12 Student, Upper Yarra Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 16; Mr S. Robertson, Former Student, Warrnambool College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 30; Ms L. Davis, Student, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 39.

³⁸⁸ Karen Walker and others, 'Counsellor practices and student perspectives: perceptions of career counselling in Australian secondary schools,' *Australian Journal of Career Development* 15, no. 1 (2006): 41.

³⁸⁹ Sheldon Rothman and Kylie Hillman, *Career Advice in Australian Secondary Schools: Use and Usefulness*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 53 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2008), 14.

³⁹⁰ Further information about the Managed Individual Pathways program is available on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/sensecyouth/careertrans/mips/default.htm>.

³⁹¹ The Asquith Group, *Review of Managed Individual Pathways in Government Schools: Final Report* (Kew: The Asquith Group, 2005), 4.

³⁹² Mr M. Goldsworthy, Acting Principal, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 4; Ms C. Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 4; Mr D. Paproth, Deputy Regional Director, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 41-42; Mr R. Boucher, Principal, Swifts Creek Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 32; Mr B. Ridgeway, Principal, Rosebud Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 51; Mr K. Lee, Principal, Robinvale Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 35.

At the same time, the Committee found that achieving these positive outcomes requires faithful implementation of MIPs and a substantial allocation of staff time. One principal observed that time must be invested in building relationships with students before meaningful advice can be provided about their future pathways:

It needs a lot of time if you are going to do it properly. The people involved need to get to know the kids; not just cruise in, have a chat, 'Here's a career'.³⁹³

The Committee heard that where too little time is devoted to career education roles, some students miss out on the individual counselling process.³⁹⁴ A recent year 12 graduate from Warrnambool gave an illustration of how easily this could occur:

In year 12 part of the program was that you would meet with this careers counsellor. It was a group of four year 12 students for 15 minutes. I missed my appointment because I was at another meeting, and that was it for me.³⁹⁵

Several participants suggested that schools vary in the priority and time given to career education,³⁹⁶ and that staff time allocations are often insufficient.³⁹⁷ Mornington Peninsula Shire Council provided the Committee with a comparison of staff time allocated to career education, student transitions, and coordination of Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) programs in schools in the region, showing significant variation in all areas.³⁹⁸ Another participant told the Committee that allocations for career teachers can be as little as four periods per week in small schools or six periods in larger schools.³⁹⁹

The Committee heard that the time spent on career education and related activities depends largely on the resources available to career educators. One participant suggested that the time schools set aside for career education is not related to school size or academic outcomes, but instead reflects 'how readily a faculty is able to argue for a better allocation for their resources'.⁴⁰⁰ Ms Kate Hodge, Later Years Manager, Maffra Secondary College, described having to 'fight every year' to maintain career education time.⁴⁰¹ Two school principals told the Committee that while allocating staff time to career education roles is 'very, very useful', this is a difficult decision to make within school budgets.⁴⁰²

The Committee supports the MIPs program as a welcome recognition of the importance of individualised support in pathways planning. However, it is concerned to hear that the implementation of the program in some schools may not allow sufficient time for individual face-to-face discussion. The Committee therefore recommends that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development conduct further investigations towards

³⁹³ Mr B. Ridgeway, Principal, Rosebud Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 51–52.

³⁹⁴ Ms L. Watt, Member, South West Regional Youth Affairs Network, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 14; Ms A. Trickey, Executive Officer, Careers Connection, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 24.

³⁹⁵ Mr S. Robertson, Former Student, Warrnambool College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 35.

³⁹⁶ Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, Written Submission, May 2008, 3–4; Equity and Access Unit, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 12.

³⁹⁷ South East LLEN, Written Submission, May 2008, 5; Ms A. Trickey, Executive Officer, Careers Connection, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 24; Mr D. Roche, Executive Officer, South Gippsland and Bass Coast LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 14.

³⁹⁸ Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, Written Submission, May 2008, 3–4;

³⁹⁹ Ms A. Trickey, Executive Officer, Careers Connection, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 24.

⁴⁰⁰ Mr D. Conley, Youth Services Coordinator, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 3.

⁴⁰¹ Ms K. Hodge, Later Years Manager, Maffra Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 45.

⁴⁰² Mrs H. Thiele, Principal, Murrayville Community College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 51; Mr M. Goldsworthy, Acting Principal, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 4.

determining an appropriate time allocation for career education in schools, with a particular focus on individual face-to-face discussion.

Engaging parents

Given the crucial role of parents in guiding and supporting the post-school aspirations of their children, some participants argued that parents also have a critical need for information about contemporary career and education options.⁴⁰³ The Committee heard that these options have changed dramatically since many parents were in school, and that parents often lack reliable information about the range of choices and the costs and benefits of these options.⁴⁰⁴ The Committee notes that the 2005 review of the MIPs program found that good practice is enhanced by the inclusion of parents in pathway planning processes.⁴⁰⁵

Evidence revealed various ways in which schools can involve parents in career education. One career educator described the 'incredible parental support' gained for the school's year 11 'careers camp', which immerses students and parents in a variety of familiarisation activities in universities, TAFE institutes and industry workplaces.⁴⁰⁶ Another notable parental engagement model was Parents as Career Transition Support (PACTS), a program which gives parents the opportunity to participate in a series of workshops that offer information about the range of post-school options.⁴⁰⁷ The program was developed by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and is delivered by partner organisations and schools. A 2006 evaluation of the program found that participating in PACTS was enjoyable for parents, that it improved their knowledge about options, and that participation in the program encouraged parents to discuss post-school plans with their children.⁴⁰⁸

The Committee also heard about certain barriers to engaging parents in career education. One PACTS facilitator told the Committee that some schools are reluctant to offer the program, either because career teachers are 'too busy' to run the program, or because parental engagement is not a high priority within the school.⁴⁰⁹ The Committee heard that some schools have not embraced the PACTS program because it is not seen as contributing to their students' ENTERs.⁴¹⁰ On the other hand, one career teacher told the Committee that he was interested in running PACTS at his school, but was struggling to get any 'active

⁴⁰³ Melbourne's North and West Area Consultative Committee and Western Youth Futures, Written Submission, April 2008, 12; Mr M. Date, Executive Officer, Glenelg and Southern Grampians LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 6; City of Whittlesea, Written Submission, April 2008, 32; Mr P. Marple, School Captain, Benalla College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 10; Mrs A. Forster, VCE Teacher, Careers Coordinator and Work Education Coordinator, Senior School, Benalla College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 10–11; Ms A. Trickey, Executive Officer, Careers Connection, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 26.

⁴⁰⁴ Ms T. Hancock, Executive Officer, South West LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 14; Mr M. Horn, Senior Manager, Research and Policy Centre, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 53.

⁴⁰⁵ The Asquith Group, *Review of Managed Individual Pathways in Government Schools: Final Report* (Kew: The Asquith Group, 2005), 30–31, 34.

⁴⁰⁶ Ms C. Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 4.

⁴⁰⁷ Ms L. Toddun, Facilitator, Glenelg Local Community Partnership, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 37; Ms T. Hancock, Executive Officer, South West LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 14; Mr R. Johnson, Careers Pathways Manager, Swan Hill College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 21–22.

⁴⁰⁸ Lois Bedson and Daniel Perkins, *A positive influence: Equipping parents to support young people's career transitions: Evaluation of the PACTS program* (Fitzroy: Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2006), iv.

⁴⁰⁹ Mr V. Virgato, Career and Transition Coordinator, Eastern Industry Education Partnership, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 30.

⁴¹⁰ Ms H. Hickson, Executive Officer, Eastern Industry Education Partnership, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 30.

participation' from parents.⁴¹¹ Two participants noted that it may be especially hard to engage parents in their child's education where they have had negative experiences of schooling themselves.⁴¹²

The Committee believes there may be room for further support and guidance for schools seeking to engage parents in career education activities. In terms of raising aspirations towards higher education, this may be especially important in areas where parents are less likely to have experience with university themselves, and may therefore be less aware of the benefits and possibilities. The Committee also encourages schools to promote parent participation in career education or aspiration-raising activities offered by other stakeholders, including university outreach programs.

University recruitment and outreach

While schools typically focus on raising awareness of a range of post-school possibilities, universities are involved in activities aimed specifically at promoting higher education. Activities undertaken by universities to foster aspirations may be grouped into the two broad categories of recruitment and outreach.

Recruitment activities, often coordinated or undertaken by marketing or dedicated recruitment staff, are motivated by the university's interest in attracting future students. Recruitment activities provide information about courses, entry requirements and the university through publications, guest speakers and attendance at careers fairs and similar events. Some recruitment activities, such as open days and campus tours, are held in the university environment.

While recruitment activities primarily affect students who already have higher education aspirations, evidence collected by the Committee indicated that they can also encourage students who are unsure or undecided to consider university. Attendance at university open days can be particularly beneficial for young people, helping them to clarify and strengthen their aspirations, as well as enhancing their familiarity with the university environment.⁴¹³ Nevertheless, several participants stressed that the distance, travel costs and other commitments make attendance at university open days difficult for prospective students from non-metropolitan areas.⁴¹⁴

In addition to recruitment, universities may also undertake outreach activities to raise student aspirations towards higher education. Outreach differs from recruitment or marketing in that it is typically aimed at populations with lower levels of participation in higher education, and is motivated by a desire to improve access and equity for under-represented groups. Rather than promoting one particular university, outreach programs also have the broader aims of demystifying higher education,⁴¹⁵ promoting

⁴¹¹ Mr R. Johnson, Careers Pathways Manager, Swan Hill College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 21–22.

⁴¹² Mr M. Date, Executive Officer, Glenelg and Southern Grampians LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 6; Ms L. Steele, Principal, North Campus, Sunshine College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 2.

⁴¹³ Mr T. Lam, Year 12 Student, Copperfield College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 17–18; Mr D. Nguyen, Year 12 Student, Sunshine College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 12.

⁴¹⁴ Murrabit Group School Parents and Friends Club, Written Submission, February 2008, 1; Equity and Access Unit, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 12–13; Year 12 Students, Orbest Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 1; Ms J. Billingsley, School Captain, Benalla Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 3.

⁴¹⁵ Ms J. Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Support Services, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 3.

awareness of university life,⁴¹⁶ fostering university aspirations⁴¹⁷ and lifting student achievement.⁴¹⁸

The Committee heard about several outreach programs at Victorian universities, including: the University of Ballarat's Regional Schools Outreach Program; Deakin University's Regional Engagement Access Program and Metropolitan Access Program; Schools Access Monash; and Access and Success at Victoria University. Outreach programs aimed at raising aspirations were also a major theme of meetings during investigations in Scotland and Canada.

Types of outreach activity

Most outreach programs combine several categories of activity, some of which are the same as or similar to recruitment activities. One category of activities focuses on building familiarity with university environments, academics and 'university life'. The rationale is that higher education aspirations are underpinned by a sense that universities are 'taken for granted, not something that is either unheard of or out there and alien'.⁴¹⁹ This may be achieved by sending academics into schools. Professor Richard James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, argued that by sending academics into schools to talk to students, young people are able to develop a broader idea of what academics are like and what occurs in universities.⁴²⁰

Familiarity can also be built through work experience at university, campus visits or residential programs which expose students to lectures, university residence halls and other aspects of university life over several days. During its investigations in Scotland, the Committee heard about a range of successful outreach programs designed to build familiarity with tertiary education environments. For example, LIFT OFF to Success (Learning in Fife and Tayside: Opportunities for the Future) is a one-week residential program aimed at enthusing young people who are still at school about post-school learning opportunities. The program involves selected students in the middle secondary years who have been identified as having the potential to do well at college or university, but who are currently underachieving.⁴²¹

During LIFT OFF to Success, students visit different partner institutions experiencing a wide variety of subjects, most of which are not taught in school. There is a 50:50 mix of college and university experiences. Undergraduate students from participating institutions play a vital role, acting as positive role models and demystifying the tertiary education experience. Although the summer school had only been running for two years, feedback from participants and their teachers shows that exposure to different learning styles and environments, as well as entirely new subject areas, is improving aspirations and motivation for learning among many participants.⁴²²

⁴¹⁶ Monash University, Written Submission, March 2008, 2; University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

⁴¹⁷ University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

⁴¹⁸ Dr M. Davies, Co-director, Access and Success, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 22; Professor P. Steele, Academic Director, Berwick and Peninsula Campuses, Monash University, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

⁴¹⁹ Dr M. Davies, Co-director, Access and Success, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 25.

⁴²⁰ Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 15.

⁴²¹ Meeting with Ms M. Dundas, National Coordinator for Widening Participation, Scottish Wider Access Regional Forums, Edinburgh, 29 August 2008.

⁴²² *ibid.*

The Committee also heard from senior students at Kurnai College who participate in the Schools Access Monash program and are co-located with Monash University at the Gippsland Education Precinct. One year 12 student described the benefits of developing a familiarity with the university environment:

Being attached to the university has really taught me so much about how it really works. Before I was here university just seemed like all these people who were constantly studying. It seemed like a completely different world. But being attached to the uni and seeing them walking around, they are completely normal people—funnily enough! It is just so good to see that it is not going to be a gigantic step ... You are still going to have fun and have time to do your own thing as well as being able to study ...⁴²³

Opportunities to experience the university environment may therefore help to dispel inaccurate preconceptions that can discourage higher education aspirations.

The category of outreach activities with the most overlap with marketing and recruitment are those which provide accurate, factual information about higher education, including the costs and value of university study, university terminology, support services, entry requirements and alternative entry schemes, and sources of financial support. This information is presented in printed formats and in information sessions.

One example of an informational outreach activity described to the Committee is Deakin University's *Can My Wallet Afford It?* program. Unlike most activities which focus on schools, *Can My Wallet Afford It?* addressed both students and their parents with a 'plain English guide' to the value and costs of higher education. Well attended community workshops throughout Victoria's Western District complemented the written guide. Mr Vince Callaghan, Member, South West LLEN, told the Committee that a program like *Can My Wallet Afford It?* is 'essential', but should not be linked to any specific university.⁴²⁴ Ms Anne Trickey, Executive Officer, Careers Connection in Benalla, told the Committee that the program had been successful in helping parents to see the 'possibilities and opportunities' and that she would like to implement it in her region.⁴²⁵

Outreach programs sometimes include activities designed to support student achievement, often but not always focused at the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) level. Activities may include literacy projects in early secondary school, individual tutoring from university students, extension studies, revision lectures, and equity specific enrichment and learning activities held at school and on campus.⁴²⁶ The Committee also heard of university outreach activities aimed at lifting student achievement which include teacher professional learning.⁴²⁷ For example, through the Teacher Leadership component of Access and Success, Victoria University works collaboratively with teachers in partner schools to lift achievement by enhancing teacher expertise and retention in the profession.⁴²⁸

⁴²³ Mr J. Mills, Year 12 Student, Kurnai College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 67.

⁴²⁴ Mr V. Callaghan, Member, South West LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 16.

⁴²⁵ Ms A. Trickey, Executive Officer, Careers Connection, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 26–27.

⁴²⁶ Various activities are described in Access and Success, Victoria University, Written Submission, August 2008, 6; Professor P. Steele, Academic Director, Berwick and Peninsula Campuses, Monash University, Written Submission, March 2008, 2; Centre for Regional Development, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 7; Mr R. Juratowitch, Campus Principal, Kurnai College, Gippsland Education Precinct, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 4; Supplementary information provided by Deakin University, March 2009.

⁴²⁷ Professor P. Steele, Academic Director, Berwick and Peninsula Campuses, Monash University, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

⁴²⁸ Access and Success, Victoria University, Written Submission, August 2008, 8–9.

Finally, outreach programs often incorporate activities intended to inspire or motivate students. This can take the form of motivational presentations by academics or other university staff. Universities may also engage their own students to act as mentors to secondary students, to assist with application processes, or to speak as ‘ambassadors’ of the university. Mr Tony Edwards, Project Manager, Access and Success, Victoria University, described the value of having university mentors work with secondary students:

... as they worked they were exchanging amazing amounts of information about their commonality—that they came from a similar geographic area and their parents were from a non-English speaking background—and they related to each other things like, ‘I am in the second year of my course, and I found it hard, but these are the successes I have experienced’. That exchange in itself was gold, because they were handing over a whole lot of knowledge that you can only get from people who are experiencing it firsthand.⁴²⁹

The importance of peer mentors who can share their experiences with younger students was also emphasised by representatives of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation,⁴³⁰ and the Scottish Wider Access Regional Forums.⁴³¹ It was stressed, however, that mentoring initiatives should form part of an integrated approach to addressing the multiple barriers many young people face when considering their post-secondary options.

Effectiveness of outreach

The Committee heard mixed views about the effectiveness of outreach activities. In Canada and Scotland where outreach programs are well established, the Committee heard that research has demonstrated the effectiveness of some programs. Professor Richard James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, also offered a strong endorsement of outreach programs. Professor James pointed to findings from the United Kingdom showing that where academic staff work with students in the early stages of secondary schooling, aspirations for university study and the rate of transition to university can be lifted.⁴³² Evidence received from Deakin University,⁴³³ Monash University⁴³⁴ and the University of Ballarat⁴³⁵ suggested that some outreach schemes have resulted in significant improvements in student participation from target equity groups.

On the other hand, Professor Kay Lipson, Dean, Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale Campus, Swinburne University of Technology, stated that evidence about the outcomes of outreach activities is ‘inconclusive’, adding that it is difficult to evaluate their effectiveness.⁴³⁶ The Committee heard that the Schools Access Monash Program has enjoyed particular success at some schools, but resulted in ‘very little change’ at others.⁴³⁷ In his capacity as Academic Director, Berwick and Peninsula Campuses, Monash University, Professor Phillip

⁴²⁹ Mr T. Edwards, Project Manager, Access and Success, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 25–26.

⁴³⁰ Meeting with representatives of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Montreal, 2 September 2008.

⁴³¹ Meeting with Ms M. Dundas, National Coordinator for Widening Participation, Scottish Wider Access Regional Forums, Edinburgh, 29 August 2008.

⁴³² Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 14.

⁴³³ Dr J. Oriel, Head, Student Equity Unit, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 52–53.

⁴³⁴ Ms S. Webb, Campus Manager, Peninsula Campus, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 41; Professor P. Steele, Academic Director, Berwick and Peninsula Campuses, Monash University, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

⁴³⁵ Supplementary information provided by the University of Ballarat, March 2009.

⁴³⁶ Professor K. Lipson, Dean, Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale Campus, Swinburne University of Technology, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 18.

⁴³⁷ Professor P. Steele, Academic Director, Berwick and Peninsula Campuses, Monash University, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

Steele commented that further research is needed to evaluate the impact of outreach activities on participation rates, and to determine the most cost-effective models.⁴³⁸

The Committee agrees that ongoing research is needed to establish the effectiveness of outreach activities in the Australian context, and also acknowledges the research already being conducted in this area. Most university outreach programs currently include an evaluation or research component. Although still in its early stages, Access and Success at Victoria University is a notable example of an outreach program with a strong research focus.

During international investigations, the Committee was interested to note major coordination efforts in the delivery of aspiration-raising activities linked to a sound research component. For example, the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation has implemented numerous pilot projects aimed at testing the relative effectiveness and efficiency of various aspiration-raising and other interventions against randomly assigned control groups. An important aspect of the pilot projects has been identifying which interventions are practical for the government to take on.⁴³⁹ While further research will offer a clearer picture of the effectiveness of outreach activities, the Committee also observes an emerging consensus about some of the characteristics that are likely to contribute to successful outreach programs.

Engaging younger students

While university outreach programs have traditionally focused on students in the final years of secondary school, many participants suggested that students should be familiarised with university from a much earlier age.⁴⁴⁰ This perspective is based on international research, and on the understanding that young people begin making decisions about the future earlier than previously thought. Ms Pat O'Connell, Executive Officer, Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN, described the shortcomings of the current approach:

We are adding it in at about year 10, year 11, year 12, when a lot of young people have already formed their opinion about who they are, what they can do and where they see themselves going.⁴⁴¹

By the final years of high school, students may have lost interest in achieving at school, while others will have left school altogether.

The Committee found during its investigations in Scotland and Canada that there is awareness internationally of the need to reach students at an earlier age. In Scotland, the Committee was advised about Greater Opportunity of Access and Learning with Schools (GOALS), a widening participation project which reached almost 160,000 young people from 300 schools between 2000 and 2008. The aim of the program was to raise awareness, aspirations, achievement and application rates through a range of activities targeted at

⁴³⁸ *ibid.*

⁴³⁹ Meeting with representatives of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Montreal, 2 September 2008.

⁴⁴⁰ Centre for Regional Development, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 7; Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, March 2008, 7; Mr I. Whitehead, Former School Principal, Written Submission, May 2008, 3; Mr I. Haddock, Koorie Home-school Liaison Officer, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 23; Associate Professor H. Ballis, Acting Pro Vice-Chancellor, Monash University, Gippsland Campus, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 28; Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 14; Dr A. Harvey, Acting Executive Director, Bendigo Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 30.

⁴⁴¹ Ms P. O'Connell, Executive Officer, Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 24.

students from late primary through to late secondary school, as well as their parents. The Committee heard that GOALS was developed in response to increasing awareness that the traditional approach of 'sending in the university recruiters at age 16' is far too late to address the needs of under-represented groups.⁴⁴² Similarly, in Canada the Committee heard that the career education and aspiration-raising programs piloted by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation have focused on students from late primary through to the end of secondary school.⁴⁴³

The Committee notes that several university outreach programs currently operating in Victoria involve students in the early years of secondary school in an effort to raise awareness of the nature of higher education. The Committee is also aware that some Victorian universities have begun extending outreach activities into primary schools. Supported by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Monash University through its Gippsland campus has initiated the Monash Discovery Club. Working with principals of local primary schools, the Club will give students in years 5 and 6 the opportunity to 'discover' university.⁴⁴⁴ The University of Ballarat Regional School Outreach Program will also begin a pilot program with students in years 4 to 6 at Cape Clear Primary School, aimed at encouraging these students to continue school beyond year 10 and consider tertiary education.⁴⁴⁵

Targeting student achievement

Given the important relationship between academic achievement and university aspirations, focusing on student achievement might be a particularly effective approach to outreach. One achievement-centred outreach program that was brought to the Committee's attention during its international investigations was the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program presently being piloted by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation and the Government of British Columbia. AVID is a five-year, in-school academic support program involving 1,200 students in years 5 to 12 across 20 schools. The program aims to prepare students for post-secondary studies by placing them in advanced post-secondary preparatory classes, which provide them with the skills they require for university style learning. Program participants are supported by specially trained teachers and tutors, as well as an interdisciplinary School Site Team.⁴⁴⁶

The Committee notes that extension opportunities in Victoria often appear to be directed at high-achieving students. In contrast, the AVID program is directed primarily at average students, who are supported with skills and strategies to tackle the advanced post-secondary preparatory classes. The Committee believes that such programs may serve a valuable purpose in building the skills and confidence of middle achieving Victorian students who may be on the threshold of developing aspirations towards higher education.

⁴⁴² Meeting with Ms M. Dundas, National Coordinator for Widening Participation, Scottish Wider Access Regional Forums, Edinburgh, 29 August 2008.

⁴⁴³ Meeting with representatives of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Montreal, 2 September 2008.

⁴⁴⁴ Monash University, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

⁴⁴⁵ Supplementary information provided by the University of Ballarat, March 2009.

⁴⁴⁶ Meeting with representatives of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Montreal, 2 September 2008.

Building effective partnerships with schools

Several university-based participants stressed that successful outreach programs rest on a foundation of strong partnership between universities and schools. Dr Merryn Davies, Co-director, Access and Success, Victoria University, told the Committee that the 'significance of developing partnerships that are going to be very strong and very enduring' was probably the 'most important theme' arising from Access and Success.⁴⁴⁷ Ms Sue Webb, Manager, Peninsula Campus, Monash University, attributed the varying impact of Schools Access Monash at individual schools to differences in the strength of the underlying school-university relationship, especially the support of school leadership.⁴⁴⁸ Likewise, Professor Phillip Steele, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Campus Coordination and Academic Director, at the Berwick and Peninsula campuses, claimed that unless the school is committed, outreach programs are a waste of resources.⁴⁴⁹

A number of schools participating in the inquiry indicated that they are eager to be involved in aspiration-raising and other outreach activities, and feel that such activities would be effective.⁴⁵⁰ Mr Kevin Lee, Principal, Robinvale Secondary College, envisioned a relationship with a local university similar to that with a sister city:

For example, if Robinvale Secondary College was attached somehow through magical strings to La Trobe University at Bundoora and Mildura, the relationship would be established. We would have points of contact, we would have exchange visits and we would have all sorts of things—which we do with our sister city in France.⁴⁵¹

Mr Lee suggested that such an arrangement could give regional schools access to facilities they may lack, as well as allowing students to develop an understanding of university life.⁴⁵² Another principal suggested that clustering arrangements between schools could make involvement in outreach activities easier in non-metropolitan areas.⁴⁵³ Some participants also suggested that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's regional offices should have a role in coordinating such partnerships.⁴⁵⁴

On the other hand, several school-based participants described difficulties associated with university partnerships in outreach programs. Some school administrators reported that participation in university activities and programs could be difficult to administer, with the need for a staff member at the school to act as a coordinator.⁴⁵⁵ The Committee heard that university programs may not be taken up for this reason.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁴⁷ Dr M. Davies, Co-director, Access and Success, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 27.

⁴⁴⁸ Ms S. Webb, Campus Manager, Peninsula Campus, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 41.

⁴⁴⁹ Professor P. Steele, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Campus Coordination and Academic Director, Berwick and Peninsula Campuses, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 45.

⁴⁵⁰ Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Written Submission, March 2008, 7–8; Ms T. Burgoyne, Principal, Portland Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 18; South West Association of Post Primary Principals, Written Submission, April 2008, 10.

⁴⁵¹ Mr K. Lee, Principal, Robinvale Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 35.

⁴⁵² *ibid.*

⁴⁵³ Mr C. Houlihan, Principal, Padua College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 53.

⁴⁵⁴ Ms T. Burgoyne, Principal, Portland Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 18; Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Written Submission, March 2008, 7; Professor P. Steele, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Campus Coordination and Academic Director, Berwick and Peninsula Campuses, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 44.

⁴⁵⁵ Mr C. Houlihan, Principal, Padua College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 53; Mr K. Lee, Principal, Robinvale Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 35; Mr M. Goldsworthy, Acting Principal, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 8.

⁴⁵⁶ Mr K. Lee, Principal, Robinvale Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 35.

Other participants observed that universities must be sensitive to the needs and views of schools and students if they are to build successful partnerships. Without this sensitivity, outreach programs have the potential to be perceived as judgemental. The vicCentral Highlands Area Consultative Committee, while supportive of outreach activities, highlighted the need for an underlying acknowledgement that many regional young people simply do not wish to go to university, and argued that any attempts to influence young people's aspirations must be conducted in a non-judgemental way.⁴⁵⁷

During the inquiry, Victoria University was recognised for its success in building effective relationships with schools.⁴⁵⁸ It has also previously been recognised and commended by the Australian Universities Quality Agency.⁴⁵⁹ Dr Merryn Davies, Co-director, Access and Success, Victoria University, explained that its success in building partnerships with schools rests on its respectful approach:

Schools need to be treated with great care and respect. You do not come into a school saying, 'We are from the university and we know what is right, we know what is good for you'.⁴⁶⁰

Mr Tony Edwards, Project Manager, Access and Success, emphasised the importance of working with the school's priorities rather than simply rolling out a program:

... in the very first 50 or 60 minutes that we have a meeting with them we just listen rather than talk, and I think that is important. We need to look at their strategic plan and appreciate that, and we need to look at their annual implementation data and strategies and try to see how we can weave in with that rather than tack onto it.⁴⁶¹

The Committee was impressed with Victoria University's approach to working with schools, which illuminates some of the features and benefits of a genuine partnership. At the same time, the Committee recognises that this approach reflects the university's unique mission, history and context, which is underpinned by a mandate to actively engage with the western suburbs community. Nevertheless, the Committee believes the model may provide a valuable example for other universities seeking to strengthen school partnerships in outreach activities.

Collaborating across institutional boundaries

While university recruitment programs typically spring from competitive interests, the Committee heard that a collaborative approach is likely to be more beneficial for outreach activities. Professor Joyce Kirk, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Students, RMIT University, described the benefits of a new partnership between RMIT University, Victoria University and the University of Melbourne around equity programs in schools and the community:

We are working on a partnership model rather than a competition model. The idea is that we are raising aspirations, we are not competing for students. I think when initiatives are framed in that way, the chances of success are much greater.⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁷ vicCentral Highlands Area Consultative Committee, Written Submission, March 2008, 9.

⁴⁵⁸ Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 17; Mr G. McLean, General Manager, Youth Transitions Division, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 July 2008, 5.

⁴⁵⁹ Australian Universities Quality Agency, *Report of an Audit of Victoria University* (Melbourne: AUQA, 2006), 16.

⁴⁶⁰ Dr M. Davies, Co-director, Access and Success, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 27.

⁴⁶¹ Mr T. Edwards, Project Manager, Access and Success, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 27.

⁴⁶² Professor J. Kirk, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Students, RMIT University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 14–15.

Likewise, Dr Kerry Ferguson, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Equity and Student Services, La Trobe University, told the Committee that funding models for university outreach programs should seek to enhance institutional collaboration. Dr Ferguson argued that universities 'do not want to be falling over one another' to access outreach funding, but should instead be seeking to build partnerships within the sector, with local governments and other organisations.⁴⁶³

The Committee heard varied opinions regarding the extent to which universities should be expected to engage in outreach activities. Higher education sector representatives commented that not all universities consider outreach to be part of the core business of their institutions.⁴⁶⁴ Dr Jennifer Oriel, Head, Student Equity Unit, Deakin University, observed that limited incentives and penalties currently mean that universities, particularly universities with prestigious reputations, have no reason to improve their performance on equity measures.⁴⁶⁵

On the other hand, some participants suggested that outreach programs should be the responsibility of all higher education institutions. The Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch) argued that the Australian Government should require all universities to have targets to substantially increase the proportion of students from low socioeconomic status and rural backgrounds.⁴⁶⁶ Dr Oriel agreed that increasing the participation rates of students who are educationally disadvantaged would require 'affirmative measures introduced across the board'.⁴⁶⁷

The Committee agrees that outreach should be approached as a joint responsibility within the higher education sector. This should be underpinned by a collaborative approach by universities to outreach activities, to ensure that the focus is on lifting participation in higher education, not on recruitment for any single institution. A more collaborative approach may also reduce the duplication of effort across institutions, and open up the benefits of effective outreach initiatives to a wider audience of potential students.

During international investigations, the Committee learnt about the collaborative approach to outreach activities facilitated by the Scottish Wider Access Regional Forums. All of Scotland's higher education institutions are members of the forums, which work jointly on programs designed to raise aspirations and achievement through close relationships with schools and communities, support courses and summer schools, university taster programs and mentor schemes.⁴⁶⁸ The Committee believes that the forums offer a good example of the potential for collaboration in outreach activities.

⁴⁶³ Dr K. Ferguson, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Equity and Student Services, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 14.

⁴⁶⁴ Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 11.; Professor K. Lipson, Dean, Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale Campus, Swinburne University of Technology, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 15.

⁴⁶⁵ Dr J. Oriel, Head, Student Equity Unit, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 56.

⁴⁶⁶ Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, May 2008, 8.

⁴⁶⁷ Dr J. Oriel, Head, Student Equity Unit, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 56.

⁴⁶⁸ Meeting with Ms M. Dundas, National Coordinator for Widening Participation, Scottish Wider Access Regional Forums, Edinburgh, 29 August 2008.

Community engagement

Some inquiry participants pointed to a need for university outreach to move beyond schools to include engagement with the broader community. Community engagement aims to make the university 'a known part of the community', rather than an occasional visitor.⁴⁶⁹ The South East Development (Melbourne) Area Consultative Committee argued that without a broader community focus, higher education institutions will struggle to connect with communities that are 'economically disadvantaged and disengaged from education'.⁴⁷⁰ Associate Professor Harry Ballis, Acting Pro Vice-Chancellor, Gippsland Campus, Monash University, told the Committee that there is increasing recognition that the '70s model' of the 'university on the hill', removed from society, is no longer adequate, especially in regional settings:

I am now saying that we need to revise that. We need to be out there. I believe a regional university campus has capacity to value add to our communities so that we are increasing our engagement and visibility in ways that will do that.⁴⁷¹

The Committee is aware that other universities are recognising the need for greater engagement with their communities by, for example, opening open days to the broader public and incorporating community activities into the curriculum.⁴⁷²

Although only a few inquiry participants highlighted community engagement as an addition to school-based university outreach activities, the Committee is conscious of a growing awareness in the higher education sector of the importance of community engagement in outreach. At the 2008 Forum on Higher Education and Social Inclusion, Ms Ann Stewart, National Co-convenor of Equal Opportunity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia, argued for a revised model of outreach focused on community engagement to raise university aspirations over the longer term:

While any new model of outreach would retain the most effective of its traditional elements, it needs to shift focus substantially from school-based to community-based activities through multiple sites of engagement, which can result in long-term sustainable relationships, building trust and mutual benefit between all stakeholders.⁴⁷³

In this model of outreach, universities work together with schools, TAFE institutes and community groups, with university promoted as one of a range of post-school and lifelong learning options worthy of consideration.⁴⁷⁴

Access and Success at Victoria University offers a practical illustration of how outreach and community engagement may be combined to lift aspirations for tertiary study. One component of the project has been the Kinder Kinda Program, which sought to address low levels of pre-school participation in parts of Melbourne's west by engaging with parents and children in their local public library. Pre-service early childhood education teachers, together with Victoria University staff, delivered programs for both parents and children, with parents able to work towards a certificate in early childhood development.⁴⁷⁵ Dr Merryn Davies,

⁴⁶⁹ Ms J. Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Support Services, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 5.

⁴⁷⁰ South East Development (Melbourne) Area Consultative Committee, Written Submission, May 2008, 4.

⁴⁷¹ Associate Professor H. Ballis, Acting Pro Vice-Chancellor, Gippsland Campus, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 29.

⁴⁷² James McWha, *Community engagement: a case study looking at the evolution of the University of Adelaide's experience*, (presentation to the 6th Annual Higher Education Summit, Sydney, 4 April 2008).

⁴⁷³ Anne Stewart, *Outreach and social inclusion: Outreach for social cohesion* (paper presented at the Forum on Higher Education and Social Exclusion, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 16 July 2008), 6.

⁴⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁷⁵ Dr M. Davies, Co-director, Access and Success, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 24.

Co-director, Access and Success, explained that while the links to university aspirations may not be obvious, research suggests that engagement at this level has an important impact on a community's disposition to schooling and further education.⁴⁷⁶

Resourcing for outreach programs

One theme to emerge in the inquiry is that to be effective, outreach programs must be adequately resourced. Mr Kent Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, commented that even universities that recognise the importance of outreach activities may not have the resources at hand to implement them:

I will make the point now that it is resource based and we run a tight ship as it is. Having people go out to schools to do what has to be considered very important work simply means that they do not do other work. One of the challenges I have is to find out who is to do this other work.⁴⁷⁷

Several participants commented that the investment of time and resources required in outreach limits the extent of outreach activities or the number of schools that universities are able to reach.⁴⁷⁸ One added that outreach (as opposed to recruitment) activities may not have any direct financial pay-off for universities in terms of student enrolments.⁴⁷⁹ A Monash University representative told the Committee that implementing the Schools Access Monash program was 'quite expensive' at around \$25,000 per school.⁴⁸⁰

Universities can currently apply for Australian Government funding to support outreach programs, as well as a range of other equity related activities, through the Higher Education Equity Support Program. Funds are allocated on the basis of the numbers of students from low socioeconomic status and regional or isolated backgrounds, to cover both outreach activities to attract these students, and activities to support them while they are studying.⁴⁸¹ In 2008, Victorian institutions received \$2.3 million through the program to assist students from equity groups.⁴⁸²

As previously noted, the Australian Government has recently set out ambitious targets for participation in higher education, with a goal of 40 per cent of all Australian 25- to 34-year-olds to have a Bachelor level qualification or higher by 2025. A recent Australian Government policy paper remarked that in working towards this goal, the Government is investing its effort and funding to 'lift the aspirations of students who would previously never have considered university as an option'.⁴⁸³ University representatives participating in the inquiry agreed that new participation targets would require increased investment in equity

⁴⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷⁷ Mr K. Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 47.

⁴⁷⁸ Associate Professor H. Ballis, Acting Pro Vice-Chancellor, Gippsland Campus, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 28; Mr K. Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 47; Professor P. Steele, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Campus Coordination and Academic Director, Berwick and Peninsula Campuses, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 44; Ms J. Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Support Services, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 5; Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 11.

⁴⁷⁹ Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 11.

⁴⁸⁰ Professor P. Steele, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Campus Coordination and Academic Director, Berwick and Peninsula Campuses, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 44.

⁴⁸¹ *Amendment No. 3 to the Other Grants Guidelines 2006* (Cwlth), s. 1.55.

⁴⁸² Meeting with representatives of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra, 17 June 2008.

⁴⁸³ Australian Government, *Universities, Innovation and Education Revolution* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 7.

funding.⁴⁸⁴ Increased funding for equity purposes was also recommended by the Review of Australian Higher Education, which proposed that four per cent of total teaching grants be specifically directed at increasing access and participation for under-represented groups.⁴⁸⁵

To support its participation targets, the Australian Government has recently announced further investment in equity programs for Australian universities, with a particular focus on improving participation in low socioeconomic status areas. The Government plans to implement a two-pronged strategy to encourage universities to take a greater leadership role in lifting the participation rate of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Over four years, this will include \$325 million for financial rewards for universities attracting and retaining low socioeconomic status students, and \$108 million to enable universities to build partnerships with schools in low socioeconomic status areas.⁴⁸⁶ The Committee welcomes these moves to boost funding for university outreach activities.

Using an integrated support approach to raise aspirations

Throughout the inquiry, the Committee heard that most groups currently under-represented in higher education face multiple barriers to participation, and will therefore require multiple interventions and supports. Initiatives to raise aspirations will be an important part of any comprehensive strategy aimed at increasing the higher education participation of under-represented groups. At the same time, the Committee recognises that raising aspirations will be both difficult and futile if other barriers discussed in this report are not addressed. Hence, initiatives to raise aspirations towards higher education must be accompanied by supports that provide disadvantaged groups with a genuine opportunity to participate.

The Committee found that international best practice interventions employ an integrated approach, providing the necessary emotional, community, social and financial supports that make participation in higher education a viable choice among low socioeconomic status and 'first-in-family' students. One example was provided in Ontario, where the government has implemented a variety of programs aimed at increasing the accessibility of post-secondary education. The government's projects include: CA\$27 million in funding over three years for university, college and community-based initiatives to inform, advise and encourage first generation students to pursue further education; CA\$3 million in bursaries provided over three years; and CA\$19 million to provide Pathways to Education over a four-year period.⁴⁸⁷

The Pathways to Education Program provides four key supports to assist young people to successfully complete secondary school, continue into post-secondary programs and become actively engaged in their career development:

⁴⁸⁴ Professor S. Walker, Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 18; Dr A. Harvey, Acting Executive Director, Bendigo Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 35; Dr K. Ferguson, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Equity and Student Services, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 13; Ms C. Murphy, Deputy Principal, Office of Admissions, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 13; Mr C. Sheargold, Associate Vice-Chancellor, Melbourne Campus, Australian Catholic University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 18.

⁴⁸⁵ Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 159.

⁴⁸⁶ Australian Government, *Universities, Innovation and Education Revolution* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 7.

⁴⁸⁷ The Hon J. Milloy, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities (Ontario), Meeting with representatives of the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Toronto, September 2008.

1. Intensive tutoring in five core subjects provides academic assistance.
2. Social support is provided in the form of group mentoring for younger students, and speciality and career mentoring in senior secondary school.
3. Immediate financial support (such as free bus tickets to support school attendance) is available, along with bursaries of up to CA\$4,000 for post-secondary education.
4. Student-parent support workers provide advocacy support by connecting young people, parents, school administration, teachers and community agencies.⁴⁸⁸

The Committee heard that Pathways to Education is an award-winning program that has proven results. First created and implemented in Regent Park, Toronto, the Pathways to Education Program has proven to be a highly effective model which is now expanding to five additional locations in Canada.⁴⁸⁹ Since the program began operating in 2001, the school drop-out decreased from 56 per cent to 10 per cent. Absenteeism was also reduced substantially. Impressively, the transition of secondary school graduates to post-secondary education increased from 20 per cent to 80 per cent, with more than 90 per cent of those students being the first in their families to attend post-secondary institutions.⁴⁹⁰

The Boston Consulting Group analysed the costs and benefits to society of the Pathways to Education Program, concluding that the return on investment is CA\$25 for each dollar invested in the program.⁴⁹¹ The cumulative lifetime benefit to society of a student in Pathways to Education is CA\$400,000 and the net present value to society for every participating student is CA\$50,000.⁴⁹² The findings also indicated a dramatic increase in the overall quality of life in Regent Park, including a decrease in teenage pregnancy rates and a significant reduction in violent crime and property crime reports in the community and adjacent neighbourhoods.⁴⁹³ This suggests that large-scale, integrated programs may be a worthwhile investment not only for improving participation in higher education for under-represented groups, but as well as for the benefit to society.

Conclusion and recommendations

There is now strong evidence that differences in the aspirations of young people across Victoria are an important contributor to geographical differences in higher education participation rates. Inquiry participants highlighted the range of complex and interrelated factors that influence young people's beliefs about the value and attainability of higher education. The Committee found that socioeconomic status can exert a strong influence on aspirations, while distance can pose further barriers to the development of higher education aspirations. Therefore, the Committee believes that as part of its new Higher Education Plan, the Victorian Government should implement a statewide program aimed at raising aspirations towards higher education for students from under-represented groups. This program should reflect international best practice and engage students and their parents

⁴⁸⁸ Pathways to Education, 'About us,' Pathways to Education, <http://www.pathwaystoeducation.ca/about.html> (accessed 9 July 2009).

⁴⁸⁹ The Hon J. Milloy, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities (Ontario), Meeting with representatives of the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Toronto, September 2008.

⁴⁹⁰ Pathways to Education, 'Results,' Pathways to Education, <http://www.pathwaystoeducation.ca/results.html> (accessed 9 July 2009).

⁴⁹¹ Pathways to Education, 'Results: The Boston Consulting Group Assessment (2007),' Pathways to Education, <http://www.pathwaystoeducation.ca/boston.html> (accessed 9 July 2009).

⁴⁹² *ibid.*

⁴⁹³ *ibid.*

from the early and middle years of secondary school, include activities aimed at raising student achievement, and include a rigorous evaluation and research program.

The Committee recognises the vital role played by career education in schools in helping students to consider a range of post-school pathways, and opening up the possibility of higher education to those students who might not have considered it. Substantial progress has been made in developing career education in Victorian schools, and the Committee believes that this should be sustained and built on. The Committee has therefore recommended a number of measures to ensure that all Victorian students have access to effective career education.

The Committee also heard about the efforts of universities to raise aspirations towards higher education through outreach programs. The Committee is pleased to note that these activities will be further supported by recent reforms to Australian Government funding, and believes that the current national policy environment provides an impetus for improved collaboration among stakeholders aimed at raising aspirations for higher education. The Committee also sees a role for the Victorian Government in supporting a more coordinated approach to outreach, which also integrates strategies aimed at addressing the multiple barriers to participation in higher education by under-represented groups.

Recommendations

4.1 That the Victorian Government implement a statewide program aimed at raising aspirations towards higher education for students from under-represented groups. The program should:

- engage students from the early and middle years of secondary school;
- raise awareness among students and their families of higher education as a worthwhile and viable post-school pathway;
- integrate and resource targeted programs to assist students to improve academic achievement to meet their aspirations;
- integrate aspiration-raising activities with other strategies to address the barriers to higher education participation for under-represented groups; and
- include a rigorous program of evaluation and research.

- 4.2 That the Victorian Government continue to fund the Managed Individual Pathways program, and improve the quality of career education in Victorian schools by:
- phasing in a requirement for all career educators to have a relevant graduate diploma or equivalent qualification;
 - providing additional scholarships for career educators to attain a relevant graduate diploma;
 - providing ongoing professional learning for all Victorian career educators; and
 - consulting with the Career Education Association of Victoria to determine appropriate staff time allocations for career education roles, with the aim of improving levels of individualised student support.
- 4.3 That the Victorian Government, in partnership with local governments, universities and other stakeholders, consider further opportunities for co-location of school and university facilities in areas where participation in higher education is low.
- 4.4 That the Victorian Government develop systemic programs at a school and regional level aimed at engaging parents in career education and aspiration-raising activities, and regularly monitor and review the outcomes of these programs.