14 FEB 2008

Mr Geoff Howard MP
Chair
Education and Training Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Mr Howard

Thank you for your letter dated 21 January 2008 regarding the inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education currently being undertaken by the Education and Training Committee of the Victorian Parliament.

As you may be aware, Queensland has a high proportion of students enrolled in rural and remote schools compared to other Australian jurisdictions. These students are less likely to enter higher education than students in metropolitan areas. The department is therefore committed to enhancing pathways to enable access to higher education opportunities.

In response to your query, the attached document highlights characteristics of higher education participation and outlines research which examines geographical differences in participation in education and training in Queensland. In addition, the effects of geographical differences in participation on the skills shortage are discussed, as are the various policies and programs which have been implemented in Queensland to address barriers contributing to geographic differences in participation in education and training.

I trust the information provided is useful in informing your deliberations and I look forward to learning of the results of your inquiry.

An electronic version of this letter and attachment has been copied to Ms Karen Ellingford, Executive Officer, Education and Training Committee.

Should you require further information, please contact Mr Ian Hawke, Assistant Director-General, Strategic Policy and Performance Division on telephone (07) 3237 1700.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Hunter
Director-General

Ref: 08/14772

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Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts response to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education

1. Characteristics of higher education participation

Compared to other states and territories in Australia, Queensland is the most decentralised state, with a higher proportion of rural and remote schools and students, particularly Indigenous students. As at August 2006, there were 118,582 students enrolled in state schools in rural and remote Queensland, accounting for more than 24 per cent of the total student population.

Higher education participation rates in Queensland have fluctuated according to a number of factors including the availability of university places. Rates vary by region according to local operating conditions, including the local economy, employment availability and access to a university campus.

Participation in higher education by those living in Brisbane is 20 per cent higher than the state average. Currently, 39 per cent of metropolitan Year 12 completers go direct to a Queensland university from school, with a further 7 per cent holding an officially deferred place at a university for the following year.

In non-metropolitan regions, school-leaver participation has generally dropped over the last decade, although there has been good recovery in some regions over the last three years, particularly in the Gold Coast, Mackay, Sunshine Coast and Townsville regions, all of which have higher than state average participation. With the exception of Mackay, these regions have long-established or growing university campus populations.

Queensland has a widely dispersed population, with 55 per cent of the population living outside the capital city. While regional higher education participation has increased dramatically across the state due to the establishment of regional campuses, distance education support, and the expansion of entry pathways, transition and support programs, there remains an imbalance.

This has generally been attributed to powerful social and economic inhibitors which outweigh those related to physical access. Despite the fact that many young people are now completing senior secondary learning, the strong economy and the ready availability of local work means the often permanent foreclosure on post-secondary study. In more rural and isolated areas, the effects of drought and gender differences have also been critical.

2. Major research studies looking at geographical differences in participation in Queensland education and training

While there are many research studies that examine geographical differences in participation in education and training, the following two studies focus specifically on Queensland:

i. Next Step is the Queensland Government's statewide survey of all students who completed Year 12 in the previous year in Queensland, in state and non-state schools. The survey, which has been conducted annually since 2005, collects information about the initial study and employment destinations of young people after leaving school. A series of detailed regional reports is produced which provide useful information on the geographical differences in participation in education and training in Queensland.
Results from the 2007 survey show that students who completed Year 12 in Brisbane were more likely to enter university and enrol in VET Certificate IV+ courses, while those in remote and very remote areas were more likely to be apprentices, trainees or seeking work. For example, 44 per cent of Year 12 completers in Brisbane entered university, compared to almost 29 per cent of students in the Northern/North West region of Queensland.

The rates of transition to apprenticeships and traineeships tend to become higher as the environment becomes less urbanised, with students from remote and very remote areas having the highest rates of transition to these destinations. The proportion of Year 12 graduates who are seeking work also rises with increasing remoteness, while the rate of Year 12 graduates not studying and not in the labour force shows no clear regional pattern, but is highest in the remote and very remote areas.

Further details, including results from the 2007 survey and regional reports are available at www.education.qld.gov.au/nextstep.

A similar survey, On Track, has been conducted in Victoria since 2003.

ii. Taking a Break is a study undertaken by a group of Queensland Universities, which identified and assessed the key factors and barriers underlying the apparent decline in university participation among Queensland school-leavers.

Further information, terms of reference and a discussion of the results are available at www.eidos.org.au.

3. Impact on skills shortage and the economy resulting from geographical differences in participation in education and training

Identifying a link between educational attainment and skilled labour shortages in geographic areas is problematic due to a number of factors. Firstly, mobility within both the education and labour markets makes it difficult to support a perception that potential students are likely to only seek educational opportunities or that potential workers will only seek employment opportunities within their own geographic areas. Secondly, although educational attainment data may be available on a geographic basis, data disaggregated on a geographical basis relating to skills shortages is not available, presenting a barrier to more detailed analysis of the issue.

4. Policies or programs that are intended to address barriers contributing to geographic differences in participation in Queensland based education and training


The Rural and Remote Education Framework for Action 2006–2008 commits the Queensland Government to improving service delivery to students in rural and remote areas with a focus on improving retention rates and literacy and numeracy outcomes. Key initiatives include, but are not limited to:

- delivery of regular scheduled lessons via telephone in state schools of distance education to deliver improved audio quality, clearer reception and more reliable transmission and enabling greater interaction between distance education teachers and students.

- provision of annual subsidies to assist geographically isolated distance education families with the costs of computer hardware and broadband Internet in the home classroom.
- offering a range of subjects in Years 9–12 via online virtual schooling to students, including students at rural and remote schools, where teaching expertise in particular subject areas may not be available.

- delivering flexible online learning pathways to meet the needs of students in rural and remote areas at risk of disengaging from learning through programs such as:
  - Stepping Stones which provides career guidance and Certificate I in Work Education to students in the senior phase of learning.
  - Ollie Up which focuses on developing literacy, numeracy and social skills for students in the middle phase of learning.

- providing scholarships annually to assist Year 12 students from rural and remote areas in Queensland to undertake a Bachelor of Education.

- delivering an ICT training program for parents/home tutors to allow home tutors to provide greater support to their children in using digital curriculum materials.

- establishing Rural and Remote Education Centres of Excellence to share effective teaching and learning practices with other schools through activities such as mentoring, workshops, professional development programs, school and community visits; foster leadership in rural and remote education; assist with orientation and induction of principals and teachers newly appointed to rural or remote schools; and support the building of partnerships between schools and rural and remote communities.

- providing assistance under the Living Away from Home Allowances Scheme for students who are geographically isolated to continue with their education.

- piloting a homestay program for geographically isolated students in Years 10, 11 and 12 to enable students to attend selected state high schools and live away from home in private board with local families to complete their education.

**Education and Training Reforms for the Future**

In 2002, the Queensland Government implemented significant reforms to the State’s education and training system. The Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF) included a range of strategies to improve school education outcomes and strengthen overall standards of achievement. The initiatives were aimed at:

- improving student retention and participation in education and training

- improving the qualification levels of young people aged 15–17 years

- strengthening young people’s transitions through the senior phase and into further education, training and employment.

As part of the ETRF initiative, legislative reforms enacted in 2006 aimed to ensure young people remain in education, training or employment until the age of 17 or until they receive certain qualifications.

From 2008, students who complete Year 12 may qualify for the new Queensland Certificate in Education (QCE), which recognises a broader range of learning that students can undertake including traditional academic school subjects, VET, higher education subjects undertaken while at school, extracurricular qualifications, as well as learning achievements from self-directed learning projects, or projects completed in conjunction with a workplace or community organisation.

In rural and remote communities, young people who work on the land or engage in community organisation activities like the rural fire brigade or in structured workplace situations can have the learning from these activities count towards their QCE.
Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting (QCAR) Framework

The QCAR framework aims to improve the quality of schooling and the comparability of assessment and reporting of student achievement right across the state.

QCAR will create a shared language among schools in metropolitan, rural and remote areas and support professional conversations between teachers about curriculum, teaching, assessment, and reporting issues. One of the main challenges for rural and remote schools is the high level of staff mobility. Through QCAR, teachers across the state will share a common understanding about learning programs being used and what they need to teach, and have access to a range of high quality teaching and assessment tools.

Indigenous students

Queensland has a set of key commitments to improve participation and achievement for Indigenous students, including improving the standards of education. The Department of Education, Training and the Arts coordinates a range of targeted strategies aimed at providing comprehensive, place-based responses to improve attendance, participation, retention and achievement for Indigenous students, including

- **Bound for Success: Education Strategy for Torres Strait**
- **Bound for Success: Education Strategy for Cape York.**

  The strategies include a variety of initiatives aimed at enhancing high standards of education, including transition support services for Indigenous students from Cape York, the Torres Strait and Palm Island who have to live away from their remote home communities to access secondary education.

- **Partners for Success**

  This strategy sets targets for attendance, literacy, numeracy, retention and employment of Indigenous people in each school and includes:
  
  - sharing of successful practices in Indigenous education through Centres of Excellence in Indigenous Education and a High Achiever Principals Network
  - specialist support services
  - recruitment, selection, induction and training strategies to enable talented teachers to work with Indigenous students.

Industry–School Engagement Strategy

The Industry–School Engagement Strategy encourages local relationships and skills solutions between businesses and schools. As part of this strategy, Queensland state schools have developed partnerships with the information and communications, technology, wine tourism, aviation, and minerals and energy industries.

Young people at Longreach, in the far west of Queensland, have participated in a rural skills training program that leads to a Certificate II in Agriculture and/or Certificate II in Rural Operations. This opportunity arose from the local DYAP partnerships and the result was a Rural Vocational Pathways Program which included four one-week blocks of training at the Agricultural College campus.

Inclusive Education Policy

The Inclusive Education Policy encourages schools to provide personnel with professional development that enhances understanding of how certain social, cultural, economic and geographic factors interrelate and impact on different families and groups in their communities and influence geographic outcomes for individuals and groups of students.
These factors include poverty, health, gender, ability or disability, ethnicity, location, religion, cultural and linguistic diversity, and sexuality.

**VET Pricing Model**

Queensland TAFE institutes earn revenue through the provision of training output. Lower population densities in regional and remote areas means that the department must pay a higher price to TAFE institutes servicing these communities to better reflect their cost structures. Relative to prices paid for training in South-East Queensland, the department pays, on average, an additional 14% for training delivered by regional institutes and an additional 190 per cent for training delivered by the sole remote institute (based in Mt Isa). These higher prices enable the TAFE network to maintain a presence in regional and remote communities.

**Queensland Skills Plan**

The department has in place a range of skilling initiatives to improve access to VET forQueenslanders residing in rural and remote areas. Many of these are encapsulated in the Queensland Skills Plan (QSP), which is a major reform to the Queensland VET system, launched in 2006.

Some of the major QSP initiatives that will improve access include:

- developing strategic partnerships and formal engagement models such as skills formation strategies between regional industries and government
- establishing Skilling Solutions Queensland offices across the state including a mobile centre to extend the service’s ability to deliver training and career information to Queenslanders living in regional and remote locations of the south-west and Darling Downs regions.
- establishing major trade training centres in regional TAFE institutes
- improving support for apprentices and trainees by doubling the accommodation subsidy and increasing travel subsides
- improving access to e-learning and videoconferencing

The department is currently reviewing the QSP to ensure that it remains responsive to the emerging labour market, including the needs of individuals and employers in regional, rural and remote areas.

Several of the QSP initiatives have been incorporated within the Blueprint for the Bush - a partnership plan between the Queensland Government, AgForce Queensland and the Local Government Association of Queensland to build a sustainable, liveable and prosperous rural Queensland.

**Distance Learning**

The new Learning Resource Management System was enhanced in November 2007 when students and teachers in south east Queensland converged online through two new systems called *my.TAFE* and ResourceBank. This initiative is a milestone for TAFE as it moves to a new digital environment. It provides more than 4000 educators with the ability to access and share in excess of 10 000 learning resources, create and deliver content as well as assess and monitor student performance. This system will improve learning outcomes for students by providing access to up-to-date technology and increased flexibility in the way students undertake their training.
TAFE Open Learning will provide a brand for the 'customer of one' initiative. The major benefit will be greater choices for clients. In the early phase of the operation, five TAFE Queensland institutes will offer a wider range of programs with more flexible options. TAFE Open Learning will be the major vehicle providing learning options to meet individual choices, prior learning experiences and the opportunity to learn in the most efficient, effective and customer focussed manner, encouraging more participants in training in skill shortage areas. This approach will include flexible training delivery such as face-to-face instruction, online, distance education and workplace training.

**Agricultural Colleges**

With campuses located across Queensland's major agricultural, horticultural and pastoral regions and course offerings in agriculture, horticulture and conservation and land management, the Australian Agricultural College Corporation (AACC) is uniquely positioned to meet the vocational education and training needs for those wishing to pursue these courses.

AACC's full-time campus-based training occurs on farm scale production units, draws on international best practice, incorporates the latest in research and technology and is delivered by trainers who are recognised as leaders in their field. This together with our modern teaching, recreation and residential facilities provides for excellent training within a quality lifestyle environment. Industry and school based training programs draw on the same intellectual and resource base but are primarily delivered in the workplace utilising quality distance educational resources. These resources are supported by on-campus residential schools where required. The AACC is Queensland's lead institute for vocational education and training in rural and related areas.

For further information on any of the above policies or programs please go to the department's website at www.deta.qld.gov.au.