20 May 2011

Ms Kerryn Risely, Executive Officer
Education and Training Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE 3002
Email: etc@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Ms Risely

Parliamentary Inquiry into the education of Gifted and Talented Students

Universities Australia has invited its member institutions to respond to your invitation to make a submission to the Victorian Parliament’s Education and Training Committee’s enquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students.

Queensland University of Technology appreciates the invitation to participate and a brief submission to the Inquiry follows.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Professor Ken Bowman AM
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
Submission

to

Parliament of Victoria
Education and Training Committee

Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students

Organisation: Queensland University of Technology

Address: GPO Box 2434
         Brisbane Qld 4001

Phone: 07 3138 4055

Contact email: k.ohare@qut.edu.au
Queensland University of Technology

Details of programs you currently provide to gifted and talented students:

Programs directed at school-aged students
QUT provides a number of opportunities for academic high achievers from high schools. For example:

Start QUT: This program provides an opportunity for high achieving high school students to study two subjects per year at QUT while they are completing Years 11 and/or 12. This program is known as Start QUT:


- Start QUT students are typically students who have achieved high academic results in their previous schooling or are deemed by their schools to have the potential to do so;
- Students do not pay tuition fees while they are studying in the program;
- Start QUT students study the subjects in the same classes as current QUT students, and at the same time improve their preparation for university;
- Allows students who pass two units (grade of 4 or above, 7 being the highest) to gain admission to selected QUT courses and start studies in Semester 1, following completion of Year 12;
- Successful START QUT students may receive academic credit for up to two units (24 credit points) towards an entry course for related units, which has the potential to reduce future debt;
- Successful START QUT students may also be eligible for up to 4 credit points towards their Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE).

The large majority of students have a positive experience in the program – it extends their learning, gives them an experience of university, and enables them to make an informed decision about what to study when they enter university. Many students note that they feel much more confident coming to university after participating in START QUT. Students who pass the program receive guaranteed entry into a number of courses at QUT, a bonus rank and the ability to apply for credit for the two units they have successfully completed.

Academic Extension and Enrichment Programs: Other opportunities are provided for high school students – of any age – to participate in informal extension and enrichment programs or to take formal subjects (as non-award students). Typically, these opportunities are offered in the STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) and have emerged as part of the university’s engagement efforts with schools and the teaching profession. Some innovative programs are emerging to attract and support gifted and talented students in other fields such as Creative Industries, and from equity target group backgrounds (e.g. low income and indigenous students).

Promoting learning opportunities to academic high achievers: QUT also provides a range of information and promotional events directed at high school students and their parents regarding
university study opportunities. Specific events are held for Year 11 high-achieving students and their parents. These workshops provide participants with practical study tips and advice to enhance their study skills in the lead up to Year 12 and information on the START QUT program and other QUT scholarships including merit-based scholarships (see 1.2). A session is dedicated to helping parents support their high achieving students.

Academic Scholarships Evenings – current scholarship holders are provided with advice about how to make successful scholarship applications, and the types of benefits available as a result of accepting a high achievers’ scholarship at QUT.

Programs directed at incoming and current QUT students:

The Vice-Chancellor’s Scholarship Program and the Deans’ Scholars Programs provide a means of attracting and acknowledging students with very high university entry scores (usually OPs of 1 or 2 but other criteria also exist, e.g. OP 1-5 in case of elite athletes). To continue to receive their financial scholarship, VC’s scholars must maintain a high level of academic progress throughout their degree.

These programs encourage and support students to challenge themselves in their learning within and beyond the official curriculum.

Learning is seen not only in narrow assessment terms but also in terms of nurturing an interest in broader intellectual and research pursuits and in building a range of personal and professional capabilities. To continue to receive their financial scholarship, VC’s scholars must maintain good academic progress throughout their degree.

For example, the Vice Chancellor’s Scholarship Program allows students to be part of a program known as the College of Excellence. The College of Excellence (http://www.scholarships.qut.edu.au/collegeofexcellence/index.jsp) promotes a range of existing opportunities already available to other students (e.g. international exchanges, internships, mentorships, vacation research scholarships) or College-specific activities (e.g. speaker/leadership/volunteering, etc). Students must participate in activities to maintain their membership of the College. The College of Excellence is also open to other undergraduate students who achieve a GPA greater than or equal to 6. These students are invited to be members of the College but must provide an application demonstrating interest and potential benefits of membership, to be accepted into the College of Excellence. There is some evidence that students who attain high secondary schooling exam results may be more likely to have educationally and socially advantaged backgrounds, though such differential results do not persist during university (e.g. Faculty of Education Wide Bay schools project).

Vacation Research Experience Placements: Most faculties at QUT provide opportunities for high achieving students to participate in Vacation Research Experience Placements http://www.qut.edu.au/research/rhd/ug/vres.jsp. This provides these students with an opportunity

---

1 These programs are in addition to traditional approaches to supporting academic high achievers via honours programs, special programs with very high entry scores etc.
to assist with research projects, be academically challenged within a research environment, be mentored by a QUT researcher and otherwise, gain employment skills and a modest stipend.

QUT also supports students to participate in a number of national and international competitions (e.g. in STEM disciplines) that challenge participants and draw out their creative and intellectual excellence as a way of extending and challenging them.

Your Experiences and Issues Surrounding these Programs:

High achieving students are often looking for additional challenges and opportunities. Programs like Start QUT, the College of Excellence, Dean’s Scholars’ Programs, and the Vacation Research Experience Program provide students with additional opportunities to challenge themselves both within and beyond the formal curriculum. There are obvious criticisms along equity lines raised from time to time in view of the well-established link between high school achievement and socio-economic advantage. However, these have been addressed to some extent by making other pathways available. In the case of Start QUT, some programs have been targeted towards students in high schools in low-income areas.

Start QUT 2010 outcomes for Start QUT - 157 students completed two units (134 in 2009). 60 were admitted to a QUT course under the START QUT guarantee (20 in 2009). The average GPA is 4.9 (semester 1) and 4.7 (semester 2). There is strong evidence that Start QUT students have high satisfaction levels with their experience of taking first year units.

In the case of young and socially immature students undertaking enrichment/extension work, there have been one or two anecdotal reports of these students experiencing some social challenges (e.g. where group work required with older peers).

The Experiences of Students Participating in these Programs:

The feedback from students participating in College of Excellence and Dean’s Scholars program activities is generally very positive. However, many of these activities are extra-curricular and the student take-up rate for some events varies greatly. As noted above, some G&T students undertaking enrichment/extension work have experienced social difficulties.

Your views about how the concepts of ‘giftedness’ and ‘talent’ should be defined:

The implicit approach in QUT language is to utilise terms such as academic high achievers, merit scholars, etc. “Giftedness” is not a commonly-used term. The honours system is another way that academic merit is recognised.
Mechanisms to improve the capacity of teachers to identify and adequately respond to gifted and talented students:

Recognising and teaching to gifted and talented students is included within the teacher education curriculum. A number of staff have a particular expertise in this area and work closely in professional development in schools.

Any broader implications for school communities arising from the education of gifted and talented students:

Well resourced schools in higher income areas are more likely to be involved in QUT Start type programs, unless there are intentional collaborations between universities and schools. As noted above such collaborations have been initiated in the QUT context but are still small in scale.