

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education

Churchill — 19 May 2008

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Witnesses

Mr R. Juratowitch, campus principal,

Mr M. Answerth, executive officer, Gippsland Education Precinct, and

Mr K. Kennedy, Gippsland Group Training.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — I declare this hearing of the Education and Training Committee open. The committee is hearing evidence today in relation to the inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education. I wish to advise that all evidence taken by the committee, including submissions, is subject to parliamentary privilege. In other words, you can say whatever you want and you will not get sued. Welcome. What we will do is we will listen to you for about 10 to 15 minutes and then we will allow 10 to 15 minutes for committee members to ask you some questions if that is all right. Mike, are you going to start off?

Mr ANSWERTH — I am indeed. Good morning ladies and gentlemen. This is a submission of behalf of the Gippsland Education Precinct at Churchill. The purpose of this submission is that the board of management of the Gippsland Education Precinct believes this organisation, that is, the precinct, was established to address some of the issues which have been included in the terms of reference of this parliamentary inquiry. Although the precinct has been functioning for only around three years, a number of measures have been put in place to increase education and employment for students in this region which we consider likely to be of interest to the inquiry.

By way of background, the Gippsland Education Precinct, known as the GEP, is a partnership of the major providers of education, training and employment for young people in the region. The multi-sectoral campus comprises five partners: Monash University, Kurnai College, GippsTAFE, Gippsland Group Training and Latrobe city. The GEP was established in 2004 in a purpose-built facility, which we will have the opportunity to have a look at later, located on the campus of Monash University Gippsland in Churchill. Students began attending classes at the GEP in 2005 and the first graduates emerged at the end of that year. The GEP was an initiative of the Victorian government with three broad goals: firstly, to address the low educational and employment outcomes of young people in the Gippsland region, with particular emphasis on the Latrobe Valley; secondly, to tackle high levels of youth disengagement and low level of transition from school to tertiary education, training and employment; and thirdly, to redress the drift of secondary students to institutions outside the local area.

The key features of the Gippsland Education Precinct are that through its single facility the GEP is able to link year 11 and year 12 students with Gippsland Group Training, GippsTAFE and Monash University, all of which have a presence on the campus. GEP is able to provide the ability for students to transfer between courses and allow year 11 and year 12 students to customise their education to best meet needs, interests and abilities. The facility provides an extensive range of articulated pathways between different sectors: secondary school, TAFE, group training and university; direct entry into Monash Gippsland undergraduate courses for students who study at the facility and meet the appropriate prerequisites; access to challenging accelerated learning program for high achievers; and a natural bridging program for international students who are looking for safety, English-language skills and innovative pathways to continue their education in Australia. I would now like to hand over to my colleague Kevin Kennedy to talk a bit further about it.

Mr KENNEDY — The precinct has specific programs aimed at school leavers and those looking to continue their education in the region, including customised vocational programs for those not in the secondary school system, and a certificate of professional studies which works largely between Monash and Gippsland Group Training for students currently in employment who wish to undertake tertiary studies but do not have the necessary educational background. This parallels the diploma of foundation studies which is for school leavers. It is a new initiative. Also available are programs that better support all students. These include career planning assistance as a result of innovative pathways between secondary school, TAFE, group training and the university; a strategic online environment offering up the latest in IT systems. Within this environment students have access to more computers, are able to access the system from outside the centre and have the opportunity of using methods specifically designed for online learning; and it has a student support service built upon the existing university model and accentuated by local Latrobe city programs that encourage growth and independence. I will now pass over to Rob Juratowitch. Rob might like to talk about the transport issues and others.

Mr JURATOWITCH — In looking at the factors that we believe impact on comparative lower rates of participation in higher education, we have identified in our submission a number of issues we believe have an impact, some of which we believe are true of all regional areas and some of which we believe are more true or more specific to our area in Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley.

Looking now at the issue of transport, certainly the Latrobe Valley will be probably one of the better catered for areas in regional Victoria. That being said, it is still a major problem for us with students being able to access the variety of programs they would like to access. The initial establishment of the Gippsland education precinct was

premised on the fact that it would involve students from across the Latrobe Valley, but ultimately that did not occur. Partially the reason that it did not occur was because of the significant issues around transport and getting students from across Gippsland to the Gippsland education precinct.

Currently we have real issues getting students from west to east in the morning. Students coming from Traralgon South can get to the Latrobe Valley quite easily, but students coming from West Gippsland to the Latrobe Valley find it incredibly difficult just because the public transport system is geared towards commuting to Melbourne. If you look at our links with South Gippsland, then the situation becomes even worse around transport, with a real lack of public transport infrastructure in South Gippsland allowing students to be able to access resources in this area.

Perhaps one of the biggest factors, and I am sure you have heard this through all of your sittings, is socioeconomic status and that impacts in a range of ways. The research that was produced by Professor Richard Teese from Melbourne University shows that socioeconomic status is the biggest factor that impacts on student performance at school. If we accept that research, then what it says is that ENTER scores will be lower for students from lower socioeconomic status, and therefore those students will be less able to access higher education. When we look across Victoria we see a significant pattern of lower socioeconomic areas throughout the regions, and in particular in the Latrobe Valley. Our school in particular is one of the few schools in Victoria that has two urban renewal areas in our feeder area. We have significant challenges around socioeconomic status.

I guess one of the other factors around socioeconomic status is the capacity then of parents to see university as being a viable alternative to students having to relocate to Melbourne. The significant gap in the cost of accommodation, for example, between the regions and the city make accessing university in metropolitan areas very difficult. If you look at the campus here, having a regional campus mitigates a whole range of those factors in relocating to Melbourne. Certainly it is a real advantage to us and we have seen the major advantage of that. There are still major issues with students who need to go out and earn money before they go to university, and we find that probably is the biggest factor that separates students who take up places at higher education and university. It is not necessarily their ability but their family background and capacity to pay for that education.

One of the other factors that really perhaps impacts strongly in this area, which has not been true in the past but is more recently true, is the buoyant labour market, and Kevin you might want to talk about that.

Mr KENNEDY — The economy is good. The economy is sound and we hope it continues to be that way, but from a group training perspective in recent years our organisation has started to notice the decline in interest even at trade level. There are opportunities around the country and in other parts of the world which encourage young people from secondary school to not apply for apprenticeships as they once used to, specifically in industrial areas such as factory work, and the automotive industry which is an important sector.

The region here has always been a strong region as far as trade training is concerned, but in more recent years that has tended to slip away. There have been a lot of people dissatisfied with the outcomes of the power industry winding down, and as a consequence of that we concern ourselves very, very greatly about putting extra opportunities in front of young people in the region. The reason that my organisation participated in the construction of the education precinct was to encourage more young people to stay on at school. At one stage the Latrobe Valley had one of the lowest retention rates of schools anywhere in Victoria. The GEP has addressed that. It has made it more secure and more attractive for young people to go on and do study.

But I believe the buoyant labour market will continue to erode the opportunities that can exist for young people in this particular region, because more and more we are seeing young people who are packing their bags and leaving the region to go to other states and other parts of Australia. And you add to that the fact that in many families tertiary education is not a high priority, as previous generations have earned good incomes from trades and had the benefit of skills training and ongoing employment in the power industry.

Mr JURATOWITCH — Another factor impacting on rates of higher education is the large number of deferrals that we see from our students. The evidence shows that many of those students who have a so-called gap year, once they have begun earning a wage, find it incredibly difficult to go back to life as a student, and particularly the idea of not having any money. The fact that students have to earn \$18 000 a year to qualify for independent status for Centrelink certainly encourages students to take a gap year. We are not necessarily saying it

is a bad thing for all students, but certainly there is a high risk factor for students who are deferring to then not go on to accept their place at university.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Rob, you can speak for another 2 to 3 minutes, and then we will start asking questions.

Mr JURATOWITCH — Sure, okay. We will scoot through. You have a copy of our papers. If we look at lower ENTER scores by country students, which I mentioned before, then the research by Richard Teese certainly bears that out. That has a significant effect on the student's capacity to get offers at university.

What is going on to address these issues? Some of the things that have been done by partners in the GEP are having an impact. Certainly the Students Access Monash program that Monash runs here creates strong links between not only us and Monash but all of the Latrobe Valley schools and Monash. It provides a whole range of programs that encourage students to go on and study at Monash. A key one of those is that they provide free tutoring services for high-achieving students that then enable those students to get the higher ENTER scores that they need to go on and study at university.

The diploma of tertiary studies (DOTS) has had a major impact on the number of our students who have gone on to university, particularly those students that might not have seen university as an option that they may have wanted to take up. Many of the students who have accessed the DOTS program are first-generation university students — that is, as Kevin said, they come from families that have a long tradition of being working-class families, where taking up a trade is seen as the most important pathway they can take. This is starting to break down some of those barriers and some of those, I guess, prejudices against university education.

We are really promoting enhancement studies. Enhancement studies in most schools are traditionally done by distance education, which is not a really great way of study for senior students. We are working with Monash University to establish the precinct as an on-campus enhancement studies centre. Kevin might want to mention the cooperative program.

Mr KENNEDY — Just to be very quick about it, we have a program that integrates our group training organisation with Monash University — it is the only one of its kind in Australia — to encourage young people to come and do apprenticeships and go on and fully develop their opportunities and their own potential. We have linked up with Monash University, and we now run a program that encourages apprentices, while they are being paid as apprentices by my organisation, to continue on and do study at university. As an extension of that, apart from our group training organisation placing apprentices, we are now placing university undergraduates as well out into industry. With Monash University we have designed a program that allows young people to go and study in workplaces. It is not a work experience program. It is an on-the-job assessment program that is unique. The idea was imported from Canada, and it has got legs; it could go anywhere in the country. The real stimulus and the real opportunity here is to encourage young people to not just necessarily apply hard at school so they can go immediately into university but to use the apprenticeship system as a transition process and a pathway on to further study. Basically a young person can start at a VCAL program and end up with a PhD.

Mr JURATOWITCH — A final point is just around vocational pathways or pathways in general. 'Pathways' is perhaps an overused term, but certainly one of the things we want to see is seamless pathways — that is, a student being able to go from Kurnai College into GippsTAFE and ultimately on to Monash University, pursuing the area that they would like to study. There were a whole range of dual awards that linked TAFE with university. Unfortunately a lot of those dual awards have not been accredited because Monash University faculties have not seen fit to authorise those dual awards. Perhaps they do not want to see the links with GippsTAFE and with TAFE institutions affecting their brand name. That is a real problem for us and is causing some real issues in creating those seamless links into university.

Mr DIXON — Rob, is the only campus of Kurnai College here on the precinct, or how is the school set up?

Mr JURATOWITCH — We have three campuses. We have a 7–10 campus in at Morwell; we have a 7–10 campus at Churchill; and then the campus at the Gippsland education precinct is year 11 and 12.

Mr HALL — First of all, thanks Rob, Mike and Kevin, for your presentation this morning. Well done on the great work that you continue with the education precinct. One question I was going to ask, Mike, relates to the

three objectives you outlined when you established the precinct — and you mentioned those and listed them in your presentation this morning. Are we able to start getting a bit of a measure of whether those broad objectives are being achieved yet; or, in terms of the future, what sorts of processes have you got in place to track the kids to see whether we are achieving those broad objectives?

Mr ANSWERTH — Yes, we certainly are seeing some trends. I think Rob might like to comment on that, particularly the transition from secondary school to university.

Mr JURATOWITCH — Yes, we are getting some positive results, I have to say, Peter. If you look at educational outcomes, certainly we have seen a steady rise in our ENTER scores, which is terrific, but it is certainly not the be-all and end-all. What we have seen from 2005, which is pre-GEP for us, to 2007 is an increase of 18 per cent in the number of students going on to tertiary studies. That is probably an equal increase in both TAFE and university, so it is not all going to TAFE and not all to university, but both. That is a pretty big increase in a matter of two years.

When we look at the issue of the drift of secondary students away from the state system, again we are seeing really positive results here. This year we have over 80 students who have come to us from schools other than Kurnai College. So these are people who have gone to other schools but are locals, who have felt they had to choose institutions outside the Latrobe Valley to access a quality education, and they are rejoining us. We are finding, certainly at our Churchill campus in particular, that we are winning back a healthy share of the market that we had lost in the past. Certainly the precinct and our involvement in it is seen as a major attraction to parents wanting to bring their kids from the private system back into the state system.

Mr HALL — Are they coming from other government schools, or private schools, or are they disengaged kids coming back into the system?

Mr JURATOWITCH — All of those. The biggest group are coming from the Catholic system. We had a group coming from the independent system. We have students re-engaging with us who have dropped out of other secondary schools that cannot offer the broad range of programs that we have but are seeing pathways here. So, yes, the range.

Mr HALL — I am going to come back to Kevin and ask about skills and things like that later on, but other members may want to ask you some questions first.

Mr HERBERT — Thanks, Rob, Mike and Kevin. I am pleased to see it is going well. I had a little bit to do with this in the early days when I was chief of staff to Lynne Kosky in the first term of government, and there were a few teething problems with different schools and which schools would come in. So it is excellent to see it is coming along with that original vision. And congratulations on the work that has been done because it is never easy pulling together something like this. It is often complex with school councils, university boards et cetera, so congratulations on that.

Just on Peter's point, I just wonder whether as part of your longer term goals, you have either public or in-house targets for students coming through in terms of students completing year 12 and students then accessing tertiary education. Are there targets in place that you work to?

Mr JURATOWITCH — This is an interesting one you raise, Steve. Currently the Gippsland region is addressing this as a major concern as part of what they are calling the Gippsland Youth Commitment. You have got a range of players from across areas — not just education but all government sectors working together. Something that we do not have at the moment is that sense of a target. Certainly, we have an in-house target at our college which is two-thirds. If you can see — you probably cannot see — my logo, it has three waves. Basically the symbol of our college is there are three key pathways that we see: about a third of our kids to go to university, about a third of our kids to go to TAFE, and about a third of our kids to go into work, whether that be an apprenticeship, traineeship or full-time employment. That is our goal at this stage.

Mr HERBERT — Can I just add one other question at this point? I was just interested in your comments about the gap year and the number of students. Do you have any idea of what the actual percentage is in terms of this campus here of students that take a gap year and then do not return? There must be something for planning purposes, I would have thought, otherwise it would be an awful job trying to line up the HECS numbers that you get.

Mr JURATOWITCH — It is a difficult one, Steve, and even tracking it is quite difficult because once students leave, we do not have complete control of where they are going and the information we get. We know what offers they get but we do not always know who has taken up those offers; often they will take up offers and begin their course and then defer partway through their course, so tracking those numbers is a fluid thing. They are changing constantly. People are coming in and out.

We get a sense of that through the On Track data that comes through — that is the Melbourne University research. It ebbs and flows a little bit, I have to say, from year to year. We have had as high as 12 per cent of our graduating class take a deferral or a gap year, and last year I think it was down to about 4 per cent. So we are seeing it really change.

Mr HERBERT — But you do not know how many come back? If 12 per cent defer, I just would have thought that the uni — there must be something for planning purposes? They would not just assume numbers.

Mr JURATOWITCH — I am sure the university would have those figures for you.

Mr KENNEDY — I think they should be able to advise you very accurately on that later today.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Further to Steve's question on targets, have you got any percentages of kids attending the college from year 11 who go on to year 12, and the percentage of those who go on from year 12 into one of those three pathways?

Mr JURATOWITCH — Yes, so if we say years 11–12, probably about 80 to 90 per cent would go on, depending again on the labour market: how many apprentices Kevin puts on. A third of our students are in VCAL and so many of those students will not go on and do year 12, and for us it is a successful outcome for those students if they go on and get apprenticeships. Many of those students in VCAL are aiming to get apprenticeships, and the close work that we do with Gippsland Group Training means that they are very successful in that role. We have had real internal debates about what is the right amount of VCAL because we could become almost a VCAL school but we want to keep our academic focus as well. We have always kept a one-third, two-thirds ratio: one-third VCAL, two-thirds VCE, and of those two-thirds VCE, we are currently getting about a third into university and about a third into TAFE. This year, in 2007, it is almost exactly a third and a third.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — And do students who attend the college get any preferential treatment for courses?

Mr JURATOWITCH — For who?

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Including getting into courses.

Mr JURATOWITCH — Into Monash?

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Into Monash.

Mr JURATOWITCH — That is certainly not something that is deliberately preferential, if you like. The fact is that they are on the campus and that they know these people. For example, if the students are going to Gippsland Group Training, many of the instructors will know our students really well. You know, they see them in their daily operation so they understand whether they have the attributes to be employed. So that is an advantage but it can also be a disadvantage for a student who presents well but does not necessarily have the consistent skills that they need to have to be employed. When it comes to university, again, they are not in a position to be able to offer preferential treatment, and that is probably one of the things that we have been pushing for and asking for — for Kurnai College to have some advantages — but we do not currently have those advantages, no.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — So, to Pete's question in terms of the success of this program, the Gippsland Education Precinct, from what I understand you are saying, has been very successful; should this type of program perhaps be replicated in other parts of Victoria?

Mr KENNEDY — Can I jump in? I think it is a model that could work well anywhere in Australia. Not only is it beneficial as far as the taxpayers dollar is concerned, if you think about amalgamating schools and bringing them more into one area, but the synergies that are created as an outcome of that do provide preferences for people, they provide opportunities for people. Families, kids can actually see the benefit, the opportunity to

move in and out and trial things without becoming a disaster because their particular stream becomes a dead end for them.

We can bring them back and put them in another direction, we can provide all range of educational options all on the one side. This is an old saying: if it can work in the Latrobe Valley, it can work anywhere. This is the hardest ground. At one stage, we had a retention rate of young people in secondary public schools here in this region of around the 40 per cent mark: 42 per cent, 45 per cent. I can remember those years. We have got kids who were destined for the dole queue for the rest of their lives now being paid as apprentices and studying at university at the same time. There is no need to rely on HECS, they are being paid a wage and being freed up from their workplace to study at university, and, you know, the options are endless. If it could work here, it could work anywhere in Australia.

Mr HALL — I was going to ask — perhaps Kevin is best placed to answer this question — about the shortage of skilled workers that we have in this region, and given the fact that we do have a buoyant labour market currently, I know it is difficult for some firms to acquire the skilled worker level they require, and it is potentially going to be an increasing problem in future development related to coal and other resources around the region. How can we best accommodate that, Kevin, and is it important that higher education, as well as vocational education, has a role in providing for that shortage that we have in skilled workers now and into the future?

Mr KENNEDY — Peter, I think it is fairly obvious to people that have been involved in these matters that industry are now suffering the consequences of their misdirection of the last decade. They had not trained enough people, they had not supported the education system generally well enough, they had not put enough dollars back into making sure that their human resources were there and were well-trained. We do not have enough people ready for those major projects in the region. There is a short-term and a long-term answer, I believe.

One is that we need to spend a lot of time, a lot of effort, a lot of resources and a lot of money on improving all of our education right across all levels, and make up for what we tried to save on a decade ago. At the same time, I honestly believe that we need to open up our immigration programs and bring people in from other parts of the world to come and address that, not just at that professional level but at the trade level and even at the semi-skilled level. I believe that that is really what built our country in my working lifetime. I have seen it on so many projects, and I think that Australia is at that point once again. We are all immigrants.

Mr HALL — So what role can governments play, Kevin, in terms of promoting that bank of skilled workers and building up that bank of skilled workers, both professional and vocational workers in this area, given the fact that very few apprentices — I think 0.8 per cent of apprentices in the Gippsland region — are actually employed by government organisations, while 99.2 per cent are employed by the private sector. So what role can governments play to actually promote the education of young people in this region to accommodate what we will need in the future?

Mr KENNEDY — If we talk about the trade areas, Peter — I presume that is what you are asking about — certainly, every government department could easily accommodate large numbers of apprentices and still provide them with the necessary skills that they need rather than just plonking them in a job and leaving them for a four-year period. Government could do a lot in encouraging what we now call competency completions, a fast-tracking of some apprenticeships, and work with industry, with organisations like mine to be able to acknowledge that not all trades need to take four years to complete and, as a consequence of that, stimulate that part of it.

Mostly what government needs to do is to recognise the fact that we do not need to encourage employers with subsidies and shift those subsidies to young people. We have no problem attracting employers. We have plenty of employers needing young people, but young people are still being paid an abysmal rate of pay to do apprenticeships.

Mr HALL — And traineeships.

Mr KENNEDY — And traineeships, yes. If I could add to traineeships, perhaps more on a group training note, it is time that traineeships were perhaps done away with completely and more young people were encouraged into what you might call more rigorous forms of study in trade training. Traineeships were established back when we had a recession. We have not got a recession any more. We do not need quick fixes. What we do need is to

encourage our young people to go on and do more rigorous forms of study and further their education so that they can compete anywhere in the world.

Mr HERBERT — Thanks, Kevin. I had that viewpoint myself about subsidies, particularly when it comes to critical skill shortages. My question is a little bit different to that and perhaps I will move on a little bit in terms of the articulation from TAFE courses to Monash. Rob, you made the point that the Monash board as if there has been some difficulty in accrediting diploma type units going across. Is that because it is a normal academic stand-off or are there other factors in here? The second question is: do you have any capacity in terms of movement through the system to RPL, as you can in the TAFE system — you can RPL for accreditation? Does that flow through to university yet?

Mr JURATOWITCH — No. That is probably one of the biggest things holding back the development of the precinct, in my view. It is the lack of dual awards that have been accredited through GippsTAFE and Monash University. There has been a lot of work done. Other universities are doing it, but Monash and its obsession with its world ranking means that it does not see the necessity of being involved in these dual awards. I hasten to add that that is not this campus. This campus is all for it. It would be terrific for this campus, and it did all the work on it. But Monash Clayton, which is where all the power resides for the faculties to auspice these programs and accredit these programs, has said no.

Mr HERBERT — So it is a faculty decision, not a Monash board decision?

Mr JURATOWITCH — That is what I understand. I do not understand completely the politics behind it, but we are being overtaken. All the work that was done three or four years has been overtaken by other universities that have taken up this challenge. We see currently that the federal government is pushing in this direction for there to be stronger linkages between TAFE organisations and universities. We have had this model sitting on the board for four years and it has not been taken up. It is disappointing.

Mr HERBERT — One last question: that being the case, is there a list of courses that have been rejected in terms of joint accreditation?

Mr JURATOWITCH — I am not sure if ‘rejected’ is the right term, Steve, but yes, there is a list of courses that we have that were proposed for dual accreditation.

Mr HERBERT — How would we get a copy of that?

Mr JURATOWITCH — Alan Scarlett will be able to provide you with a copy of those.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you very much, Rob.

Mr ANSWERTH — Can I just jump in and say a very brief word about multi-sectoral campuses.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Very brief, Mike.

Mr ANSWERTH — In fact there are about 12 around the country with a similar model to the GEP. Not many of them have five partners — I do not think any others have five partners, the same as the GEP. A network has just been established.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you very much, Kevin, Mike and Rob, we appreciate your time.

Witnesses withdrew.

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Witnesses

Mr M. Murphy, executive officer, and

Mr J. Ernst, member, committee of management, Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN; and

Mr D. Roche, executive officer, and

Ms C. Elliot, manager, planning and development, Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE, South Gippsland and Bass Coast LLEN.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — On behalf of the committee I welcome you to this inquiry. The time set is for half an hour, which is 10 to 15 minutes for you to speak to us and then we will finish off with 10 to 15 minutes of questions.

Mr M. MURPHY — My name is Mick Murphy from the Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN, covering the municipalities of Baw Baw and Latrobe. I introduce David Roche, who is my counterpart in South Gippsland and Bass Coast, and committee member John Ernst. Carol Elliot is from GippsTAFE; John Cargill is from GippsTAFE as well, the manager of the Morwell campus. Grant Rathchen and Donna Bell are from the commonwealth department. All of us have a very significant interest in the passage of young people from school to post-school life, which obviously is inclusive of participation in higher education but in all other sectors as well.

Our region is not dissimilar in many ways to a number of regional parts of Victoria, where the participation rate directly from year 12 into higher education is lower than the rest of the state. The deferment rate of those who receive offers and defer, for whatever reason, is higher. As you would probably be aware, collectively the regional LLENs are currently conducting a longitudinal study into deferments. On your agenda for later in the afternoon we have arranged for a number of people to talk specifically to you about that sort of process.

Our region, as you would be aware, is a quite diverse and a large region, but direct access to higher education is relatively limited. We have this magnificent campus here in Churchill. While the Monash campus is in many ways a jewel in the crown of Gippsland in relation to higher education, it does not obviously — neither does any regional campus — cover the full spectrum of availability at a local level. Of course we have other aspects of delivery of higher education in other places in Gippsland.

The diversity shows that Latrobe in particular, where most things seem to be centred in Central Gippsland, may have some access. Interestingly, just because of that access, the deferment rate in the central part of Gippsland is actually lower than the rest of Gippsland but still higher than the state. The participation level in higher education directly from year 12 is slightly higher than the rest of the region as well. But it is enormously diverse. I will hand over to David to consider some specific issues for the more outlying area of South Gippy and Bass Coast.

Mr ROCHE — I would just like to run through a summary of issues and opportunities. They are not necessarily in priority order. I think sufficient has been said about the major cause, as we understand it, for deferrals — and that is purely economic. There is actually an article in the *Age* today which I think expresses it quite clearly. The education section has the heading ‘Underclass — Why life is a struggle for so many students’. I do not intend to go into that at all.

Within South Gippsland and Bass Coast the economy is actually doing fairly well and skills shortages are actually providing other options. There is a real opportunity there for employers to encourage higher education as well as some of the trades and attending to the skills shortages. We all acknowledge that there is a lack of transport within South Gippsland and Bass Coast. Although there is some improvement mooted through the budget, perhaps the Transport Connections projects could make access to higher education opportunities a priority.

Service provision in South Gippsland and Bass Coast generally is lacking, no matter where you look or what service you are after. However, there are five local developments down there that might in fact have an impact on higher education. The first one is the Bass Coast shire education strategy. Others are the Leongatha education precinct; the Southern and Coastal TAFE Alliance, an ACE initiative down there; and also the Phillip Island nature parks, which are not readily acknowledged as a provider or deliverer of education, but they are probably one of the largest education and training providers within our region. They all have the potential to affect higher education.

We have found that the engagement of the large employers is low. Although we have very few large employers, some of those employers require encouragement and support to encourage younger people into higher education. We have also found, through our own small research, that career and transition advice is inadequate, so we would be saying that there is an opportunity for additional support there, including through and to mentoring programs.

The demise of the Melbourne University presence in 2005–06 was hardly an encouragement for young people to continue on to higher education. We would be contending that there is a great need for a university presence somewhere within South Gippsland and Bass Coast. A couple of those initiatives at the moment, the Bass Coast education strategy and the Leongatha education precinct, provide a real opportunity for that to be progressed.

The 2006 parliamentary inquiry into retaining young people in rural towns and communities I think set out a number of recommendations and spoke about why young people are not continuing on to higher education and about higher education in general. I think we need to go back and revisit some of those recommendations and have a look at the implementation of those with some vigour. We should perhaps look at extending the role of the LLENs. The charter and responsibilities at the moment are largely around post-compulsory options for 16 to 19-year-olds, but that could actually be extended to higher education options.

The socioeconomic factors were mentioned before, including the impact of the drought. I do not think a lot needs to be said about that, although we did pick up one interesting statistic. At one stage, from November 2006 to October 2007, the number of 15 to 19-year-olds on youth allowance actually increased by 98, from 66 to 164. We are not quite sure what the reason was for that. Some of us thought that it may have been that a number of kids, instead of going on, were sitting at home and helping their mums and dads on the farms. Currently there are a couple of other reviews and inquiries happening, on the DEECD 'Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform', the LLENs beyond 2008 project and the Gippsland apprenticeship research project report. We would be suggesting that at least the findings of those reviews be used to inform this current inquiry. That is for South Gippsland and Bass Coast.

Mr M. MURPHY — In Baw Baw Latrobe, in the remainder of the region that we refer to as Central Gippsland, the reasons for young people not taking up study beyond year 12 remain consistent through the various reports in relation to On Track each year. Without a doubt, the two primary focuses for not taking up higher education were financial and a readiness to leave home, even in relation to coming to Churchill even from within my own region, which includes this campus. The need for travel from, for instance, Warragul and Drouin in West Gippsland to Churchill is actually more difficult — other than using private transport — than travel to the city. So there is a notion of relocating. From elsewhere in Gippsland, likewise, even from within Latrobe — to travel from the northern parts of Latrobe to Churchill essentially. While this campus particularly does a great deal in relation to access to public transport and while through the current state initiative in Transport Connections there is reasonable access to bus transport, the private vehicle is the main way that young people get around.

I might add on that one, although it is not directly related to this inquiry, that the change to early driving licences that will come in in July and which actually prevent the notion of car pooling in terms of young people under 21 carrying passengers — I think the rule is something like only one passenger under 21 as well, unless grandma is sitting in the back seat with a driver's licence — will have a significant impact on the availability for young people to get to not only higher education but in fact all other aspects of training as well. I fully endorse and support the notion of reducing the number of young people that travel together in cars. In fact, for many years I advocated, particularly to young boys, 'Get yourself a ute. That way you can carry only one passenger'. So I support that notion. But when it comes to car pooling for employment or training, it can have the opposite effect. I am very much in two minds about this new regulation, but it will have an impact on young people in regional areas either getting to campuses like Churchill or getting back from campuses in Melbourne, Ballarat or anywhere else on a weekend or returning home.

Unfortunately a couple of years ago in this area we did have a multiple fatality in East Gippsland in relation to young people travelling to training. I know they are going to occur, unfortunately, but somehow or other we need to extend or find an exemption, which is not a good thing for any regulation, anyway. The impact of that change in relation to access will be yet another barrier.

The main barriers that I want to mention are first, as I said, financial. A number of young people in our region, and I think in most regional areas, who either defer or choose not to apply do so on the basis that they do not have the financial capacity. It is not so much the fee structure. Kids can put fees on the never-never through the HECS system, but you cannot put the rent or the travel costs — in most cases, and you should not put them on credit cards, anyway — on the never-never. So for young people to have the capacity to earn enough money particularly to get independent status — and there is another commonwealth regulation that is a bit of a problem that this inquiry may be able to potentially influence — they need to earn a certain amount of money, but over a lengthy period that is greater than 12 months. It can have a quite significant impact on their capacity to take up study a year later, if that is what they are choosing to do. I think it is something in the order of \$17 000 over 15 months. That again has an impact, and our statistical analysis of each year through the On Track process shows that the reason that regional people do not take up training is very highly weighted towards their capacity to pay for it and their readiness for both themselves and their homes to have that separation at 17 years of age, or something of that order.

The other thing that I would like this inquiry to be aware of is that all of these issues associated with young people taking up places in higher ed have the same impact in terms of other aspects of training. There is the notion of independent status, whether a young person is taking up higher education at a university or a TAFE course at another campus — or for that matter even some other form of training through apprenticeship. There is a flow-on effect — I do not call it down the scale; I call it across the scale — from higher education in the one extreme to employment without training at the other, and everything in between. There is an impact in regional areas on our capacity to take up all those things.

The other barrow I would push quite a bit on that would be that if we have 30 or 32 per cent of young people exiting year 12 taking up higher education, where the rest of the state might be as high as 40 per cent, that extra 8 or 10 per cent not taking up higher education are in fact taking up places in TAFE, which pushes another 8 or 10 per cent a bit further across the scale or, depending on your way of thinking, down the scale. So it does have an effect right across the board in terms of reduced opportunity for regional young people. I could go on forever; I am used to it.

Mr HALL — Thank you, Mick, David and others for your presentation here this morning; we appreciate that. I want talk about aspirations. In my own mind I do not believe that an economic barrier or a transport barrier is the only thing that leads to kids not applying at the same level in this region to go on to a higher education course, or even some vocational education courses. How important do you think the aspirational issue is in this region — that is, kids say, ‘Mum and Dad have not gone to uni. Why should we? It is not within our radar. We do not even think about it’? How important is that in this region, and what do you reckon we can do to address that?

Mr M. MURPHY — We did not cover that, Peter — we have got some young people talking to you about that this afternoon — but there is absolutely no doubt that our region statistically again shows the number of households that have tapped into higher education in the past is lower than in other places. I think a great deal has been done in recent times in relation to not only lifting the notion of aspiration but also lifting the number of pathways to make that achievable. But there is still no doubt that, particularly from regional areas, the notion of getting out and earning an income, particularly when that becomes a priority to fill the family pocket, is strong. While we do have a lower participation in higher education, we actually have a higher participation in apprenticeships than many areas of the state, but we also have a higher transfer from year 12 back into entry-level certificate. Again, some of that is around young people completing and not taking up higher education, but doing a certificate II in TAFE. Some would view that as a backward or at least sideways step in terms of their ongoing journey.

I think both family and community aspiration and expectation is a very major factor, but we cannot undersell other pathways towards skilling young people and helping them to enter the work force. I think there needs to be a balance between aspiration to higher education and aspiration to other skilling processes.

Mr ROCHE — Can I just make a comment on that? Even though Bass Coast is developing quite quickly, there is still a fairly low socioeconomic base. In South Gippsland you have still got a number of areas that still come up as being very poor. I mentioned before there being no university presence. There is actually no culture of learning within some areas in South Gippsland and Bass Coast. The withdrawal of a university or a university presence from South Gippsland was certainly no encouragement for parents, I think, to encourage their young people to go on to higher education, particularly when that facility was very closely associated with probably the largest industry in South Gippsland and Bass Coast — the dairying industry.

Mr HALL — For the benefit of my colleagues you might want to mention what Melbourne University’s was before.

Mr ROCHE — They did have McMillan campus at Leongatha and effectively pulled away from it in 2005, and while there has been some attempt to try and replace the programs there through an ACE provider and also through the TAFE, it just has not reached the prominence that it had before.

Mr ERNST — Could I just make a comment too about the whole aspirations thing. One of the issues that I have as well, as a parent of teenage boys, is actually broadening their horizons. A lot of the horizons here are fairly limited to the sorts of industry that has been traditionally in this area anyway. One of the challenges that we have been sort of faced with — and we are actually getting good responses from some in the industry, and I am

thinking of SP AusNet in particular — is that it is an industry that needs more people. The power industry is looking for more skilled people.

Whilst this facility here does not provide any training in the power industry and actually withdrew those courses a number of years ago, the industry itself is basically looking at ways to engage with younger people. We have had absolutely 100 per cent support when we have asked and basically said, ‘You have got an issue here with your skilled workforce. You are wanting to upskill, and we have got a community here that actually cannot see beyond that horizon and some of the opportunities that are there’. So what we have actually been able to achieve with SP AusNet and a couple of the other providers is that they bring young engineers down to talk and work with young people. We have practical activities that have been organised through the LLEN that is touring through the secondary schools and will probably bring it down to a lower level, and that is where the young people then have direct exposure to younger engineers and hopefully get inspired by them to actually become participants. These are the sorts of inroads we are trying to make around that, but it is all fairly limited and it is part of that bigger picture of moving that horizon over a little bit further.

Mr HERBERT — Thank you very much for the presentation. Just on the aspirations and a bit on your point also, David, one of the central points this inquiry has to address is lifting retention rates, lifting people going on to university and how much of an impact that having facilities in a local community has versus making it easier, perhaps through subsidies, et cetera, to go to Melbourne. That is the truth of it. In terms of your experience where is that balance here? Do local young people seek to do higher education here or is there a drive to move down to Melbourne or to other campuses?

Mr M. MURPHY — There is a really worthwhile course that has been developed here at Monash Churchill, now referred to as the diploma of tertiary studies. Statistically this year, for instance, the number of young people that applied to that course — and predominantly that is to get a foot in the door of higher ed at a local level — was well beyond expectation, in the order of 300 plus young people, pretty well all of whom would qualify to do that course. There has been a lot of research around — —

Mr HERBERT — So these are people with slightly lower ENTER scores and are going to get in through that other process?

Mr M. MURPHY — Lower, yes, but the aspiration is still there. Potentially, without it, the lower ENTER score would immediately kill the aspiration. 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. So there is no doubt that is the case.

The other aspect of it that makes it a lot easier — for instance, again, through this campus and one of the local secondary schools in the Latrobe Valley — is there is a partnership in relation to a peer mentoring between undergraduate and year 11 and 12 students. Again, looking at encouraging aspiration — and John’s example in relation to engineering is a good one — the region as a whole has seen a downturn in the number of young people participating in higher level maths and science, and this is in fact probably right down, in terms of aspiration, into primary schools.

The Gippsland region, through the recently released Gippsland Youth Commitment, has identified six major areas, one of which is a greater participation in higher ed and the other is a greater participation in maths and science, as being a focus that the region needs. The number of young people doing year 12 specialist maths has probably halved in secondary schools over the last 10 years. Therefore the pool of young people, not only those in schools doing specialist maths, saying to their junior peers, ‘Maths is worth doing’ is smaller— and I am saying this as a previous maths teacher, by the way. With some of the attitude that ‘Maths is too hard’ or ‘too uninteresting’ or, from a parent point of view, ‘I could never understand it anyway and I can’t help you’, it does have this longitudinal downturn of desirability from both family and young people to do that. That cannot be turned around overnight, but I think there is a fair degree of effort now to ensure that that is the case over time. Part of that is allowing even visitation to a campus like this. That might be a hell of a lot easier in Latrobe but far less so in Bass Coast or more outlying areas. With that greater exposure and therefore increased aspiration, there is no doubt that regional facilities improve regional participation in higher ed.

Mr ERNST — It would not be an exaggeration to say that we have a crisis in maths and science in secondary schools in this area at the moment. The outcome of that, for example, with the nursing course here is that our young people are simply not competing for places here against Melbourne young people. Whilst we produce enough nurses from our courses here to fill the vacancies in this area, because the people are coming up from Melbourne to pick up those places they go back to Melbourne when they finish. In contrast to that, when you look at the TAFE system, where they do the div. 2 nursing, most of those places are picked up by our local people, and they stay local. The hub of this whole maths-science issue — and I did a fair bit of study on this last year when I was working with the Department of Planning and Community Development — was that over a 10-year period we have actually seen the number of people participating in VCE stay around about the same, but with the subjects they have been picking up there has been about a one half reduction in the maths-science area. This is really critical when you start looking at sustaining courses in universities such as this. There has been a lot of blame put on this university for pulling its engineering course out of here. The simple reality was that the young people here were not eligible to do the courses; they were not getting the prerequisite subjects to do that.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Are you saying that local students should receive bonus ENTER points for nursing?

Mr ERNST — No, I do not think it is an issue of — you are almost saying — dumbing down the courses to fill the spaces. I think what needs to happen is a re-emphasis on the importance of maths-sciences much earlier in the system. This is where something like the youth commitment is a good starting point around that. But it needs to happen like yesterday — it is that critical.

Mr HERBERT — Just to clarify, John, when you are saying a reduction in students doing maths-science, are you talking about maths methods and physics and chemistry — the hard maths?

Mr ERNST — Yes, the hard-end subjects.

Mr HERBERT — As opposed to the total number?

Mr ERNST — Yes. The total number of VCE students has stayed about the same, but when you look at the mix of subjects they have been picking up, there has been a reduction in the maths and sciences at the high end, which is what you need to get those high ENTER scores.

Mr ROCHE — Could I make a brief comment on those aspirations? I go back to what I keep saying, South Gippsland and Bass Coast, because South Gippsland and Bass Coast is developing as a region in itself. Any other region in Victoria would have a university presence. In fact there are a couple of factors that I think are in there. Monash is doing things and it started the diploma of tertiary studies (DOTS) down in South Gippsland; that sort of things needs to be encouraged. Unless there is a presence and unless it is talked up, I do not think the aspirations are going to lift. The other point that we have found down our way is that the actual careers and transition advice being provided to students is probably inadequate. Nobody — I will not say ‘nobody’. There is probably a situation there where students are not being encouraged to continue on and to create those aspirations as much as they could be.

Mr DIXON — Which leads on to the question I was going to ask: what is the quality of careers and pathway advice over all?

Mr ROCHE — I think the quality is quite good within the schools themselves. It is the time allocation and the amount that is available.

Ms ELLIOTT — For example, students are not aware of the breadth of options that are available, whether it is higher education or TAFE, with the TAFE options.

Mr M. MURPHY — One of the aspects worth encouraging in relation to quality of career and pathway advice is the current level of cooperation between the state and the commonwealth in terms of their various initiatives. We can certainly see that there is a great deal more in the way of that degree of collaboration — for instance, Grant and Donna who are here from DEEWR this morning, and their interactions with the schools through the commonwealth initiatives as well as the state initiatives to improve career advice to young people has been really positive. There is still a long way to go.

Mr ERNST — Some of the schools are changing the way they provide that careers advice. Some of the advisers themselves have become resource people so, when a young person comes to them about a particular career, they are plugged into those people who are involved with that career rather than providing the advice face to face, which changes their relationship.

Mr HALL — I think one of the important pieces of advice you are giving to us today is the whole issue about further participation in higher education needing to be tracked right back to the source through a secondary school level in terms of participation in appropriate subject choice and the careers advice that you were talking about as well, and probably also the aspiration issue as well can be tracked back to that.

Mr M. MURPHY — I think the potential benefit goes beyond participation in higher education to all levels of training.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you very much for your time. We appreciate your coming down.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education

Churchill — 19 May 2008

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Witnesses

Ms S. Heckenberg, student;

Ms D. Paton, GippsTAFE;

Ms R. Heckenberg, head and lecturer, centre for Australian indigenous studies, Monash University;

Mr I. Haddock, Koorie home-school liaison officer, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development; and

Mr S. Walsh, central Gippsland Wurreker broker, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — The Education and Training Committee welcomes representatives from the indigenous community. Thank you very much for coming to this hearing. We have about half an hour. Could you give a presentation for 10 to 15 minutes, and then we will ask you some questions. Who will be starting off?

Mr WALSH — I will be starting off. I am Stephen Walsh, the central Gippsland Wurreker broker. First of all I would like to introduce the people on the panel here today: Isaac Haddock, who is employed by the department of education; Robyn Heckenberg, from Monash University; Doris Paton, from GippsTAFE; and Sadie Heckenberg, who is a current student at Monash University. Isaac will be speaking as a student as well as a person employed by the department. There will be two aspects: about Monash University in particular, and obviously that preclusion from engaging within the higher education sector; and then some of that pathway discussion from TAFE to higher education, which will be facilitated by Doris. She will talk more about that.

I will start in terms of being able to draw out some of those issues we have about engaging within the higher education system for indigenous communities. Some of those have been around a lack of understanding about current entry pathways. Obviously entry pathways themselves are about where they are able to take you within the higher education sector and what are the benefits and rewards. Obviously access and also accommodation towards the university has also been a major issue, given our communities are spread across the Gippsland region and we have a dense population of indigenous communities within the Latrobe Valley region but a high population within the East Gippsland region as well.

The disadvantages have been about generational poverty and obviously that lack of understanding about knowing those benefits of moving forward into the higher education sector. We have prepared a bit of a background in notes, which we would like to leave with you today, which we have discussed previously. Some of those have also been around partnerships. The university has had a long commitment to local partnerships, in which we have been able to capitalise in being able to have much more of a role within the university sector, especially the indigenous community. It has only just been recently that the university has taken upon itself to be able to start looking at strategies and ways in which they have been able to get the indigenous community members on board. That has been through mechanisms such as the student support officer and indigenous student support officer, who have been able to support students.

Just recently also at the Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies, Robyn Heckenberg has taken upon herself to look at a scheme called Koori footprints to higher education, for which we have been able to employ a Koori education resource officer. That will in turn be able to increase the number of participants from high school coming into the university by offering information about some of those entry pathway programs and obviously what it takes in terms of the roles and responsibilities of a student within the university. I will pass now to Robyn, and she might be able to speak a bit more about the current life here within the university.

Ms R. HECKENBERG — I am Robyn Heckenberg from the Koori unit, as it is known by the local community, and officially by the university as the Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies. My background is that I am Wiradjuri, so I actually come from New South Wales. I guess the model I am most used to is a model where there is a lot more community engagement than I have been able to find here at Monash between the indigenous community and the organisation. However, we are trying to break down those barriers and really reconnect with programs that used to exist here years ago and try to rebuild those sorts of programs and initiatives that meant there was a lot of community engagement.

The model I am looking at at Charles Sturt University in Wiradjuri country is that there are 50 indigenous students in a total student population of 500 — that is, at the Dubbo campus. So that actually shows you what can happen and what a community can expect from its regional university if there is a really strong commitment, which we are now trying to drive in this area. So there are actually strong community aspirations for our kids to be able to go on to further education.

I think over the years that has really changed and now there are actually students who are coming to university who are actually second-generation university students, having seen their parents successfully complete university earlier. But a lot of the barriers that have been a part of how difficult it was for their parents to get to university have not really changed.

Those barriers still exist. One of the most extreme barriers is systemic racism. It is a kind of a hidden racism that you do not really have to acknowledge unless you are an indigenous person or someone from another country.

Basically universities exist as, I guess, bastions of the establishment. These are some of the things that our students probably are in a bit of conflict with the times and have to slowly learn to come to terms with. In a way it is the student who has to change the way they see the world rather than the university being able to model itself more to what the student needs.

Interestingly we had invited several students along here today. Three of them could not come. They typify the reasons why there are challenges and what some of the barriers are for students. One student does not live terribly far away but he is completely reliant on public transport and it takes him nearly 2 hours to get here sometimes. He only virtually lives down the road but in reality quite a long way from here.

The other thing about him is that he has been suffering lately from quite a bit of illness, yet he still has very strong obligations to his local sporting community, and as we know for indigenous people sport is very important and very character building. It also fosters social interaction. As well as that, he has all of his strong family commitments to older relations and all those sorts of things that could also impinge at times on him being able to make it to university.

There was another person who could not attend here today because her dad is having an operation. I guess that is another thing: if you are a young Koori person, because of your extended family relations and the fact that you do have strong commitments to family, sometimes you cannot make it here because of quite major illness within the family.

The other young fellow who could not make it here today — he really did want to come, and he is very committed to indigenous education — could not come because he had to work. He had to drop out of university at the end of last year but hopes to continue next year. He had no income at all. There is no equity for him within the whole way that the university is set up, and indeed the way student support finance is set up, because his parents work. Because his parents work he is entitled to nothing, so he has had no financial support. His only way out of it, through the role modelling of his parents, is to go out and work himself and hopefully save enough money to be able to attend university again next year.

One of the other things I am seeking within the university system and would really love to find a bit more guidance with would be greater indigenous leadership in education within the university. It is sort of like: one finds that one has to be one's own leader because there is not that much indigenous leadership within the university. I think Monash University is trying to slowly change that. It is more the mechanisms of huge organisations and institutions rather than the individual institution itself that causes some of these things to be that way.

To finish off, having over a number of years watched our students really go through quite a lot of challenges, I have found that universities can be very isolating places if you are an indigenous young person, especially where you have no access to accommodation and support and you just have to fend for yourself when you are used to coming from an environment where there is a lot of support and you have got big family ties. I would like to see universities bring in more scholarships, especially accommodation ones and things like that.

I notice that our students struggle with things like accommodation and how hard it is just to get here. There is also the fact that they have a lot of family commitments. I would like to see the university get behind more initiatives, especially in medicine, so that students can engage in becoming doctors. The community really needs more indigenous doctors. To start with we do not even have one indigenous medical student. I will hand you over now to Sadie who will have a quick word.

Ms S. HECKENBERG — My name is Sadie Heckenberg. I am finishing my degree at the end of this semester. I am doing a bachelor of arts, double majoring in journalism and indigenous studies and minoring philosophy. I would like to talk to you about before I came to university and my trip through university, just to give you an overview.

My introduction to tertiary studies was when I dropped out of school at the age of 16. I went to a very good private school. It was incredibly racist at times, and I ended up dropping out. It was in New South Wales, so I ended up dropping out two weeks before my school certificate. I was told that I had to get a job or go into tertiary study, so I immediately entered into a certificate 1, which I completed in six weeks. In 2004 I did a certificate II and certificate III in business, which rekindled my love for study. I was incredibly fortunate, due to my marks in accounting, to be offered an interview which proceeded to being allowed into the diploma of tertiary studies course at Monash

University. That is a bridging course — your first year of university — although it was only six months for me because my gap in education showed completely.

I did business and I ended up failing all of my business subjects. Out of eight subjects I passed five. I failed business law accounting and microeconomics. Because of that I did not think I would get back in, and then I got a phone call really late in the re-enrolment period asking, ‘Is Sadie coming back in?’. I re-enrolled, but I re-enrolled in arts because I found that I could actually do arts subjects. I re-enrolled in journalism, which was a huge surprise, because I have very low spelling skills. I have strived completely with that, and that is due to the fact that throughout my second year at university — my first year in my course — I had two tutors. They were incredibly helpful to me, and I needed them so much.

The support at Monash is incredible, and otherwise I would not have been able to cope. Sometimes it is really hard. Sometimes the environment is completely culturally unsafe. It is sometimes due to lecturers and sometimes not due to lecturers, just due to really old course content. In one of my journalism subjects there was a two and a half-page report on how to deal with indigenous people. It was incredibly offensive.

I suppose one of my major issues at university is money. I moved down here onto campus and found it a horrible environment to live in for me personally, so I moved in with my mother. That cut off Abstudy, so I was completely reliant on her for all of my income, which I was not used to because I was used to living alone. I was very fortunate in the middle of last year to be offered scholarships, but due to the low amount of the scholarships — it is actually considerably less than Abstudy — and due to my age, getting lump sum payments is incredibly difficult to manage. I have had to juggle jobs. Recently I had four jobs.

At the university I am the editor of the student paper, so I have to fit that into my study, and it is becoming quite difficult. I am really looking forward to graduating. I am going into honours, which I am hoping will be a bit less work because there will be less subjects I have to cover — a bit more content, less subjects. That is basically my life story. Due to support I have been able to go from being a failing student to a student who can get into honours quite easily. I would really like to thank the university — just some of the people who have been around who have been so supportive. The Koori unit is just amazingly supportive.

Mr HADDOCK — Good morning. My name is Issac Haddock, or more commonly, Zac. I attended Monash University to study my undergraduate certificate in nursing when I was 19. I had left home when I was 15. I did not complete VCE but had the potential to go on and have further education. During the time of my absence from education I got a mechanics apprenticeship and entered into the workforce, as most people would, and started a new family. I come from an environment where I am the first person in my family to attend tertiary education, and the expectations that my family had of me at the time saw my tertiary education as less than valued — not as a negative thing, just the value of it was questioned a number of times, and of course I have got family expectations and responsibilities and they come first and foremost amongst everything else.

During that time when I started my own family I worked for the community development employment project, or CDEP. That awarded me \$207 a week for a week’s worth of work, and I had no chance of Abstudy while I was studying full time on campus. As you can understand, I had my own rent, my own bills, my own fees and all the costs associated with raising a family to consider, and the reason I was unsuccessful at Monash University and ended up dropping out before the end of my third year was the mere fact that I could not attend lectures. I would turn up for a lecture and if work rang me, work took precedence and I jumped back in my car to drive back down and work the day as a casual for \$15 an hour.

Finances have been a huge hindrance in my personal quest for further education. I am currently happily studying a community-based bachelor’s degree at the Institute of Koorie Education at Deakin University, where I can study full time and continue to work within the community and earn a wage which will support me. Once I leave here I am actually going down to the university for a week’s intensive. There are six intensive weeks throughout the year — when I go down there and forego the week’s wages at work to fulfil my study requirements — as well as a lot of online and telephone conference-type tutorials during the weeks I am not down there. Without this sort of study environment there is not a chance at all that in my situation, with a family and the financial responsibilities that I have, I would ever have been able to consider a tertiary education, much less successfully complete it, or be on my way to completing it.

I just wanted to speak very briefly about the fact that my story is not unusual amongst our community. We quite often, as the stats from the 2006 census would reflect, have families young, and we quite often live independently as well. When you are living independently, coming from a generationally poor background, with no role modelling in tertiary education and only role modelling in employment and training, trying to break that cycle and get into education to further yourself and further your community is quite difficult a lot of the time — again, mostly because of those financial restraints that I was subject to.

When I first started studying my bachelor of nursing, the state government I think it was — or the federal government, I am not entirely sure — offered a student supplement loan, which was a top-up type payment as a part of Abstudy. A lot of people who were in my boat took that up. Unfortunately there was a little hidden clause — I am still paying it off at the moment — that it is indexed and you do pay interest on it. So on top of the exorbitant HECS fees that I now have for a course that I never got to complete I then have the student supplement loan of \$7000. It was \$6000 when I took it on; it is \$8500 currently and shows no sign of receding unfortunately, even though I do make regular payments through tax. That is pretty much all I wanted to speak about today — to talk about my firsthand experience.

Ms PATON — I guess I am the last speaker. Doris Paton.

Mr WALSH — Actually Doris is going to sum up on the GippsTAFE and then we are actually going to finish up with me doing the recommendations.

Ms PATON — I am the team leader of the Koorie Unit at GippsTAFE and I have been there for nine years. I am actually a student of Monash from a long time ago. I am one of the few Koori teachers in this region. We have five teachers at the Koorie Unit and all of the Aboriginal teachers in the region are at the Koorie Unit. We have one support staff member and four non-Koori teachers. Our students range in age between 16 and 70. Most students who attend TAFE and live in the region want to stay in the region. They do not want to leave the region because that is where their family and community is, so the opportunity for work and education is really important to provide a pathway for them into those areas.

The youth that we get at TAFE are young people who have disengaged from education and are in the care of other agencies generally. They come to us, and their biggest needs are in literacy and numeracy. As well as their social issues, they have serious literacy issues which require extra work from us and extra tuition from our teachers. We are able to meet that with ITAS, the indigenous tertiary assistance for tutoring scheme, and we work with that small cohort in various ways.

We provide them with opportunities to have work experience; we provide them with support through working in with older students — peer teaching, peer learning; we provide them with social networking opportunities by taking them out of the region to art exhibitions, to camps and to do other things outside of the region. We try to broaden their experience of learning and take them on a different journey to the journey they might have started when they first came to us.

The main reasons people in the community come to TAFE are to engage in learning or to re-engage in learning; or many are first-time learners. Most of our work is done in the area of literacy. For the other students who come, it is generally a pathway into employment. The pathway we use is through working with agencies to provide traineeship support and pre-employment programs and to support them in their workplace through mentor training. We have various ways in which we work with the students who come in to TAFE.

There are several advantages of a regional TAFE like GippsTAFE. I think the main one is that we are able to meet the needs of the local community in training, particularly in skill demands for the region. We work with agencies like Parks, DSE and other agencies that have a strategy for engaging Aboriginal people; we have that relationship with them. We work with agencies to supply network support through Berry Street and through other agencies that work on a more personal level.

The TAFE has a learning environment which is supportive of the indigenous community and its values and is supportive of the families and the community in their aspirations in education. For example, we require extra milk every day because our students like to drink lots of cups of tea. We are able to gain that support through management. Management at GippsTAFE takes a sincere and real interest in the aspirations of the Koori unit in providing a transitional pathway into work and into further education. One of the disadvantages which we

recognise is that the courses can be limited through a regional TAFE and that employment opportunities are therefore limited as well.

The barriers that our community faces in TAFE education are things like those that have already been mentioned: lack of understanding of cultural differences, lack of understanding of different learning styles, community responsibilities through family involvement. Like Robyn said, one of the single biggest issues for our students is travel and transport. Most of our students do not have licences, therefore they walk to TAFE. They come when it is raining or when it is nice, but the distance they have to walk to TAFE can be a barrier to attendance.

One of the best opportunities we have been able to provide through TAFE is the opportunity for flexible learning and online learning. We have many students enrolled in our courses who live in other regions of Victoria and are able to access online courses through the Koori unit which provides flexible learning processes. As I said, the biggest issue for us is addressing the literacy and numeracy issues of the community before we can start to work with people on an individual transition plan into employment or further education. Thank you.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you. Stephen, can you quickly sum up because we are running out of time?

Mr WALSH — Going back to what Isaac was talking about and how his story is not a stand-alone story, I, too, was a former student of Monash. Now I am coming back into Monash University as part of a cohort group based on a research model to undertake a masters degree in various areas. Unfortunately when I attended earlier as a student I was obviously the financial responsibility of my family. I did not have the luxury of having employment at the time; therefore I had to look for other means of finance, whether it be legally or illegally.

I felt that if there had been a bit more support within the university, I would have had the chance to be able to progress at a younger stage rather than as a mature-age student. We have heard Sadie talk about going from being a failing student to an honours student and also some of the reasons which Robyn mentioned about some of the support factors which are needed.

We have come together and we have these five recommendations in which we have stated that what is needed is: access and equity for Koori students in pathways to higher education; increase accommodation for indigenous students, not just abroad but also locally; increase the provision of participation for initiatives and schemes; have local indigenous involvement at a decision-making level within the university which obviously increases the pathway of opportunity for the Koori community; and paid mentors for current and prospective successful students as a 12-month pilot program. I will just sum up there and thank you for having us here today.

Mr HALL — I thank each of you for coming in and telling us your story. It was very interesting indeed and helpful for us. My question is: is it difficult for Aboriginal people — I think you might have mentioned it, Robyn — to move out of the region to study, and is it therefore critically important for the indigenous community to have local access to study options, given the fact that family is so important and they are less likely to move?

Ms R. HECKENBERG — Absolutely, and it is certainly part of the vision of everyone here today that we find successful mechanisms whereby our students can stay in this region to study. Rather than having to go to Melbourne University or Deakin they can use us as their university of choice. We are really working together to try to find ways where we can have that happen here.

Mr HALL — So the reality is that probably few young Aboriginal people would actually move away from home to study. Is that the reality?

Ms R. HECKENBERG — The reality is that there are young Kooris within Gippsland who could come to university if there was a way they could get here. They have not been able to come here because there has not been the opportunity of, say, a minibus that goes from Sale every day or three nights accommodation a week provided by the residences so that someone can leave home for just a few evenings a week and be able to study full time here. I guess we need to really broaden the ways we approach it so that those opportunities can be gained for students who want to stay with their families.

Mr HERBERT — Thank you very much for your presentations. I would like to direct a question to Doris and Robyn. But, firstly, I was just interested in your explanation for why you dropped out, Sadie, in terms of bad school experience. I imagine that is the case for many people who have a bad experience at school and that impacts

later on in terms of their educational aspirations. What I am interested in is that link and what the Koori unit does in terms of trying to build aspirations in secondary schools, because I think obviously the better the secondary school aspirations in education, the better the chance of indigenous and non-indigenous kids coming into university. Is there a program in terms of secondary schools in the area to lift aspirations?

Ms R. HECKENBERG — Probably Stephen would be just as well to answer that because he belongs to the Koori footprints program that we have got going at the moment. Do you want to answer that, Stephen?

Mr WALSH — Yes, certainly with getting the Koori education resource officer on board that is a way to be able to obviously start to inform students about some of the benefits of entering in, and I guess that is seen as a bit of an aspiration, to be able to promote access to students. In terms of broadly within the whole of the Gippsland region — —

Mr HERBERT — In the valley, yes.

Mr WALSH — Unfortunately we have only had that focus for the Central Gippsland region or the Latrobe Valley, and even then it is probably just Latrobe Valley as it is and not Baw Baw, South Gippsland, Bass Coast or East Gippsland, where we do have other indigenous populations.

Mr HERBERT — Is it successful?

Mr WALSH — It is only just in its first phase, and Monash has just started to come back around and start looking at some of their old strategies, which were at the highest point of indigenous engagement within the university and which had dropped off due to a lack of anticipation within the university and, I guess, the university's role. But I think it probably needs to be answered by Doris too — that aspiration from GippsTAFE, that pathway from TAFE to university.

Ms PATON — The way that we work with the schools is mostly through the VET programs and to provide introductory-type courses, short introductory courses, where indigenous students from the region can participate in different courses for a very short period to give them a taste of what courses they might be interested in. We work with other departments in TAFE to do that. So it is not just courses in the Koori unit; it is courses across the TAFE. That is probably the way that we work mostly, creating some aspiration into our pathway of learning.

Ms R. HECKENBERG — I wanted to just make a comment to add to that in terms of VET and VCAL. The way that institutions tend to look at VET and VCAL as somehow being less than VCE is definitely a stumbling block, isn't it, for our prospective students. That is a kind of attitude that is pretty hard to shift, given that you go along to faculty board meetings and they talk about exclusive VCE. VCAL and VET are kind of left out of the picture. If you try to say anything about that, there is usually a bit of — not just a brick wall but hostility that you would consider the elite group of VCE to have any equivalents to VET and VCAL.

Mr HADDOCK — Further to the aspirational-type programs, they need to be instituted as soon as possible in the secondary education of indigenous students, because there is not that generational expectation of further education. We have a lot of programs within the schools where the liaison officers will go in in the final years of secondary education and try and build the aspirations of indigenous students to access tertiary education. Unfortunately most of our students have already left long before then. We need to start building the aspirations of our children in late primary school into early high school.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education

Churchill — 19 May 2008

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Witnesses

Associate Professor H. Ballis, acting pro vice-chancellor,

Ms L. Hambly, director, strategy,

Mr A. Scarlett, executive officer and campus manager, Gippsland campus, Monash University.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — I declare this hearing of the Education and Training Committee open. The committee is hearing evidence today in relation to the inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education. I wish to advise that all evidence taken by the committee, including submissions, is subject to parliamentary privilege — in other words, you can say what you wish and you will not be in trouble. I welcome representatives from Monash University. The format is that you give us a presentation for 10 to 15 minutes, and then we will ask a few questions for the other 10 to 15 minutes.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — Thank you very much. The university has already made a written submission, but I wanted to speak on some specific issues in relation to this campus and the way we see the situation. It has been a real challenge for us to attract and keep students from the region here, and we made a deliberate effort to pitch ourselves and to increase the relevance of the campus to the region. Some of what I say is really not new. Generally we bundle together socioeconomic factors. What that means for the campus is that one of the factors that slows down students coming to enrol here is economic factors per se. As soon as they indicate a desire to come to university, they just cannot get out of their house and go to the nearest university around the corner or take a tram or take a bus. For them going to university is a serious economic challenge. There are significant costs involved. They have to establish travel arrangements. They have to organise accommodation for the most part. We have got some from the regional high schools that can come here, but as soon as we look to southern and eastern Gippsland and the wider Gippsland, there are additional accommodation costs that are immediately incurred. For that reason there is a direct correlation between students seeking a gap year and going to university.

Let me say about the gap year that I am concerned about it. I have spoken in every context about the gap year. In order for the students to accumulate money to go to university, they go and get part-time employment, and often to get part-time employment many a student has to go into the city to find ready available positions. In a large number of cases, once they go into the city, they do not come back into the townships. The policy is good, in that it enables students to go and get a job. For the regional areas it is bad, because it is part of a caustic formula; it is actually draining the region of its young people, and I raise a problem with that.

The second area that for us is a problem — and I use this to account for the low uptake of students going to university — is transport. Distance is overcome through transport, and our public transport facilities here are pretty nebulous in some cases or elementary in other cases. In order for a student even to come from Morwell to here, it is a major challenge. The campus has to set up a whole lot of mechanisms at our own expense in order to accommodate those things. Transport, and the adequacy of public transport in particular, is a thing that mitigates students coming to university.

A third factor, in my opinion — and it is hard to define — is to do with aspiration. It is to do with the kind of hopes that young people have in the region. I do not know where it comes from. Is it because less people from the region are from a university background, therefore less kids aspire to go to university? Somehow university does not feature as highly in their thinking as it should. Many a time I have taken graduation addresses here. One parent came along to me and said, ‘We finally got the monkey off our shoulder’. I said, ‘What is this monkey?’. She said, ‘We have been here for four or five generations — Gippslanders, farming community — and this is our first degree in the family’, with a sense of pride. I think that translates in a way right through the community in terms of a desire to come here.

In some of the interviews that I have done in other projects in relation to shiftwork in the place, a lot of the people that responded to my interviews were commenting, ‘You do not need university education in light of the kind of pays that we are on’. There is a sense around the place that, if you want to get into the big money, then university is really not one of the mechanisms that you need to get there.

Last but not least — I have bundled up very quickly a whole lot of things — has to do with ENTER scores. I mention it because it is directly an issue for this campus. In some respects, if you want to go to any other university, the ENTER score is not a real issue. By virtue of the fact that we are with Monash University, Monash has set a benchmark that says, ‘We have no programs below a 70 ENTER score, so you have to have 70 in order to get in here’. What we have done is set up a whole lot of mechanisms to try and get students into the place, but that ENTER score is a real factor in here. I have challenged the vice-chancellor. Recently I had the vice-chancellor group meet with us, and I said, ‘This policy has to be reviewed in a way for the campus’. It is a challenge for a student, either coming in to do a diploma of foundation studies or one of the alternative pathways that we established, or go somewhere else and go directly into a degree.

What I have done is given a flavour of the concerns, but I wonder if I can take 5 minutes and tell you that we have not been flat-footed on this campus with these things. We have established a whole lot of strategies to mitigate these factors. One of them is the alternative entry pathways. We have invented these things so that we come under the Monash radar, so to speak. The diploma of foundation studies — or tertiary studies, as we call it now — is one. Many of our students — I think we are getting anywhere between 120 and 150 students each year — are coming into this campus through this. All it is is a rebranding of the first year of the degree. Students come into this at the lower ENTER score and then they just roll into the degree without any loss of time. That has been a factor for us. We have also introduced associate degrees, which are two-year versions, particularly for some specific programs. There are a variety of ways we have tried to manipulate processes, really, to honour the university's entry requirements while engaging with our community, which I think is our mandate.

Mr HALL — Do you get HECS-funded positions for those?

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — They are fully HECS funded, and it is how we pitch them, Peter. We are working at ways now to make it look as seamless as possible for the young people by saying, 'If you come here, you do not come into a sort of a lesser program, you are actually in the full first year of a degree' and whatever. The second thing we have done is that I suspect we must be one of the campuses with the largest number of scholarships on offer. We have got a diversity of scholarships. I do not know how many we have got on accommodation scholarships at present.

Mr SCARLETT — The breakdown is not that straightforward. Some of them are commonwealth scholarships, so they are direct, and then some of ours are direct in partnership between our campus and local shires, and there are about four or five of those, but then there are other ones through the commonwealth. There would be 20 or 30 at least.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — In one of the lists that we have, the university put in something in the last three or four years when the HECS increase came in. Some of the money from Monash University has been reinvested into scholarships, and this campus has been getting somewhere around 100 plus. Currently we have about 420-plus students on a variety of types of scholarships through that means from the university. In addition to that, the campus has created some, and I think this year we have got about 31. Each of the shires around has got between one and three scholarships or bursaries, as they call them, specifically targeting students who are coming in. If you put it all together, of the on-campus cohort I would say we would have close to about a third of them on a scholarship of some form or another. I think if we did not have those, there would be a high likelihood that these students would either go part-time or defer their study or something. This is the way the socioeconomic stuff bites into the processes here.

I will give two illustrations of how dynamic this stuff is. Art and design here was in trouble. We were enrolling eight or nine students a year, but the demand for art and design right around the place is high. All I did was I responded by giving a \$1000 art bursary to anyone who enrolled, paid out in \$500 payments per semester. Within the first year we enrolled 24 students into the degree; this year it has gone up to 31, plus another 10 masters students. There is a direct correlation between the availability of resources and the programs. The other one is our civil and environmental engineering. The local industries have come together and put together a whole lot of significant engineering scholarships — about 20 — and this program that all of a sudden was nowhere is now getting 28 or 29 people into the program. The issues are apparent: once you put some resources at a certain spot, you are likely to impact in the region.

The third thing is the Monash University SAM program — the Schools Access Monash program. Unfortunately we can only do it with three schools, and currently we have got it with Kurnai College here, Traralgon and Lewana. There is an indication that they might wind that program back, and I am concerned about that. I think I would have to pay it from the campus, because it is such an effective mechanism for bringing students to university. It provides them with tutorial support, all sorts of career advice, and assistance in their studies as well as some funding to come to university.

Ms HAMBLY — Scholarships.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — Scholarships. I think it is a terrific formula, but it needs to be even more strategic. We work very closely with the regional office of the department of education here. The policy that it has developed for engaging with the Gippsland Youth Commitment initiative as you come through this now means that

Monash University has become a key player in this regional engagement. I am convinced that unless all the players are working together each of us falls apart, virtually, individually.

The other factor that we have got on this campus that is probably absolutely unique is a thing called the co-op program. All it is is an industry placement program. A student who enrolls in this campus for on-campus study can immediately become a member of the co-op, and over a period of three years — the duration of their program — they will receive \$17 000 in pay as part of this. What we do is we find them a placement in industry directly related to their degree. If they want to be accountants, we find firms that are accounting firms; or engineers, journalists or whatever. Currently we have about 70 students involved in this.

The key to this is that the industry is actually putting up the money to do this, which is interesting. Students are coming to the program to get this money. In the first year we give them some training about placement and send them off to the organisation, and they receive a couple of thousand dollars for that; in the second year they go and spend a five-week placement, and they get \$5000 for that; and in the third year their placement extends over six months and they get \$10 000 for that. In many instances the co-op becomes the avenue for them to get permanent employment. That is a terrific little initiative, and we now have students coming to us. Why \$17 000? Because we did a mental back-of-the-envelope calculation: if they had a part-time job at McDonald's they would earn somewhere between \$6000 and \$6500 a year, so that over the three years we are giving them virtually a study support — something that they would have got anyway in part-time employment.

The last strategy — you can quiz me on any of these things — is we have finally bitten the bullet, really, with this campus, and we have said, 'Even what we have done needs to be a lot more dynamic'. So what we have done now is we are actually going out to the communities, and we are not looking to establish campuses everywhere — we will not use the 'C' word — but we are establishing programs and a presence. At Leongatha we have introduced the first year of a nursing program at the Leongatha hospital, and currently we are negotiating to do the same and expand it to other programs in Sale and in Bairnsdale, and we are negotiating with and thinking around Wonthaggi. We feel we have to lift our visibility, and we have to engage more directly with our young people in the regions to make it possible for them to come across.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you very much, Professor.

Mr DIXON — Just in relation to the notes about the Monash Discovery Club, which sounds like a fantastic concept, can I just have a bit more information regarding how many schools it involves; was it your idea or did you find it somewhere else; and obviously it is a longitudinal thing and an investment in the future, but is there any feedback on that?

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — The discovery club emerged from a comment that a regional director made here one day. She indicated that young people make their decision to go to university much earlier than we thought. We thought it was years 10, 11 and 12 where the decisions are made. In fact the decisions are made at the end of primary school and at the beginning of secondary — the very area where we are doing most poorly. The Monash Discovery Club resulted from a desire to engage with all the schools. Unfortunately when I did the maths on this it just became really restrictive, so what we have done is, working with the regional office, we have asked it to identify a number of schools and establish a membership from these schools, and we are just in the process of launching that. I reckon that is a good initiative.

Mr DIXON — It is a great idea. It is good.

Mr ELASMAR — Professor, thank you very much. You said students come to the city, which is a good idea, but we are losing them in the country, which is a bad idea. Is the working economy in the country good in a way that the students can work here and at the same time achieve what they want in university, or is it another reason stopping them from coming to university?

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — There is no doubt that the labour market is a key factor driving people out of the country into the city, but I think there are a whole lot of other factors as well. There is a whole mythology that says if you want the very best of education, you have to leave the country in order to go into the city, and I challenge some of this. But you are dead right in saying that work is one of the factors that is taking people in. I am now saying that if we provide young people with the resources, they are much more likely to take advantage of this. Invariably they may go into the city as part of an ongoing career development, but they will be engaging much more directly with the regional community, I suspect.

Mr HALL — First of all, thanks Harry, Alan and Loretta for presenting to us today, and also thank you for hosting our hearings throughout the course of the day; we appreciate that. My first question is statistical. Do you have a breakdown of the geographic profile of where students attending Monash Gippsland actually come from beyond the campus students?

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — I can give you a percentile. It is something in the vicinity of 70 per cent of our on-campus students come from the greater Gippsland region. It goes out like an expanding circle, virtually.

Ms HAMBLBY — Fifty per cent is Latrobe.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — Fifty per cent is Latrobe. A few more come from Warragul, and then it drops off — a few more for Sale — and then it comes out. We have been trying to expand the arms of this thing.

Mr SCARLETT — Name a town and I will tell you.

Mr HALL — Some of those figures might be handy, Alan, if you could drop off some statistics.

Mr SCARLETT — We did it specifically last year for students whose on-campus address — their home on-campus address — rather than just their residential address during the year. For instance there are 34 who listed Trafalgar and there are 28 who listed Leongatha. While there are 260-odd who are in Churchill living around the area, and another 220 who are coming from Traralgon, they are gradually spread out, and those people are having to travel further and further. Leongatha is 55 kilometres away, and they are commuting.

Mr HALL — It is important for us for this reason: the presence of a local campus of a university increases the participation rate locally. It provides for those young kids here locally.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — And it is one of the things, Peter, that is driving us to establish much more dynamic kind of presences around.

Mr HALL — My follow-up question was just exactly that, Harry. In terms of the programs that you have put in place to increase participation levels locally, do you have any sort of trend figures on the increase in local enrolments?

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — It is only now that we are just starting to review these policies. The model that we have been developing here over the years of a university on the hill, removed from — I say — the evils of society and whatever was a very good 70s model. I am now saying that we need to revise that. We need to be out there. I believe a regional university campus has the capacity to value add to our communities so that we are increasing our engagement and visibility in ways that will do that.

It is interesting. In south Gippsland we have been doing the pilot. A lot of the south Gippsland people see the Strzeleckis as being Mount Everest — it has got snow, and it is so far away — so in order for us to do that we have actually had to add a lot of costs in there. We transport the students there once a week so that they can access the library and the labs here and whatever. It started very small. We have only got 11 students there, but we believe that will grow.

The other thing I may add for south Gippsland — and I did this in discussion with Russell Broadbent, who was encouraging me to do the Leongatha thing. We only needed about 40 students from South Gippsland to attend university in order for the South Gippsland region to reach statistically the equivalent of the city, so we set mental targets to judge whether we were succeeding or not.

Mr HALL — The other question I want to ask is in regard to distance education, of which Monash Gippsland has been the leader, I suppose — certainly in Victoria and probably Australia — in the delivery of distance education. In what way can distance education help us address the issue that this committee has to deal with — that is, to try and improve the participation rate in higher education from students from different geographical areas, country and city collectively as well?

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — I will answer it two ways. When I first came here in the 90s the distance education program here was booming. I remember we used to produce maps with dots of where the students came from. If there were 50 from a certain town, it had a certain-sized dot and whatever. There was a preponderance of red dots from the wider Gippsland area, which was important. It sort of said to me back then that distance education

became a form of engagement of overcoming the foibles of distance and whatever to engage here. We have done new tests with our numbers, and probably the bulk of our students are coming from the city and the wider outer Melbourne area, which is an important dynamic. Either we have promoted it or we have not. As a university we have not been as dynamic in our promotion.

Ms HAMBLY — We have only got about 10 per cent of our enrolments coming from Gippsland on campus. The bulk of it is overseas and 15 per cent Australian, so it is quite small.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — But the distance education program is important. Another way to describe distance education is what the student receives from the other end. From our end we can talk of distance education as portable curriculum. It is the portability of the curriculum that makes it possible for us to do what we are doing at Leongatha and what we are looking to do in Sale and Bairnsdale.

Mr HALL — A couple of people have suggested to us already in this inquiry about the possibility of establishing, for want of a better name, online learning centres. It may not necessarily be a single university but a collection of universities, or indeed vocational providers, that are delivering online programs, but are coming together at a facility which has the necessary infrastructure — broadband, et cetera — required to actually participate more fully in an online program. One of the advantages would also be a bit of collegiate support there, because you would have a collection of students rather than just sitting in your bedroom at home.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — It all depends how it is done. That could be a model that has the potential — I am just thinking out loud — to knock a place like a regional campus off the perch, because it is so precarious for numbers. If the numbers are likely to go somewhere else, then it becomes quite rickety to maintain it financially. The way that we are looking to do it, we want the dynamic presence for those kind of facilities to do it.

Mr HALL — I agree that what you are doing in Leongatha and Sale — and proposed in Bairnsdale — is a better model, where you are actually practically delivering the program, but you will never go to Cann River and deliver programs.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — We have been experimenting, but the challenge there is the adequacy of the online stuff. We have set up a pilot program to try and provide career support to the schools in those areas, and that became our toe in the water, so to speak, to say, ‘Is the technology sufficiently robust to be able to cope with this?’, and we had major problems. I could produce a report on that.

Mr HERBERT — If you could get Telstra to hook you up, you would be lucky.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — They have been in there. We have not been able to do it.

Mr HERBERT — Thank you very much for your presentation. I have got a couple of follow-up questions. My question is by nature of information as opposed to discussion, if that is okay, Harry. In terms of what you were saying about overseas students and online, the statistics I have here are that you have about 2000 on campus — I assume they are EFT — —

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — Bodies.

Mr HERBERT — Bodies, not EFTs, and you have about 5000 off campus?

Ms HAMBLY — About 4000.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — If you are thinking of bodies and that, the EFT equivalent for this campus is about 3500 EFT-funded places.

Mr HERBERT — I guess what I am coming at is what is the percentage of those off campus then who are overseas? I was not sure about what you were saying before.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — At one stage we had a pretty thriving overseas population. What year was this?

Ms HAMBLY — It was 2006, and 2007 was about the same; 43 per cent of the off-campus numbers are overseas.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — Not now.

Ms HAMBLY — It is pretty close; 40 per cent.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — The TMC partnership has really been wound back, and we are on the way to exiting those now.

Mr HERBERT — Around 40 per cent of your off-campus bodies are overseas?

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — For 2006.

Mr HERBERT — Of the 600 or so bodies — not EFT — that we are talking about in terms of the 30 per cent of people who are not in the broader Gippsland area, how many of that 30 per cent would come from Melbourne or a suburb of Melbourne?

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — The on-campus numbers?

Mr HERBERT — On campus, yes.

Ms HAMBLY — About 20 per cent.

Mr HERBERT — So the rest come from other parts of Victoria, do they? I am just going through this: 2000 bodies, 20 per cent of them are outside the broader Gippsland region, and 20 per cent of that 30 per cent are from Melbourne; is that right?

Ms HAMBLY — Give or take, yes. About 10 per cent of our students on campus are international. About 68 come from Gippsland, about 18 from Melbourne, about 10 from overseas, and the rest come from here and there — outer metropolitan Melbourne and other places.

Mr HERBERT — Maybe we can get that information if we could; that would be useful. Can I just start going to a couple of other questions. In terms of regional delivery, we have concentrated a lot on students, but of course academic staff are also important for any university and for the calibre of it. Do your staff tend to live locally, or do they come up from Melbourne for a day or two? What are your rough percentages there?

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — The bulk of the staff live locally. They often come down and buy a home. We have got quite a cluster of staff actually living around Warragul now, and Drouin, where they are bridging the city–country area. Quite a few are moving into South Gippsland. Students find it difficult to come here, but the staff are actually finding it attractive going down there.

Mr HERBERT — The staff live in Inverloch or somewhere!

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — Yes.

Mr HERBERT — On deferment, you have about 10 per cent of students who defer. For planning purposes, what do you plan in terms of the percentage of those students who are going to actually enrol in the next year?

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — Of the deferred students?

Mr HERBERT — Yes.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — We tend to get the bulk of them coming back.

Mr HERBERT — So you plan for 90 per cent of them?

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — For instance, 9 of the 29 engineering students deferred, but we are confident that those who have deferred will come in for next year.

Mr HERBERT — So when you allocate the new year's enrolments, you basically pull out the whole deferment?

Ms HAMBLY — Because it flows on. If they defer one year, they tend to come back the next year. You get last year's this year.

Mr HERBERT — That is good. Can I just ask about one other area. We heard earlier that there has been an issue in terms of rejection of joint accredited courses and diploma courses coming in, in terms of Monash — not here, but the Clayton campus — not giving recognition.

Ms HAMBLY — We do have pathways with TAFE, and we give six months credit with the certificate IV, which takes you into a nursing degree.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — I know what you are saying. Monash is conservative on its credit.

Mr HERBERT — What I am after is, though, do you have a list of courses that have gone up for accreditation and been rejected or accepted in the last couple of years?

Ms HAMBLY — Up to Monash — is that what you are saying?

Mr HERBERT — Monash, yes.

Ms HAMBLY — There is an issue in some regional — —

Mr HERBERT — There must be somewhere a list of courses that have gone for accreditation. I assume they are accredited at the faculty level, are they?

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — We can follow them up through Merryn Evans's office. Normally, if a program is to be accredited, it is a local TAFE that seeks an arrangement with us. The easier thing to do is for us to give you the credit matrix.

Ms HAMBLY — We have got a list of what credit is currently given.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — And what it will actually do for this campus is it will list not so much the specific diplomas but it will say, 'If you have got this level of certificate IV and you want to go into the faculty of arts, this is what you will get; and for business, this is what you will get'. It will give you a total map. I am not aware of or I have not heard of a specific program that has asked for accreditation formally that either this campus or the university — —

Mr HERBERT — We heard in earlier evidence that in terms of cross-accreditation — if I heard it correctly — there have been quite a number that have been rejected, which is a bit of a pity in terms of that pathway.

Ms HAMBLY — I cannot think of recent courses.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — The only thing that I could think of that comes remotely close to that is an application or a request to establish a thing called dual awards. Dual awards is where you have got something that happens in TAFE and something that happens in university, and we lock them in together, so that if you enrol from TAFE it becomes a seamless transition into the university program. In that particular instance there were some that were challenged centrally.

For example, they had some in communications at the Chisholm Berwick campus; we tried to establish some here, and it has been very difficult to do it. I think the only one that I have got here is the writing program in Central Gippsland TAFE and journalism over here. The reason the university has found it difficult is that it has made by default the TAFE as the criteria for entry into this thing, and they felt that was problematic. That is why the university has moved away. But it is a policy that I have had to wear, rather than something that I have sat down to work out.

Mr HERBERT — I think that clarifies it. Thank you very much.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Can I also ask, in the recent 2008–2009 commonwealth budget, was there any initiative in there which will have an impact on students of regional Victoria participating to a greater degree in higher ed?

Ms HAMBLY — We are currently trying to put in submissions to get additional support from the federal government with regard to a program called diversity and structural reform, and our submission is about trying to raise aspirations and participation, particularly in the maths-science area, which fits in with the GYOC. That is a specific federal one, but it was not mentioned in the budget, it was part of the allocation of money.

Mr HERBERT — Are you talking about the announcement about the capital money?

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Any initiative.

Mr SCARLETT — Increase in capital has benefited us. The capital development fund initiatives we have been quite fortunate with over a number of years. The abolition of full fees potentially harms Monash.

Ms HAMBLY — Central.

Mr SCARLETT — Because the substitution of full-fee-paying places compared with HECS-funded places is only about two-thirds. We do not have a lot of full-fee-paying students.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — We have 10 in medicine here.

Mr SCARLETT — But in the medical program that is the only substantial number; that is 10 out of 58 or 60.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — The last question, Peter.

Mr HALL — I was going to ask about the new medical school. If you could go through that, how many HECS-funded places and how many full-fee paying places are there?

Mr SCARLETT — Forty.

Mr HALL — So 40 and 10, is it?

Ms HAMBLY — It is 40 and 10 international; so that was 40 Commonwealth supported places and 10 international, and 10 Australian full fee paying places.

Mr HALL — And in terms of, again, student profile, is that accommodated for more local students to seek enrolments through the medical school?

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — We are trying to increase that. I think, going from memory, there are eight.

Ms HAMBLY — Eight from Gippsland, with a Gippsland background.

Mr HALL — Out of the — —

Ms HAMBLY — Out of 59, and they are trying to look at how they can improve that.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — Remember that we are looking at graduate entry, and often these are Gippsland students who go into town and then come back via medicine.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you very much. Thank you again for your hospitality; it has been magnificent.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — It was a pleasure.

Mr HERBERT — Are full-fee-paying places scrapped at the start of 2009? Is that something that has come in?

Mr SCARLETT — Sorry?

Mr HERBERT — Full-fee-paying places are being abolished.

Mr SCARLETT — Yes.

Mr HERBERT — Is that from the start of 2009?

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — I do not know when the articulation is.

Mr HERBERT — Because I did not see anything in the budget about it.

Mr SCARLETT — I think it must be 2009.

Assoc. Prof. BALLIS — We have been given instruction, and I think that they do apply for 2009, yes.

Mr HERBERT — So you could enrol midyear as a last chance?

The DEPUTY CHAIR — It has to pass through the Senate first.

Mr HERBERT — It has not gone through the Senate?

The DEPUTY CHAIR — No.

Mr HERBERT — That will be interesting.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education

Churchill — 19 May 2008

Members

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Research Officers: Ms C. Whiteman and Ms J. Hope

Administrative Officer: ms N. Tyler

Witnesses

Mr D. Paproth, deputy regional director, and

Ms Y. Snell, assistant to the deputy regional director, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development; and

Mr D. Roche, South Gippsland Bass Coast Local Learning and Employment Network representative, governance board, Leongatha Education Precinct.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — I welcome you to the inquiry. The process is that you give your presentation taking up 15 minutes, and then we ask questions for the last 15 minutes. Don, welcome again. It is over to you.

Mr PAPROTH — Thank you very much. It says on my tag there that I am representing Leongatha Education Precinct. There are all sorts of people in the room whom I am finding that I know. I am from the department of education. I am called a deputy regional director. I look after all of the schools from Morwell through to Cowes, so my interest stems a long way beyond just the Leongatha Education Precinct, even though it is an initiative of which we are very proud.

I was going to have a full PowerPoint presentation with colours, bells and whistles, which I spent a lot of time organising, but unfortunately I will not be able to do that. I would like to give you some papers to read. You can read them very, very quickly as I am going through them. I will also give you a copy of my presentation, which you can ignore at will. I will ask you first of all to refer to the executive summary on the single sheet headed 'Executive summary'. That comes from the Vinson report.

The Vinson report is otherwise sometimes called the Jesuit report. It appears every couple of years, and it looks at areas of disadvantage and relative disadvantage between postcodes and municipalities right across Australia. It is a very detailed and a very academic treatise, and I would recommend that you do go into it, because it is extraordinarily well put together. I have given you that first page there with the underlinings, and I will read it. I will go away and use a very bad teaching technique and read what is obvious to you.

The executive summary of *Dropping Off The Edge* says:

However, when social disadvantage becomes entrenched within a limited number of localities the restorative potential of standard services in spheres like education and health can diminish. A disabling social climate can develop that is more than the sum of individual and household disadvantages and the prospect is increased of disadvantage being passed from one generation to the next.

Today I am going to speak about South Gippsland — both South Gippsland shire and Bass Coast shire. It is a very common thing for people to say 'South Gippsland'; it is two distinct groups, but two merging groups. Every other part of Gippsland has its own local government authority. This has two. Bass Coast shire is the third-quickest-growing municipality in Victoria. It incorporates Phillip Island, Inverloch through to Wonthaggi. We all know that there is going to be a desalination plant there at some stage in the near future, and it will have, again, a marked effect on the development of that area and the need for goods, services, training, expertise and skills — all of that sort of thing.

When you drive through that area you think, 'This is very pleasant. It is a beautiful part of the world', and it looks very affluent. If I could refer you pages in the second part of this report. Page 69 has a whole lot of tables on it and shows the most disadvantaged areas in Victoria. We are not no. 1 in South Gippsland, but in band 2 on page 69 you will see Corinella and all of the areas that pertain to that — and Wonthaggi. Both of those are in Bass Coast shire. Wonthaggi is the centre of Bass Coast shire. The reason they are disadvantaged, according to the report, is up in the top left-hand corner of page 68 — that is, the effect of the ten factors listed there: computer use, post-school qualifications et cetera.

Even though we are looking at a very pleasant part of the world that appears to be very affluent, we are looking at a very disadvantaged part of the world. One of the reasons it is disadvantaged is because of the culture that has developed over time. I live in that area; I live in Inverloch. Let me tell you, the effect of living south of the Strzelecki Ranges is massive. Fifteen years ago I got a job as a district liaison principal in Warragul. At the time I was living in Foster, which is in deep South Gippsland. Until I got the job in Warragul I had never been to Warragul. I had never been across the Strzeleckis, and I am not alone. It is unusual for people to go across the hills for any purpose whatsoever, and they certainly do not do it for education.

It is unusual for people to seek their tertiary education, their tertiary qualifications, north of the Strzeleckis. All of South Gippsland looks towards Melbourne for shopping, entertainment, education, the university — whatever. That has always been the case. There are very few students from South Gippsland shire or Bass Coast shire who come across to Churchill. That is not part of the psyche. It is cultural, and that is part of the reason I gave you that first sheet. There is a culture that has developed in that part of the world of, 'This is where we go. This is the way we do things here. This is where our interests lie'.

If you put that together with the cost of going to university in Melbourne, which is where they naturally go, we have problems. Bass Coast shire as a shire has the lowest rate of university entrance of any shire in Victoria. There

are 72 shires, I think. Bass Coast has the lowest. You will see in the presentation I was going to give you in full glowing colour that the rate of university entrants for South Gippsland is approximately the same as the rest of Gippsland. That is because South Gippsland shire drags up Bass Coast shire. It is still low, and it is low compared to the rest of country Victoria and it is hideously low compared to metropolitan Melbourne and the rest of the area there.

A lot of that is cultural. It has developed over time and this situation has been exacerbated over the last few years purely because of cost. Again, if you go through onto the middle of page 4 of the handout — I apologise for the size of it — the major reason cited by students for not going on to university, the major thing that stood in their way in South Gippsland or in Gippsland generally, is cost of travel. If you look at page 4, the middle graph, the middle bar, where it says Gippsland, the dark line says 'Too much travel'. That is much greater than the others. It is too much to be a fluke. This has been the case for a very long time.

Extrapolate that one more step. What is different about students in Gippsland compared to students in Swan Hill or students in Hamilton or wherever? The difference is that students in Gippsland do not have a major centre. There is no regional centre. We do not have a Geelong, we do not have a Ballarat, a Bendigo, even a Warrnambool or a Mildura. The largest town in Gippsland in Traralgon with 23 000–24 000 people. It is a small place, and that is the biggest we have got. You know, people will say 'Okay, Latrobe city: Traralgon, Morwell and Moe'. I do not know if any of you live in Traralgon, Morwell and Moe but I would not call them a city. Would you, Peter?

Mr HALL — Collectively, not.

Mr PAPROTH — Collectively not. That is right. There is not a unanimity of spirit or a unanimity of economic purpose in those areas, certainly not enough to attract people from south of the divide or south of the Strzeleckis over to that area. So we lack that crucial weight of numbers, that crucial capacity for us to produce for our students and to have what is appropriate for their training and tertiary education.

Okay, that is the problem. The problem is cultural. The problem is economic for the students themselves. We have a huge rate of deferrals which you will see, if you have got fantastic eyesight, on pages 5 and 6 of the handout — a huge number of deferrals, the highest rate in the state — and the problem is geographic. Now we can do very little about geographic. We can, I suspect, do something about cultural, over time; economic — that is going to have its interesting moments.

It is further exacerbated by the fact that we have no public transport in South Gippsland. Again, I live in Inverloch. If I want to go to Dandenong, I can get on a bus at 5.45 in the morning which is a little bit less than convenient. If I want to go to Dandenong or the city, I get on that bus at 5.45 in the morning and I go home at 4.30 in the afternoon which means I will be home at 7.30 at night. That is not a public transport system that is in any way efficient or pays any due worth or due regard to the people of the area. So we have no public transport. We have certainly no public transport over the Strzeleckis. So you can see we are geographically at a disadvantage and disadvantaged in those other ways.

Okay, they are the problems, but I did not come here to cry, 'Poor bugger me'. All right, what we do about it? Unfortunately, this was all going to come up in living, breathing colour on the wonderful screen behind me so that you could go 'ooh' and 'aah' and say, 'Isn't it a wonderful master plan that you have got there and your future is assured'. You will have to put up with a black-and-white copy. What you have there is the master plan for the Leongatha Education Precinct. This is a plan that a few of us started talking about maybe four or five years ago in an attempt to address the disadvantages that we were suffering, as we saw it. There was very precious little articulation of courses in the area, there was very, very little ability for students to go beyond their own little backyard.

For instance, we have a TAFE operating in Leongatha at Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE. The nearest TAFE is some 25 minutes away in Wonthaggi, that is Chisholm Institute of TAFE, which is a classic piece of organisation and cooperation. They are now working together as Southern and Coastal TAFE Alliance, which is fantastic, but we thought we could do a whole lot better than house them in a group of portables in the grounds of the Leongatha technical college.

What you see there is the map of Leongatha Secondary College as it will exist in the future. That is a space of 52 acres. In the left-hand corner — I should be doing this on a board showing you where it is — we can see Mesley Hall; that is where the town does most of its dramatical productions. Next to that we will build a kindergarten in the

future and there will be a road running right through; a theoretical conceptual road, a learning street, going right through the entire 52 acres.

North of where we are going to build the kindergarten, where you see 'Joint use oval' you will see 'Specialist school' written. That school is being constructed at the moment; it is two-thirds of the way there. We will open it to great fanfare in a little while. It is a magnificent structure. The specialist school is being built there; it costs about \$5 million.

Immediately to the right of the specialist school you will see a concept plan of the primary school. The primary school is currently at the other side of Horn Street, some kilometre and a half away, but the primary school is coming on site. We were hoping that the primary school would be funded in the budget announcement that has just gone in the last week or two. We missed out. We cried, but then we got over it and we will then go to the next hope, fingers crossed, that they will be funded in the next budget period next year. That is our fervent hope. That is all being costed, the plans are here: I could have had the plans sitting next to me; they are in my office. That is about a \$9-million project.

When that is done, the next step will be the secondary college. The Leongatha Secondary College will be rebuilt, so our learning street is continuing: kindergarten, specialist school for disadvantaged children or children with a disability, primary school, a new secondary school that will cater for 750 students.

We will then move to the right and if you go to the far right underneath the senior oval you will see 'TAFE'. TAFE has a commitment to build on that site. I will not presume to comment on whether that commitment is going to be fulfilled; they are in a different department to us now. I will not say whether that is a good thing or a bad thing; they just are. We hope that they will be funded and we hope that we will have a brand spanking sparkling new TAFE to service South Gippsland shire.

Where you see 'Manual activities' if the gods smile upon us we will have a trade training centre and immediately above manual activities, 'Community future car park' I would really like you to read that as a euphemism for 'Monash University', but that would have been presumptuous if I was to have put that there.

The town of Leongatha has about 5500 people. Five minutes down the road is Korumburra, with 4500 people. Fifteen minutes down the road is Foster, with 2000 people. Fifteen minutes up the road is Mirboo North, with 1500 people. We have got all these little towns where, again, we are victims of history here: we do not have the centre for South Gippsland. The best we can do is to put these things together to hopefully service the whole needs of the shire.

We go one step further. When that comes to pass and we are sure it will be funded in the next budget and we will all be very, very happy, but the step after that or concurrent with that is to look at Bass Coast shire. I do not know how I am going for time.

Ms SNELL — You have got to wind up now.

Mr PAPROTH — Okay, we will do it really, really quickly. I want to do the same thing in Bass Coast. Wonthaggi, as I said, or Bass Coast shire, is the third-fastest growing municipality in the state. Within the foreseeable future Wonthaggi will be the largest town in Gippsland. It will have a population of approximately 40 000. I hope you have got enough maps there. It will have a population of around 30 to 40 000. The needs of those people will have to be catered for, of course.

I show you that map, which will mean absolutely nothing to you, but if you look in the top left-hand corner, that small-sized block of land there, that is the senior campus of Wonthaggi Secondary College. To the right, right in the centre of it, where you have got the treed area, just below the treed area is where we are going to build — and it has been funded in the budget in the last week or two — Bass Coast specialist school. Currently there is no specialist school that deals with handicapped children between Cowes and Leongatha, and that is 2 hours by bus. Right at the moment we have students who have a disability — physical and/or mental, some both — who are travelling 2 hours each way, each day, by bus. I am really, really pleased that we are going to build that specialist school there immediately below those trees. The Department of Sustainability and Environment has been fabulous in its cooperation with us. That is DSE land; it is the old TAFE site and they have re-reserved it for educational purposes. It is given to us and it has been funded.

If we extrapolate that notion and say, ‘Okay, we are doing it in Leongatha, we have got a specialist school in Leongatha; why don’t we take the postage-stamp sized block of land where Wonthaggi Secondary College is — 650 students, buildings which are not fit for the purpose — and build them a new school on that block of land there?’ That is five and a half hectares, that odd-looking shaped thing. The Department of Sustainability and Environment have also pledged, promised, said they will give me the paddock to the right of that; the large paddock that is on a grazing lease. That block of land is perfect for a TAFE, perfect for future university provision, perfect for all sorts of learning street, putting all of those services together.

At the moment we suffer from the fact that our town is too small and our services are too disparate, too spread apart. If we can have some sort of unity of purpose, with buildings, maybe we can go and do something worthwhile in this area in the fast-growing municipality era. David?

Mr ROCHE — I think you have basically covered it all, Don.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Okay, then we have got a few questions to ask.

Mr HALL — First of all, thanks Don, David and Yvonne for coming along and presenting it to us. I have got to play the devil’s advocate here with respect to this, and I say that because you know I am a great advocate for educational precincts, being a person who was heavily involved in getting this one up, down here.

I look at this plan which is great for Leongatha, but the glaring absence I see in it is a higher education provider, in this particular plan. If this was to go ahead, how would that therefore encourage young people in Leongatha, Korumburra, in South Gippsland shire to take that big quantum leap and come over the top here, to travel and undertake directly a higher education course? Because that is what this committee has to come up with. How can we improve the level of education in higher education. I can see all the advantages of this, but I want to know where that next step is.

Mr PAPROTH — Thank you for that question, Peter; it is spot-on. The theory is, and we have already started it, that we will start courses in Leongatha, at the Leongatha precinct. At the moment we are starting first year nursing at the Leongatha hospital and people will then go on to complete their degree here. That is the intention. We want to demystify university, higher education, to students and for students.

Nursing is the first step because I spoke to Harry and I said, ‘I want to get them into South Gippsland, how do we do it? And we needed some carrots or some hooks or whatever the right terminology is. Nursing and primary teaching are the first two. Now whether primary teaching starts in Leongatha or we wait a few years and it starts in Wonthaggi, that is a mix and match sort of thing.

Nursing, primary teaching, social welfare and small business are the four areas that we have identified. We know that we are never going to get a campus of Monash University anywhere in South Gippsland or Bass Coast shire unless of course we grow to 100 000 people and you can do whatever you like. That is most unlikely. What we can do is to provide appropriate course offerings which will bring people into tertiary education and make it part of the furniture. That is what is lacking in South Gippsland and Bass Coast shire at the moment. We are giving them a taste which started with nursing; it started with about a dozen students — I believe, David? A dozen, 15, or something like that, and we will grow it. It depends on how well we promote it.

Mr HALL — You are hoping that this will be the catalyst for a higher education provider to begin the delivery of some of those first-year programs?

Mr PAPROTH — Yes.

Mr HALL — Is Monash the only university you have had discussions with?

Mr PAPROTH — That is the only one that I have had discussions with and that is a matter, actually, that David and I were just speaking about in the foyer before, Peter. I actually gravitate towards Monash because I see them as Gippsland’s university; Bendigo has La Trobe. That is the way I see it. Of course, the other aspect of it is that at the moment everyone is doing a university degree by remote control off campus, and that will become more and more the future. We do not have to travel to the hallowed halls, or not as much as we used to.

Mr HALL — This could become an online learning centre potentially for people like Yvonne and others who are doing distance education?

Mr PAPROTH — Absolutely; the potential is limited only by imagination.

Mr ROCHE — Could I just add to Peter's inquiry: Monash Gippsland has been involved in the discussions around the precincts and has been a key player in it right from the beginning. The other aspect of it, because of the collaboration between the partners, is also the opportunity for articulation and pathways from TAFE through to a university and perhaps something along the line of credit arrangements might be looked at and also some flexibility around the delivery by TAFEs, but it comes back to that culture again. We have got to try to lift the perception, and Don has done a good job of that today, actually talking education up, instead of talking it down.

Mr HALL — Yes, I understand.

Mr HERBERT — Thank you, Don, for your presentation. It is good to see you have great vision there and of course we all know that education is important but that the physical structure in this state was certainly run down for quite some time with schools closing and buildings not getting any capital works, so it is a big job rebuilding it over the next few years.

I did visit Leongatha Secondary College as part of my role as Parliamentary Secretary for Education, and I think you have missed out on something there. I agree that a new \$5-million specialist school will be something very special indeed with the views over the playing fields. It will be a magnificent facility, but I think one of the things that you did not really highlight and the strength of education there at the school is in fact its cutting-edge education approach to teaching that has nothing really to do with — well, marginally, to do with the physical layout, but really to do with the absolutely exemplary approach they are taking there to getting kids engaged in education and then getting their aspirations higher.

I wonder, apart from the capital, what do you think about how we could attract the best teachers into rural Victoria to actually make that dream happen? You can have buildings but you also need great teachers, too.

Mr ROCHE — You actually change the learning culture around so that teachers are attracted to go there and they are in a learning environment. That is just my opinion.

Mr PAPROTH — How honest do you want me to be, Steve?

Mr HERBERT — Give us the top ten.

Mr PAPROTH — I will tell you how to attract people into teaching.

Mr HERBERT — But do you agree that that is important in terms of regional areas?

Mr PAPROTH — Of course it is important. We can talk salaries and conditions and all that sort of stuff until the cows come home. None of those are why people go into, do not go into, teaching. I believe that I could, during my career, have made a lot more money than I did, and I could have possibly enjoyed the job as much.

If you want people to go into teaching, make it a career of prestige. At the moment it is the career that drops off the back of the wagon. If you cannot think of anything else to do, 'Oh well, I will be a teacher'.

How do you do that? We create a climate in which teachers are valued. We create a climate in which teachers and schools are not pilloried. We create a climate in which principals are supported, and that means from politicians, the community, bureaucrats and public servants- all of us. That is the major reason in my opinion why people do not go into teaching. I think I hold a record, probably a world record: I have sat on 82 principal selection panels. I am only 27 so I am grey.

We get between 3 and 8 people applying for principals' jobs. These are top-of-the-tree principals' jobs. There was a principal's job advertised in the south-eastern corridor a couple of years ago in a school of 2000 students, prin. 6, top of the range, and there were two applicants. That is a tragedy. Why are there only two applicants for that?

Why, when we advertise a beautiful rural high school which is going like a train, magnificently, can we get five applicants? Why? Because people are not prepared to put in the amount of effort that is required and do the hard things, the really, really hard things, and then in the name of accountability — and I am being really honest here, I can tell you — being whacked around the ears. We need to create an organisation, we need to create a profession that has absolute prestige, and at the moment, largely because of the media, of course, we are not getting it.

Mr HERBERT — Are there specifics to do with rural Victoria? Do you think incentives would help the hard-to-staff areas and other such schools? I understand the general picture that you are painting but I am talking really about if you are going to put in — I think you have probably outlined about \$60 million in Leongatha alone there — that sort of resource, you really must get the best teaching staff in there to lift the aspirations, with the number of students going to university. Is there anything that specifically could be done in terms of staffing to make sure that happens on that side of it?

Mr PAPROTH — If you do that it is robbing Peter to pay Paul. There is a pool of talent out there and we can say, 'Oh yes, we want to attract Freddy from Mount Waverley and get him to Leongatha or Wonthaggi'. Yes, I tend to think that if you do that and then you give them a \$5 or a \$10 or a \$20 000 consideration, I really think it is false. I think we have to lift the entire prestige, the entire attitude to the whole profession.

The underlying question, or the thing that maybe the teachers we are getting at Leongatha at the moment are not good enough, I would dispute that.

Mr HERBERT — I am not saying that at all. I think they are excellent teachers but there is an issue in terms of attracting teachers.

Mr PAPROTH — There is an issue in terms of depth, that is the problem. If you lose two or three of your best performers, maybe the next level down is not all that flash, that is the problem. I am not sure that offering great incentives, although I would not say no, but I am not sure that is exactly the right way to go. I think if they lift the bottom then the whole lot comes up with it.

Mr HERBERT — And I guess Leongatha is a lovely place to live and there is a lot there, so that is an incentive too.

Mr PAPROTH — Almost as good as Inverloch.

Mr ROCHE — Could I just make comment on that: the departmental blueprint reform paper is actually going to bring a whole range of those issues out, I think, in terms of what might be required in areas to both attract and retain good quality teachers.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Could I also ask: what involvement has Monash University got in local schools? Does it take part in anything with local schools?

Mr PAPROTH — After you.

Mr ROCHE — They provide careers advice, they provide material to the schools, they work with the careers clusters and there are also arrangements for the kids to come over to Monash on open days.

Ms MUNT — But they are even into the primary schools; they have got a program.

Mr PAPROTH — The best thing they do is to provide an intern program where students in the last 12 months or two years of their teaching degree can go out and teach in schools: Grey Street Primary School, Commercial Road Primary School, Mirboo North Primary School, and they are actually in the schools, not just on teaching rounds, but they become part of the staff over a long period of time. We are finding that the graduates we are getting out of Monash University Gippsland are just terrific.

There was about 20-odd years ago, you may remember, some concern about the quality of people who were going into schools. I do not have that concern any more. My concern is for the people who have been in schools maybe 10 years, sometimes; they are getting a bit jaded and tired, some of them, but the young ones coming in, I think it is just superb. I am really very pleased with it.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — What about the standard or the quality of careers advice that students get in schools from careers teachers?

Mr PAPROTH — That is a very broad question. Some of it is fantastic, some of it is just brilliant where students are advised — I will go back one. Every student has an individual pathway. Every student in a secondary school, most schools from year 10 onwards, that forms part of the career advice so that every student has their own

individual pathway mapped out for them to get them through to a certain period, to a certain point, and career advice going on after that.

The structure is extremely good. The structure by which students are advised is spot-on. How well they are advised is going to vary. The quality of advice is going to vary from South Gippsland Secondary College to Mirboo North to Wonthaggi. It depends on who is offering that advice but structurally I think it is outstanding.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Any other questions? Thank you very much for the time you have taken. We appreciate your coming down.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education

Churchill — 19 May

Members

Mr M. Dixon	Mr S. Herbert
Mr N. Elasmarr	Mr G. Howard
Mr P. Hall	Mr N. Kotsiras
Dr A. Harkness	

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Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford
Research Officers: Ms C. Whiteman and Ms J. Hope
Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witnesses

Mr J. Mills,
Mr C. Tebb,
Ms L. Thorburn,
Ms T. Johnson,
Ms S. Holcombe,
Mr M. Whitelaw,
Mr D. Yacoub,
Ms C. Felmingham, and
Mr A. McKernan, secondary students.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — I welcome you all to the inquiry. I declare this hearing of the Education and Training Committee open. The committee is hearing evidence today in relation to the inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education. I wish to advise that all evidence taken by the committee, including submissions, is subject to parliamentary privilege. In other words you can say anything you like about your school or about your teachers and they can do nothing to you. The form that this will take is you talk to us for about 15 minutes and then we will ask you some questions. Before we start, can I also welcome Russell Northe, the member for Morwell. Who is going to start off?

Mr TEBB — I will.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — When you start, can you please mention your name.

Mr TEBB — My name is Clayton Tebb. I am from Churchill. I hope to go to university next year, or have a gap year and go to the army and train for a year. Hopefully I will go to uni to study law, but if I get a bit lower, I will do a science degree the first year and pick up law in the second year and do a split science/law and then hopefully I will get to do criminal law after I finish that. Or I will hopefully also study something environmental — it sort of changes throughout this year — and go and do that. I definitely want to have the science in there somewhere and the law. That is what I want to do next year after year 12.

Ms THORBURN — My name is Laura Thorburn. I live in Morwell. I am currently doing my year 12 VCE and I also work on my certificate III, children's services. Next year I plan to continue on with my TAFE course and do my diploma in children's services, following by going to university the year after that to do my bachelor degree in children's services.

Ms JOHNSON — My name is Tegan Johnson. I live in Gormandale. I hope to take next year off because the course that I am looking to get into, anthropology, is only available to me in Melbourne. Because both of my parents earn too much I am unable to get youth allowance, so I have to work for a year so I can move up to Melbourne to study anthropology.

Mr MILLS — My name is James Mills. I am taking year 12 VCE this year, incidentally. Next year I am hoping to either travel to America and do something fun there like go to school and possibly, if I am very lucky, get some kind scholarship and enter an American university. Failing that, or doing particularly well and managing to get myself into Melbourne University, which is what I am aiming for. I am hoping to take law next year and get on to do a JD and so on and so forth.

Ms HOLCOMBE — My name is Samantha Holcombe. I am doing year 12 this year too, but I am also doing a VET study, which is hospitality. I did that in the hope that at the end of year it will get me a job, because next year I am planning to defer so that I can raise enough money to go to uni the year after. If so, I would like to do lots of travelling in between because that is what I want to do in the future.

Mr WHITELAW — My name is Matt Whitelaw. Like everyone else here I am doing year 12. In my future I plan to go to university. I am still unsure where. I plan to do education. My main problem is that education down here, there is not as broad a course. There are very defined courses which may not suit me. My other plan is just to do science and follow on with the diploma of education or something similar to that.

Mr YACOUB — I am Daniel Yacoub and I live in Churchill. I am also doing year 12. I am planning to go to university next year, hopefully Melbourne University, to study the three-year biomedicine course, the new generation course, then after that hopefully go into medicine, surgery course. That is what I am aiming for.

Ms FELMINGHAM — My name is Casey Felmingham. I live in Hazelwood North. I am doing year 12 VCE. I plan to do a general science degree and maybe major in environmental science and then possibly become a doctor. I am still unsure about what university I would like to go to.

Mr McKERNAN — I am Andrew McKernan. Next year I am going to work and travel, and then the year after I will probably go to university and do engineering.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Are there any questions from the committee?

Mr HALL — Do you want me to kick it off? Thank you all for coming in this afternoon — we appreciate that — and telling us what you intend to do next year. We hear a lot of stories about country kids, and some of you

have mentioned it here, really cannot afford to go to university, because it is the cost of living away from home. I have got to say that I was in that boat, too. My mum and dad could not afford to send me to uni, and I was a country kid just like you guys. In the end I got a scholarship through an education department studentship to go to university. Some of you are hoping to have a gap year and defer, but how important would it be for you to have access to scholarships that would help you in terms of the financial barriers? Does anyone want to comment on that?

Ms HOLCOMBE — If I were given a scholarship, I probably would not do the defer year. But as it is at the moment, I cannot afford to go straight into university. If the cost of going to university were taken away with a scholarship, then I would probably be able to afford accommodation and all that. At the moment, the price of having to do both is a bit too high.

Mr HALL — Can you get a part-time job, Sam, to help you through university?

Ms HOLCOMBE — Yes, even to pay for the leisure side of life as well, because I like keeping fit and stuff.

Mr HALL — Does anybody else want to comment on that question?

Ms JOHNSON — I currently have a part-time job, but I notice it is a lot harder for a year 12 student or a first-year university student like my brother to get a job, because they do not think you are reliable enough to have a job because you are going to be studying all the time. So they do not think, ‘We can call them in when we need them’, because school is going to be their first priority. It is a lot harder to be able to work and do uni.

Mr HALL — In terms of those who may be living away from home next year, have you looked at university residences, or are you looking more at private accommodation options?

Ms THORBURN — I found it actually a lot dearer to live on campus than it is to live off campus. But then it also comes to getting to where you want to go to university. Some of the accommodation that has been put as off-campus is a good 3 kilometres from the actual university as well.

Ms FELMINGHAM — I have looked at some of the on-campus ones through family members who have lived on campus at unis. It is actually a lot better because I have realised that if you live off campus, the electricity bills and water bills and all that come separately, which could be a concern to some students.

Mr HERBERT — Firstly, let me congratulate you on setting high aims and high goals, which is fantastic to hear from a group of young people. Quite a few of you seem to be interested in maths and science areas or engineering. One of the problems we have in Victoria is that there has been a drop-off in the number of young people wanting to go into university maths, science and engineering, so that is encouraging. What do you think are the main factors in why you are choosing to go into that field — into the sciences, into the engineering? Has there been something that has happened in school that has pushed you in that direction, those of you who are heading that way? Andrew, we will start with you.

Mr McKERNAN — There was kind of like an information day on engineering. I thought that was pretty cool.

Mr HERBERT — So that made you make up your mind?

Mr McKERNAN — Yes.

Mr HERBERT — That is good.

Mr WHITELAW — There was definitely a trend mostly between my group of friends when we came to year 11 to go towards maths-science — plus I was quite handy in it, so I was pretty happy to do it. But there always seems to be a job in the area, because maths-science can cover such a variety of jobs and all that sort of stuff. You can go anywhere and do it. Maths does not change throughout the world; it is the same stuff. There are always opportunities in that sort of field.

Mr DIXON — What you have got here at the precinct is just fantastic. I would like to know whether you guys think it is a good idea and something worth doing elsewhere. I can see a few nods. Would a couple of people like to say why they like it here?

Ms JOHNSON — I was in Yarram secondary up until last year. Changing here, my opportunities have opened up so much more. Before, because a lot of my courses were not available for anthropology, I was actually looking towards cheffing. Then I came here, and I have a lot more options and I can do the classes that I wanted to do. It is a really good idea. Having the uni there, I felt a lot more mature coming here. Being around the younger year levels you do not feel like acting like an adult because you are still with younger people, but here you are with your peers. I would recommend it.

Mr DIXON — That is great. Would anyone else like to say why they like it?

Ms HOLCOMBE — Something about the science thing was when we were at our old high school, the Churchill Kurnai, I noticed that the science facilities were just pretty much a classroom. But since coming to the GEP, the precinct, the science facilities are so much better. We have been able to do so many more pracs to help our understanding. Pracs make it seem all the more interesting — being able to actually do hands-on stuff. That has really probably helped with wanting to get more into the science and stuff.

Mr MILLS — I came here from St Paul's up in Warragul. I have to say, being out here at the GEP with just the year 11s and 12s, it is just an incredible atmosphere out here. When everyone is all together of course it is more a community than it is a school. Up here, I am not going to say it is elite, but it encourages you to excel because it is us year 11s and 12s and we are moving in our VCE. To be short, it is serious business. Everyone who is here wants to be. We are all looking to do something with our education. The facilities are great; I love being able to go up to the university. We have the student lounge; we have access to all the facilities up there and all the things that are done in the classrooms down there. We have the big lecture theatres, we have the sound systems in all the rooms and all the viewing projectors and everything; it is just incredible. There is no shunting around classrooms grabbing TVs and such, it is just all on hand. It is very convenient.

Mr HALL — Are any of you studying university subjects? Are there many people like you, James, who are actually studying university subjects?

Mr MILLS — I would not really know.

Mr TEBB — There is Luke — —

Mr HALL — Do you actually go to some lectures?

Mr MILLS — Yes, I go up to Clayton every few weeks to do my philosophy.

Mr HERBERT — Obviously one of the things we have to do is to work out how as a committee we increase the number of opportunities for young people in rural Victoria to access higher education. It is a central point. I do not know what you know about the committee system, but we will make a report to the Parliament when we have finished — a big thick report — and we will have a whole heap of recommendations. The government has about six months to respond to those recommendations, so it is really important for us to get it right, otherwise it will just be shelved somewhere. The central point we are asking you is: what do you think government could do in terms of policy and funding or whatever, to enable young people to access university education more in rural Victoria — more than currently happens?

Mr WHITELAW — One thing we discussed the other day when we were first told about this was that somehow they need to promote the universities a lot more to rural students, especially in Melbourne. For example, this Thursday and Friday a group of us are travelling up to Melbourne and touring around and going to all the universities, but that is at our own expense. If the government even just gave some funding to the school to supply a two-day trip, which is costing us \$30 each or something, and if it supplied enough money to schools to do that, you would probably get a lot more students willing to go to university because they would get the taste and they would understand what it is all about. Generally in Melbourne, from what I have seen, the university is a good environment to get into. That is me.

Ms JOHNSON — I personally find that because I live pretty much in the middle of nowhere in Gormandale —

Mr HERBERT — What is it?

Mr HALL — Gormandale.

Ms JOHNSON — It is pretty much in the triangle between Traralgon, Sale and Yarram. It is dead-centre nowhere. Because my parents wanted the best for me, they travel this distance to get me out here. If my mum was not teaching at the junior campus, I would not come here. It is hard for us in the rural areas with travelling because there is not enough available for us to travel around. There are buses that get you around, but then you have to find out where the buses go, and there are none that go out in my direction at all. I find it is just too hard to travel around. My brother, who is at uni, is having to stay in town with a friend, and it meant he had to get a part-time job so he could do that. I think it is travel costs that put off a lot of people.

Mr MILLS — I have to agree with what Matt said about the exposure. Being attached to the university has really taught me so much more 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 up. Yes, it is a bit of a leap, but it is not a completely different world. You are still going to have fun and have time to do your own thing as well as being able to study and such. It dispels the mystery, I suppose.

Ms HOLCOMBE — I think another reason why lots of kids are not going into the universities is because of the cost of going to university. Living in a rural area most of our parents have jobs in trades, so when it comes down to the cost most people feel they are forced to become tradespeople because they cannot afford uni and because getting that job is so easy. They can just get a job from their parents, and there are so many apprenticeships available down here. That seems like an easier option, and that is probably why a lot of people are taking it up, because they feel they have to and because they cannot afford uni.

Mr HERBERT — You need to keep the costs down.

Ms HOLCOMBE — Yes. It is too expensive.

Ms JOHNSON — I also found that even with the HECS you get into debt. My parents did uni when I was 8 and I am 17 now. My dad has only just paid off his uni bills. I think having to do that also puts you off. You do not want to be in debt for the rest of your life.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — How do you rate the careers advice that you received at school? Was it enough, or good?

Ms THORBURN — We have access to two careers teachers at school, Cherie who is here with us, and Brian Watts. Any time we need any advice we can go to them. If they are not too sure, they have books for us or they have the internet for us.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Is that why she is sitting right there, to make sure?

Ms THORBURN — It was not until I went to Cherie — I think it was on Friday last week — that I decided what I wanted to do. It came from going into the careers room and having a look through the Monash University magazines. Then I found out more information, including that on Wednesday this week, I think it is, we are doing a day in the life of a uni student. They will talk us through stuff, and that is a really good incentive from Monash University. The only downside to it is that I wish Monash here had my course, but instead the only place I know of that has it is the Mornington Peninsula, which is a 2½-hour drive.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Anyone else?

Ms FELMINGHAM — Our careers people are good, but I believe there is too much pressure put on us by all the teachers to decide our career now, which can be very off-putting and can get some students very confused. There are lots of ways to get where you want to go, but there is just a lot of pressure for you to decide, and that could put off a lot of kids.

Ms JOHNSON — I am not in anyway bad-mouthing Yarram, but I found that before I came here I had no idea what I wanted to do. I thought, ‘I am just going to end up as another farmer’s wife like everyone else in my area and live in Gormandale forever’. Coming here I had so many more options. I did not even know what anthropology was until the end of last year. Because I love history with a passion, finding something I can do like that was just brilliant. But coming from somewhere where I had no idea about any information —

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Are any of you aware of any scholarships that are available for university? None of you are aware of any scholarships?

Ms THORBURN — I know of one with the Smith Family. My brother is actually on that one. He is doing his first year at university — and yes, I know Robert is here today as well.

Mr DIXON — Matt, you were just saying about education and that what is offered here is a bit narrow for you. What are you after that is not offered here in education? Can you expand on what you were saying earlier, please?

Mr WHITELAW — Just looking at the course guide for Monash University and that sort of stuff, they offer education but not so much at this campus. They do offer it up at Clayton and Mornington and in that sort of area but down here when you look at it there is one course for education, and in my case that did not suit what I wanted.

Mr DIXON — What do you want?

Mr WHITELAW — Maths-science teaching; it is a double degree generally. From what I have seen Deakin University is probably the best. It just has a massive list of all these varying education courses in pretty much every area you want: primary, secondary, whatever course you want. It is all there.

Mr HERBERT — You will be happy to know, Matt, that there are scholarships if you are in third year of a science course. There are about 50 to 100 scholarships that do Dip.Ed. to go into teaching and there are another 50 or so to go to teach. That is one area where there are scholarships towards the end of your academic studies.

Mr HALL — Tegan, I reckon Mr Rodaughan was the principal over at Yarram when you were bad-mouthing down there, but I will not tell him.

I just want to make this comment: I was very impressed with the number of you who indicated to us that you were going to take what is other than a normal pathway to a degree course — that is, some of you through TAFE; some of you are planning to get here; one of you was planning to travel interstate and perhaps getting into higher ed through that means. That is something that we are well aware of, that kids need to understand that they do not have to get a university place first off. There are other ways of getting there.

I think you are well educated here, being at the precinct with all those dividers all on the one campus. Do you think some your friends who go to other schools that are stand-alone schools have that same knowledge as you do? That is, that there are other ways to get to university other than to get a great ENTER score — over at Yarram again?

Ms JOHNSON — I have one friend who is still over in Yarram and when I was talking to her about my school, she could not believe what we have available here. Her idea of schooling at the moment is that she is afraid of university because of how it is portrayed down in the real country-country areas. They all think going up to the city is evil, pretty much.

Mr HALL — So they have not got the same horizons as you have?

Ms JOHNSON — No. It is sad because there are some down there who are really intelligent but they just do not want to go to university because they think they are going to go down there and they will get into drugs or something, or they will get down there and they will just be run for their money or something because they do not understand what they have available.

Mr HALL — What about some of your mates, Clayton, who you play footy with? Do they understand they can go to university?

Mr TEBB — There are a few that I do not think understand how to get to university and that sort of thing. They take it that you have to get a high ENTER score but I think the main thing that helps us out here is the careers people. It helps a lot to know how to get to university and all the things that we do. I know in year 10 at Churchill Kurnai a few of the students that went to the year 11 the year before said in that school they did not prepare them for that precinct year because they said it has changed so much. The next year they taught us all about VCAL and VCE and that kind of stuff and university was the year before. I think there are other schools around the area, especially in Morwell and Traralgon, that are missing out compared to our school here.

Mr HERBERT — Sam, you talked a little bit before — and Tegan, I suppose — about the importance of parents: you know, parents are tradespeople and that is what you come to expect. You are all wanting to go to university but do you think it is generally the case amongst students that their parents have a large influence on their decisions? Also — and this is for everyone — do think it is worth looking at ways of perhaps educating parents about the opportunities for their children rather than just concentrating on the young people?

Ms HOLCOMBE — Shall I go first? Down here we have VCAL, as we said before, which is really for the people who want to get into trades, and there has been a big increase in how many people have been doing that because it is so readily available and it is a really good program. But I think the influence of parents is big because first of all they are probably the ones who will start paying off for you at school and they are the ones who want the best. For the kids who are aspiring to go to university, if they know they are not going to be able to help them, they might try to get them to go into trades.

Mr HERBERT — Do you think it is worth thinking about some sort of program to educate parents about the opportunities there?

Ms HOLCOMBE — I reckon it would be good too. Neither of my parents went to university so they do not know what it is all about either, and when I say that I want to go they think it is a good thing but they do not know how to help me, how to get me there. Educating parents could be a big thing that would be good.

Mr YACOURB — I believe educating parents would be good thing to do also because I think it would break down some of the barriers that they have in their minds about having one specific career path. Just say if they want their child to do a trade or something like that, then they would know that there are more options such as TAFE and university. They have more options for their children because parents just want what is best for you. Breaking down the barriers in their minds I think would be a great thing to do.

Mr MILLS — I would just like to say that I think there is a big attitude that if you do not do really well in year 12, it is the end of the world. If you do not get 90-plus on your ENTER it is the end of the world and you are going to be stuck flipping burgers for the rest of your life. But that is really not true. I wish people did not have that opinion because we have a student here who did his year 12 last year and he is doing it again because he was not happy with the results. As people said, there is TAFE and there are other pathways. I just wish more people knew that. I am not saying that you should not achieve the highest you can. It is just that if you do your best and you do not make it into university straight from your ENTER score, if you do not get picked straightaway, then it is not the end of the world. You do not have to just give up. There are so many other things you can do.

Mr ELASMAR — Where is that coming from? Is that coming from the teachers or the parents, or between the students when they talk about the high mark?

Mr MILLS — I just feel that is the attitude among my peers. I will not speak for all of you guys, of course.

Ms JOHNSON — My brother had that problem when he went in. He wanted to get into nursing and he just missed out but he got into the DOTS (diploma of tertiary studies) program. I think that was a brilliant program for him because he thought everything was over once he did not get the score but he got into the DOTS. He could not believe it, he thought his life was over.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Can I just ask also what extra support can you receive from the college or do students who wish to do well at VCE receive from the college? Or what would you like to see occurring at the college to help you further your studies or to get a higher ENTER score?

Ms HOLCOMBE — There is a program at the moment that I think some people here are doing. It is called the SAM program coincidentally. It is the school access Monash program. It is supplied by Monash and it is helping people who want to go to university. It is tutoring them so they can get that little bit better to beat the people in cities. It is to help them with that competition because Monash probably wants us to go to its university so it has so many programs like tutoring to help us get there.

Mr MILLS — The schools access Monash program has really been helpful and there have been a few programs at schools such as tutoring. You can apply to be tutored for certain subjects. I think that it is really, really helpful. Students who really want to excel can talk to our coordinators about that and say, 'I could use a bit of extra help'. There is always someone there that you can talk to.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you very much. On behalf of the committee I wish you all the best with your studies and good luck. Thank you for coming.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education

Churchill — 19 May 2008

Members

Mr M. Dixon	Mr S. Herbert
Mr N. Elasmarr	Mr G. Howard
Mr P. Hall	Mr N. Kotsiras
Dr A. Harkness	

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officers: Ms C. Whiteman and Ms J. Hope

Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witnesses

Mr P. Dempsey, deferred student;

Ms J. Matthews, South Gippsland Bass Coast LLEN; and

Mr M. Murphy,

Ms K. Boyer, Youth Pathways officer, Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you very much for giving up your time to come to talk to the committee. Your views are appreciated. You have half an hour. If you could speak for 10 to 15 minutes and then we will ask questions for the last 15 minutes.

Mr M. MURPHY — Thank you very much. We particularly want to raise the issue of the number of young people, particularly from regional areas, and even more so from the more remote regional areas, who defer their university placement and potentially do not take it up again. As you would be aware, through the On Track process 15 of the regional LLENs around the state, including the three in Gippsland, have commenced a study being conducted by Melbourne University as an extension of On Track into a longitudinal contact of those young people who defer, to ensure that their pathway beyond deferment is known, because that has not necessarily been available to us previously.

I will introduce Jodie Matthews from the South Gippsland Bass Coast LLEN. There are differences as well between the regions. For instance while the Baw Baw La Trobe LLEN, in central Gippsland and west Gippsland, has a deferment rate that is higher than the state average, the East Gippsland LLEN, which you will hear from tomorrow, and the South Gippsland Bass Coast LLEN regions have an even higher deferment rate, and I think there are geographic differences that we need to understand.

I also introduce Kate Boyer from my LLEN, who is a youth pathways officer, and in particular Patrick Dempsey, from Warragul Regional College last year, who has experienced that process of deferment, and certainly has an opinion or two about that one as well.

But I am wondering whether I can hand over to Jodie to just give you a picture of the issues associated with deferment in South Gippy and Bass Coast.

Ms MATTHEWS — Hello, I am Jodie Matthews. The deferral rates in South Gippsland and Bass Coast have risen from 11.7 per cent in 2004 to 18.9 per cent in 2006 as that cohort of leavers — we do not have this year's statistics but I would suspect that they will be fairly similar, if not slightly higher, because of the impact of drought on some of our areas. We see some of the schools in our region with almost a quarter of the students who get offered a place at university deferring from university. I do not think I am going to say anything new when I say that there are two issues that they cite for that. One is access and one is affordability. Given that youth allowance starts cutting out on a sliding scale at \$31 400 for a family's income, obviously finances play a very big part in families being able to afford to send their children. It is very, very difficult for kids in South Gippsland and Bass Coast to commute to any university, even this one over here — you are looking at at least an hour's driving to get access to further education.

I think the other reason that they cite — and I think you have probably heard it today — is that they need a break, but I think that this has implications for our community as well. If we have students who have deferred from university and only have the intention of hanging around for 12 months, then they are taking the jobs from the kids who do not have that intention, because, to stereotype them, they are going to present themselves slightly better in an interview, they are going to have a higher score — those sorts of issues. I think as communities we need to look at how we look after our young people for that 12-month period if they are going to defer from university to become qualified for youth allowance.

I guess one of the things that I would like to see happen in the near future — and I am the mother of a five-year-old, so I would really like to see it happen in the next 15 years — is an investment in technology. In this day and age it is very difficult for me to understand why we are not going down the path that students do not need to sit in a particular seat in a particular building in a particular location. Surely with technology we can do things like virtual campuses, so kids can actually sit in on a lecture and do not necessarily need to be in Melbourne or in Churchill, or in Darwin, for that matter. I guess that is an issue that I think should be looked at, from your point of view. Certainly there are schools in our area that are already doing virtual learning — they link up with another school in another area and the kids actually attend the class, using computers and cameras and email notes and that sort of thing. It requires teachers to have a slightly different style of teaching, but it could be a cost-effective option for rural kids who are not attending university.

They are probably the two issues from our area. The finance — we come from a low socioeconomic and from a low rate of parent attainment of higher education, and a lot of the issues that the kids identified before are very true for us. We rely very heavily on careers teachers, and we do not have two in any of our schools. In fact all of our

careers teachers are part-time and we rely very heavily on our parents and the information they have got to be able to pass that on to the students. You spoke a little bit about an education program for parents. I know that there are some already happening. One is called PACTS, which I am sure is happening over here as well. These are a couple of the things I guess that we could do to try and improve the retention rates of young people in the future. Thank you.

Ms BOYER — I am Kate Boyer. As Mick mentioned, I do the On Track Connect for our LLEN. Some of the information that I was going to present today is directly from the mouths of students who could not attend but from whom Patrick has either sent me an email or listed some reasons as to why they have deferred and also why they may not have applied in the first place and chosen to go elsewhere. As you can guess, no. 1 is financial — they could not afford to move and start to study or could not travel from Baw Baw to Gippsland to access a course. There is actually not very good public transport to get a train and then a bus out for some people. Financial — because the parents are not able to support them moving to Melbourne for a course.

Some students said they wanted a break from study. They have been there 13 years. They ask can they please have one year off before they go back for another three or four. Some are still deciding if their course is right. They feel they were pushed into universities through career planning and they want to take some time off and think about whether that course is really the course for them. Some of them change their mind after year 12 and rather than get in the bad books with parents they have deferred it for 12 months and then they will see where they go at the end of that. Quite a few are working to qualify for youth allowance to then move on to study.

Some of the reasons for not applying at all were that they knew financially they would be unable to go, so they did not set themselves up for disappointment, and that the course was not offered down here and they could not move to Gippsland. Some were trying the TAFE pathway into it — going to TAFE for a year and then looking to transfer into university.

What I have for you is from Katherine MacLagan. She sent me an email this morning. She is actually working to qualify for youth allowance. She has given me a summary of her reasons for deferment. She says:

I found year 12 to be a lot of work and a lot of pressure. Deferring meant the opportunity to gather my thoughts, have a break from study and to be able to get out into the real world before I made a solid decision about the direction of my future. I felt unable to commit myself to a university course (and a HECS debt) which I wasn't completely convinced was the best path for me.

I think that taking a year or two off from my formal education will assist me in discovering things about myself and the world which I could not learn from a textbook. I also think it is important to discover these things before committing to a career path.

It is also an opportunity to try out the working world and to be able to qualify for government assistance if and when I decide to return to my studies. It is also reassuring to know that I have a course waiting for me if I decide that is the best option.

Thank you.

Mr DEMPSEY — I am Patrick Dempsey. I was going to go to uni this year in Ballarat, but I did not get a choice whether to defer or not, because it was not an option for me. With uni being in Ballarat I could not travel there, and my parents cannot support me. Also the financial aspects of living either on campus or off campus are still too great for me to even consider. I do not qualify for any sort of fee assistance or youth allowance because my parents earn too much. I am not quite sure what to say now.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — That is all right. What course did you — —

Mr DEMPSEY — I applied for biomedical science. I also tried for a number of other courses in varying locations, because I was not sure what I wanted to do. This is the only course I got into. Unfortunately it is in Ballarat.

Mr HERBERT — I will start off with something very simple for Jodie. We have had discussions about deferral obviously in other hearings, but one thing I did wonder is that we have also heard a fair bit about online learning. Are you eligible for youth allowance if you do an online course or distance education degree? How does that work? Do you know?

Ms MATTHEWS — My understanding — and I have got it here from the Centrelink website — is to be eligible for independent youth allowance you must:

have been out of school at least 18 months and earned an amount equivalent to 75 per cent of the maximum rate of pay under Wage Level A of the Australian Pay and Classification Scale in an 18 month period before lodging a claim, or

have worked to support yourself for at least 18 months, working full-time at least 30 hours a week during the preceding two years ... or

have worked part-time for at least 15 hours a week for at least two years since last leaving school, or

are 25 or more ...

And that is the eligibility for youth allowance from what I understand.

Ms BOYER — My understanding of youth allowance is if you are registered in that TAFE or university, even if partially doing it by distance there, you are still completing X amount of units — is that what you were thinking, Nick? — so it is still considered an enrolment, but then of course you need to meet the other criteria that are set out for the independent status. It would be different if you were not going for independent, I guess.

Mr HERBERT — Yes, of course. It works out about \$18 000, does it not, currently? I guess every time there is a salary increment, it goes up, so a student would need to have a little bit of buffer there.

Ms BOYER — Yes. Sorry, I did not quite understand the question. Yes, if you are in full-time external study you are eligible for youth allowance, but you have still got to be eligible — that is, your parents earn not enough, or you are independent.

Mr HERBERT — Or you live independently and you have been out of school 18 months.

Ms BOYER — Yes. I guess that is the hard part. If you are out of school 18 months, that is part way into first semester.

Mr HERBERT — How does it help a student deferring for 12 months, then?

Ms MATTHEWS — They take it, from what I understand, from about November. Basically the kids do not get youth allowance for the first few weeks of semester — uni does not start until March — and they have a couple of weeks leeway, where hopefully what they earned over Christmas is keeping them alive.

Mr ELASMAR — In your case it is not the youth allowance, because your parents earn more. Is that correct?

Mr DEMPSEY — Yes, but they do not earn enough to support me all the way in Ballarat.

Mr ELASMAR — They do not earn enough to support you?

Mr DEMPSEY — Yes.

Mr DIXON — Patrick, so what are you going to do?

Mr DEMPSEY — At the moment?

Mr DIXON — Yes.

Mr DEMPSEY — I am working in Warragul at the moment. I only get two hours a week at the moment. It is a pretty bad job. I have been trying to get more work, but because I started so late — because I thought I was going to go to uni this year — there are very few jobs available that will earn me enough to get into uni next year.

Mr DIXON — Where do you live?

Mr DEMPSEY — Shady Creek.

Mr DIXON — Where is that?

Mr DEMPSEY — Do you know where Darnum is?

Mr DIXON — Yes.

Mr DEMPSEY — North of Darnum.

Mr DIXON — Okay; so you are isolated, too?

Mr DEMPSEY — Yes.

Mr DIXON — Wherever you go you have got to travel to a job?

Mr DEMPSEY — Yes.

Mr DIXON — What about further study? Have you got any ideas now of where you want to go?

Mr DEMPSEY — If I cannot get into this course?

Mr DIXON — Yes.

Mr DEMPSEY — I did have an option open in Geelong, and I can do that by distance ed — by correspondence — if I cannot get into university. That is my other option.

Mr HERBERT — Patrick, I guess what you are really saying is if you could earn the \$18 000 or whatever this year, your preferred option would be to go to Ballarat, pick up independent youth allowance, because it is a bigger country setting, and work part time to support yourself.

Mr DEMPSEY — Yes. I would have gone this year, but I did not have the financial — —

Mr HERBERT — You need the youth allowance to make up that difference between working part time and — —

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Mick, do you want to add something?

Mr M. MURPHY — I think this issue that we have touched on probably is one of the greatest inhibitors in terms of continuing in higher ed, and that is financial. If this inquiry was held in other states, or a similar one, I would almost guarantee the same thing would be tabled. One of the things I would like to see as an outcome of this inquiry is for state governments to work with the federal government in relation to that qualification for independence. If Patrick was able to be classified as an independent student this year, his circumstances would be completely different. Yet what we are hearing time and time again is that parental circumstances are such that they do not meet the qualification, but still cannot be in a position to put a young person through university without it. There is a disparity between what the qualification is for an independent status and what is actually required in terms of the capacity to survive. The other impact is the length of time that you must be out of school, and it is greater than 12 months, therefore it impacts on the following year. In many cases there are young people who are having to stay out one or two years, or more than one year, in order to get that qualification period. The study being done across the regional LLENs in Victoria at the moment will give us a far better outcome of whether young people who defer are able to take up the offer, change the offer or what other barriers are brought into play. But the other, longer term impact is, if we get up to 10, 15 or 18 per cent of young people actually getting offers at the end of year 12 but deferring, what message is that sending as well in terms of increasing the aspiration to get in there, when in fact a good slice of young people make it in the door, but do not actually take up the place?

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Patrick, when was it that you actually decided to defer? At what stage of year 12 did you decide to defer, and who did you seek assistance or advice from when you made that decision?

Mr DEMPSEY — I did not decide until I got the uni place. When I found out where it was, I asked my parents and they told me they would not be able to support me. I did not have enough money to qualify for youth allowance, because I had been working through year 12, so that is when I decided that I could not go.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — But were you not told that if you applied for this course you would have to go to Ballarat?

Mr DEMPSEY — Yes, but I applied for a number of courses, so I was not sure where I was going to end up.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Okay, and this was just one of the eight that you put on your — —

Mr DEMPSEY — Yes, and it was just too far — too much distance — to go this year.

Mr HALL — In regard to that, Patrick, had Ballarat uni had a campus in Warragul, would you have pursued the course then?

Mr DEMPSEY — I would have. It would have been closer and a lot easier.

Mr HALL — So the financial barrier was the cost of living away from home?

Mr DEMPSEY — Yes.

Mr HALL — So when we talk about the economic barriers, it is purely the cost of living away from home?

Ms BOYER — Yes. I definitely say the move to Melbourne, the current capacity to find appropriate housing. If it is not on campus, if it is off campus, the way housing is going in Melbourne, where they are bidding for rental properties, students are getting completely cut out of that market, and then they are relying on parents or other means to get extra money to pay huge amounts in rent. I guess there is a set amount of on-campus housing also, which I think gets filled up fairly quickly.

Mr HALL — Jodie, you were making that point when you spoke about that in the situation in South Gippsland. If we are realistic about it, it is going to be a long time, if ever, before we are going to get a decent university campus located in South Gippsland.

Ms MATTHEWS — Hence why I think we need to think outside the square.

Mr HALL — Sure, and what you were suggesting is perhaps what some have described as online study centres?

Ms MATTHEWS — Yes, but supported, because it is very difficult to study externally. Adults struggle with it.

Mr HALL — That is what students said. The advantage of having a centre where they could all come together and there would be the infrastructure in place — the broadband, the technology — is that would allow for some good-quality online learning there would be some collegiate support, too, among students all sort of attending there, albeit they might be doing different courses.

Ms MATTHEWS — Yes. I also thought that there is the possibility that you employ a couple of staff who are not necessarily expert in any particular degree but have the capacity to assist students — in the essay writing, the study skills, the seminar preparation — in the general university skills that every course requires of you and therefore it is a more supported environment than the isolation of studying at home at your own computer. I do not know whether it would make a difference, but we have got to try something. That is my theory.

Just on the move to Melbourne, one of the things we have talked about is the financial implications for families too. I think there is a really big social implication for the kids themselves. Not all kids, but if you imagine that Inverloch is your home town and you go into the great big smoke in the middle of Melbourne, you have lots of other things that you need to work out — public transport, where to go shopping, you are having to do your washing for the first time, look after yourself, all those bills — everything on top of living in the middle of a big city. There is quite an adjustment socially for them as well, and I think that that is probably fairly scary for some kids. I am not sure what percentage of our kids drop out of university — I do not think it is very high — but I am sure it adds to the pressure, if they do take up an offer, of just getting out there in the world. One of the things I would like to see, and certainly from a LLEN and LCP point of view is a little bit more a-day-in-the-life-of-living-in-Melbourne sort of stuff as preparation because it is very different.

Mr HALL — Do you have a model that you were thinking of or that you know of that would fit that online learning centre sort of concept that you just spoke about?

Ms MATTHEWS — Jodie Matthews! — she points at her head. I guess I saw that it could operate within existing structures. The computers are there, the cameras are there; it is just a matter of us thinking a little bit differently, talking to lecturers, helping them to learn how to present to a video camera so the kids can be at the

lecture while the lecture is happening and the ability to feed through information via email. The technology all exists, and it probably exists at what will be the Leongatha education precinct. It is a matter of just putting that structure in place.

Mr DIXON — Do you think part of that, too, just finishing that off, is that it is important to have a suitably qualified person — a real person — there at the centre to help the young person who is doing the online learning? Is that important?

Ms MATTHEWS — Martin, I can only speak for myself. I do not know whether it would be the difference between success and failure, but it would certainly add to the success. Studying externally and studying online is hard enough for all of us, and I am sure that many of you have attempted it at various times in your life as well. I have just finished an external education.

Mr HERBERT — I think it is hard for young people.

Ms MATTHEWS — When you are 18, it is very difficult. I think the more support mechanisms we can put around the young people, the better off we are going to be.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Steve, last question?

Mr HERBERT — Jodie, presumably there would be limits to what courses you would do — some courses clearly need hands-on practical equipment.

Ms MATTHEWS — Without a doubt there would be limits.

Mr HERBERT — I have questions for Mick. Mick, your point about the way youth allowance works, and we have heard that. If you put on the hat of a commonwealth bureaucrat — —

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Or a cardigan.

Mr HERBERT — Or a cardigan, as Nick says, and the new Labor government asked you to redesign, to not make it too costly, but to let us see if we can get something more efficient, what would you advocate?

Mr M. MURPHY — A reduced qualifying time. By the way, I never want to be a bureaucrat.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Do you drink latte? Do you carry a folder?

Mr M. MURPHY — A reduced qualification period for independent status. The crazy part about most of the bureaucrats making these sorts of recommendations to most of the politicians is that all of us got through higher education, as you indicated before, either on scholarships or paid to go and ended our qualification without a debt. That circumstance has changed so significantly and we are the ones, or appear to be the ones, who are making decisions about imposing large debts on people who are qualifying and making it difficult to do so.

A good example is Patrick. He was successful at year 12. He went through our secondary system in the way in which we would want him and many others to complete year 12 successfully, yet the ability to take that next step, which is essentially what the system has been designed for, has been made too difficult because of that qualification period and the amount that is there. I think in terms of it being a cost long term, that would be recouped many times over if that skill that was developed through the higher education process was made available to communities through a skill, in the likes of Patrick, qualified in biomechanics or whatever pathway you wanted to go along, and would be putting back into communities. I think it is more an investment rather than a cost — reduced qualification period and reduced amount of income that had to be earned to gain independent status.

Ms MATTHEWS — I just think they need to add a statement that says if you are from rural and regional Australia and you need to leave home to study for further education then you automatically qualify for independent youth allowance.

Mr HERBERT — Presumably it could also be that it is not whether you are from rural or regional, it is if you have to go somewhere to do a course and you cannot live at home.

Ms MATTHEWS — Yes.

Mr HERBERT — There would be city kids who might be able to go to the peninsula to learn specialist courses.

Ms MATTHEWS — I was just favouring our kids.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you very much for your presentations; it is much appreciated.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education

Churchill — 19 May 2008

Members

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Chair: Mr G. Howard

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Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officers: Ms C. Whiteman and Ms J. Hope

Witnesses

Mr W. Awan, manager, on-campus accommodation,

Ms K. Papadopoulos, off-campus housing manager, and

Ms F. Webb, financial adviser, health, wellbeing and development unit, Monash Residential Services, Monash University.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — I declare open this hearing of the Education and Training Committee. The committee is hearing evidence today in relation to the inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education. I wish to advise that all evidence taken by the committee, including submissions, is subject to parliamentary privilege. Welcome. If you speak for 10 or 15 minutes, we will ask some questions.

Mr AWAN — My name is Waseem. I am the manager for on-campus accommodation here in Gippsland. I look after the accommodation for this area.

Ms PAPADOPOULOS — I am Kristine Papadopoulos. I manage Caulfield residential as well as Monash Residential Services off-campus service across the Victorian campuses of Monash, so I have a dual role.

Ms WEBB — I am Freda Webb. I am a student adviser in health, wellbeing and development at Gippsland campus. My role is to assist with off-campus accommodation inquiries from students and staff, along with providing student financial advice and counselling for students and also looking after international students support. It is a role that covers a few different aspects. I am in with the counselling staff on campus as well.

Mr AWAN — I will start with the supply and demand for on-campus accommodation. I have prepared some figures for the Gippsland campus. We actually accommodate 390 students in our accommodation. At the moment we have 255 students, which is actually 65 per cent of occupancy. As you can see, Clayton, Berwick, and Caulfield are all 100 per cent occupied, but Gippsland has only 65 per cent occupancy. I have some attachments at the back of this presentation, where you can see some student residency patterns for Gippsland according to their year level, what courses they are doing and what nationality they are. I will not go through all of them, but you can have a look at how our numbers of 65 per cent occupancy are made up. They combine a lot of international as well as local students who are living 1 hour or 2 hours drive from here. With the alternative housing options, which is point no. 2, I would like Freda to do a bit of a highlight on that.

Ms WEBB — What usually happens with students looking for off-campus housing is it is usually within the Churchill township that they are looking. A lot of students do not have access to cars, so they need to have something close by. It is mainly students sharing a house — renting out the whole house and sharing. We also have situations where property owners will just offer a room within their house or, if there are any flats or smaller residences available, students will be on their own. The reason they go off campus is mainly because they cannot afford the on-campus accommodation or it is not suitable because they have a family. A lot of students coming from overseas actually bring their families with them. In that situation they need to find something off campus.

There are some costs, that I have listed on here to give you an idea of the costs. Those costs are per person. It is not for a whole house; it is usually per student. Also attached is the on-campus accommodation fee schedule for you to have a look at. The criteria for assessing on campus — —

Mr AWAN — I will answer that. We do not have a set criteria for assessing the application, as we have in Clayton, because Clayton has around 400 students on the waiting list and we always have empty beds. So we do not have a segregation of students: this student is welcome, and this student is not welcome. We try to take every student who wants to come on campus. Unfortunately we cannot take the students with families because the layout of the rooms is that they are only a single room with single-bed accommodation. So we really cannot accommodate those students and they have to go off campus to find suitable accommodation. We do not actually have set criteria for assessing applications. Whoever comes in, that person is welcome to live on campus.

I will just go through the fee schedule that is referred to in point 5. If the student is wanting to live on campus, our fees are per week and we bill them on a monthly basis. That actually includes their utilities — gas, electricity, water, everything. Also there are internet and telephone points connected in their bedrooms. They have ready access to them, although they have to pay for internet downloads and everything for that. Their fee does cover everything. You can see that off campus the students end up paying more actually, as compared with the on campus, because we do have a lot of pastoral care supports, a lot of events running and free food and all that. That actually does compensate them for living on campus. The fee is a little bit higher but it compensates them with the events and all that which we run.

If you look at point 6, the differences in academic and social outcomes of students living on campus and off campus, unfortunately we have data only up to 2006. You can see clearly that students living on campus are

actually doing better in their studies than students living off campus. I will not go through all that, which is just information.

Point 7 is about the challenges for Monash University in delivering on-campus accommodation. MRS finds it particularly challenging in being able to offer on-campus accommodation at a rental price that is competitive to the private rental market in the Churchill township. We in MRS provide a lot of extensive pastoral care support and initiatives which are actually not found in the private rental market. The availability of adequate funding and the competing need to provide funds for education and research all place pressure on further capital development to include on-campus accommodation. We have actually got another building coming up with 200-bed accommodation, which will give us more room for on-campus accommodation. We are running a 65-person unit but a lot of our buildings are actually quite old and eventually we are going to replace them. It will be a good factor for students to live on campus. We will be able to provide more support to students living on campus.

Coming to point 8, I have listed some benefits of living on campus like free food and free internet facilities. The rental charges include electricity, water and gas. There is no up-front payment. They are not required to pay any bond as they have to in the private rental market. There is nothing else — —

Ms PAPADOPOULOS — Where I would like to take over from is that in essence we have an irony. Monash Residential Services and the university would prefer all students to stay on campus because of the pastoral care support element which includes critical incident management. After business hours students who stay on campus will always have an emergency number and access to a staff member who lives on site, et cetera, But DIMIA's — the immigration department's — duty-of-care requirements as well as Monash policy and duty-of-care requirements in order to maintain our standards — the pastoral care element of it — particularly here in Gippsland, add a very weighty cost onto on-campus accommodation which means we cannot compete with the private rental market.

We have an irony. We believe we should provide duty of care to the level we do, but in order to do so our expenses, or the rates, to stay on campus are just not competitive in terms of the private rental market, so unfortunately students go off campus and get themselves into a whole lot of trouble there as well.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Do students who come on campus do better — —

Ms PAPADOPOULOS — Yes.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Than students who are off campus?

Ms PAPADOPOULOS — Yes, they do.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — A study was done?

Ms PAPADOPOULOS — Certainly.

Mr AWAN — If you look at point 6 there are the statistics up to 2006 which show that the ratio of students living in MRS managed on-site accommodation was 0.95 compared to those living off-campus which was 0.89. A study was done and they do better living on campus because we have support services, we have facilities to accommodate students if they need it. They form study groups there as well, so they do much better. When they first move in there is an isolation problem up here in Gippsland, but when they make friends they tend to do better than off-campus students.

Ms PAPADOPOULOS — That is the irony. With the off-campus accommodation basically what we know is that we offer a very extensive orientation program where we attempt to inform and educate students about their rights as well as responsibilities in the private rental market. But it is a very difficult ask to be able to get international students in particular, who have very little time when they first arrive and are bombarded by information from faculties let alone anything else, to be able to absorb this information and to start to really function as effectively as they could. They tend to find themselves either being take advantage of or in difficult circumstances off campus where they are not as aware as they should be of their responsibilities, let alone their rights. There is no doubt that on-campus accommodation is the way that anyone within the university community would like our students to be housed, but as I mentioned, this is the irony we live with.

Mr HERBERT — Yes, thank you very much. Thank you for the detailed presentation you have given the committee; it was excellent. Thank you also for the information you have given. I have some basic questions. I am not sure who will answer them; we will see how we go. You have 390 students that you accommodate currently, or you have the capacity for. What are the administrative staffing numbers to administer that number?

Mr AWAN — We have three full-time staff members working in the MRS office; one casual on an as-and-when-required basis. Apart from that we have three part-time staff members who are residential support officers who live on campus among the students and who help out the students. Then each year we hire eight or nine residential advisers who are students themselves. They are returning students who live among the students to help students who find it difficult to adjust to the environment. We have a fair team working for us.

Mr HERBERT — When you set your costs, your rate — I notice they go from \$109 to \$145 per week over the year — —

Mr AWAN — Yes.

Mr HERBERT — What is the basis of your cost setting? Is it cost recovery? Is it a profit set by the central administration of the university? Does it include capital and recurrent? What is the basis of your setting the student rents?

Mr AWAN — Actually it is done on — —

Ms PAPADOPOULOS — It is cost recovery.

Mr AWAN — It is cost recovery but we do not set up a profit for us. Although MRS does not get funds from the university — —

Mr HERBERT — Is it subsidised?

Mr AWAN — Yes.

Mr HERBERT — It is basically full cost recovery?

Ms PAPADOPOULOS — Yes. As a division we are expected by the university to be entirely self-sufficient.

Mr HERBERT — Okay. What about price increases? Are they based on CPI — —

Mr AWAN — Yes.

Mr HERBERT — Or are they based on a CPI increase and then if you fall behind you whack it up — —

Mr AWAN — Yes, we make sure we do not increase the rents more than CPI. We are always less than CPI.

Mr HERBERT — Okay.

Mr AWAN — One or 2 per cent less than CPI.

Mr HERBERT — You must fall a bit behind in terms of when your wages go up — —

Mr AWAN — I work in accounts as well, so I have got a bit of an accounting background as well. Last year we had about a \$290 000 loss. For the last three or four years we have been running into losses anyway.

Mr HERBERT — When you have 200 new units, how are you going to pay for them? Will you factor that into the rent across the system or what? Will the university simply get you back to where you start?

Mr AWAN — No, we will be demolishing some of the old houses which are 25 or 30 years old. The biggest cost is maintaining those units; it takes a lot. It does not cost much to run the property, but a lot of maintenance needs to be done. We will get rid of some of the old units, and then when the 200-bed accommodation comes up that will make up. Also the layout of the accommodation is such that there are six rooms in each unit, and

they are all spread everywhere. When the new building comes up it will be a 200-residence style. It will be easier to manage as well as there being less cost towards maintenance and all that.

Mr HERBERT — How have you funded that? There must be substantial costs; is that being funded?

Mr AWAN — The anticipated cost is around \$12 million. Thanks to the government which has paid \$2 million which will come as \$1 million and \$1 million next year. One million dollars will be paid by Monash University. We are looking to developers to make up the rest. There will be a sharing — a partnership. At this stage I do not know how it is going to work, but we are looking towards private — —

Mr HERBERT — Presumably you will have to raise the rents, if the private sector is going to put in most of it.

Mr AWAN — I cannot comment on that and whether they will be, but that is the case in Berwick. Berwick has the same accommodation, which was built and is owned by a developer. He gets a share of the profit. But that site is also going into losses. As you see, they only have 75 per cent occupancy, so what we are doing is decreasing the rents over there to attract the students. Once it is running at 100 per cent then we will still be running at the same loss, but the developer will be getting more money, and on the other hand we will be running at 100 per cent. I think that sort of formula will apply over here as well — that we will decrease the rents to make it 100 per cent occupancy, so that whatever we are losing we will keep losing but at least we will run at 100 per cent.

Ms PAPADOPOULOS — If I may, just to add to that — because the Clayton residential site is able to make a profit, if you like, in comparison to — —

Mr HERBERT — What do they charge in Clayton, sorry?

Ms PAPADOPOULOS — One hundred and thirty-five, one hundred and forty dollars a week in the halls of residence, so it is still fairly reasonable, and there are 1200 beds there. If you like, the Clayton site is able to pick up on losses elsewhere, so we do the juggling act as a division and help out.

Mr DIXON — The 65 per cent occupancy rate here — has that been a normal trend, or is it up or down?

Mr AWAN — It is only my first year actually, but three or four years back we were actually full, and we had waiting lists as well. Because the occupancy also depends on the courses that Monash University offers here. It is such an isolated area where it is very difficult for students, especially international students. I say that because I experienced that when I came as an international student. It is not like Melbourne, where if you are missing family or something, you just go out and relax. You just cannot go out anywhere. After 5 o'clock it is just like a graveyard here.

Mr DIXON — We found that last night.

Mr AWAN — That is the gauge because once students enrol at Gippsland they find out that it is very difficult to live here, so they move their courses back to Clayton or Caulfield and the numbers drop. Also, some four or five years ago there were a lot of courses being offered at Gippsland which have now been moved out to other campuses. That is also a factor in the dropping numbers. Sorry, I forgot what your question was.

Mr DIXON — The trend.

Mr AWAN — Yes, the trend is that in first semester numbers are higher and in second semester they just go down a little bit. This semester we have got around 255 students, next semester it could go down to 240 or something. There will be a dropout of 10 or 15 or 20 students in a semester. The second semester is always lower.

Mr DIXON — Okay. Is there much rental accommodation available in Traralgon and Morwell, and is it reasonably priced or is it hard to get?

Ms WEBB — It is probably less than what it has been in the past at the moment. I think for Traralgon especially, a lot of students do not go to live there because of the transport problems. There are only one or two buses a day to come out to the university, so they try to stay within the Churchill area and Morwell to be able to catch — —

Mr DIXON — There is transport from Morwell, is there?

Ms WEBB — There is, yes. There is a bus that leaves every hour — only up until about 5 o'clock though, so after that they are less frequent. That becomes a problem for students who have got jobs in Morwell. Getting home afterwards is always costly. There is a reasonable amount available at the moment I suppose. A lot of students will go out and get a house and then organise other students to come in with them; often it works that way. But certainly Churchill is where they look first to go, especially international students.

Mr HALL — Do you have any examples, anecdotally or otherwise, of where students have made inquiries about accommodation and then because of the costs involved have actually decided not to pursue their university education?

Ms WEBB — I had one last year. I just started in this job in November and actually just after I started we had a girl ring us up from Horsham, I think — so she was a fair way away but one of the courses that she was looking at was here. She was actually looking at going on campus and looked at the cost. She contacted me to find out the costs for off-campus accommodation but due to her family being so far away and the costs that were involved she actually did not come here. I think she ended up going to Ballarat or somewhere else that was closer to where she was. One of the issues that she spoke to me about was the high cost of accommodation. She felt that her family was struggling to get her there, and that living so far away from home and the costs of getting to and from home was an issue for her. That is about the only one I have had since I have been here.

Mr HALL — I raise it because you are suggesting as one of your recommendations that some living-away-from-home allowance be paid to students. It would not actually help, Freda, in that example, would it, where the girl was socially isolated from her family?

Ms WEBB — No, she was just too far away really, I suppose. She was probably one who needed to be closer to her family but the course she was hoping to get into was here. I know the financial problems that are often faced by the students here with Centrelink and trying to become an independent student away from their families and to be classed as independent has put a lot of pressure on them — because you have to work for that 18 months to try and earn an amount to become independent or get your family to tell them that they do not want you at home, which is not the case. I think they have a lot of problems organising everyday living money to live down here, and it is harder to find employment here for a lot of students. That is what they come to me about — trying to find work while they are studying here at Monash to help supplement their income from Centrelink.

Mr HALL — Do you know what proportion of overseas students would constitute your 280?

Mr AWAN — About 40 per cent or so.

Mr HALL — About 40?

Mr AWAN — Yes. Actually that is the main problem for the international students. Locals do tend to find some sort of jobs but when it comes to international students they just cannot find anything, so that is why they tend to try and move out to Clayton or Caulfield where they can actually go to the city or somewhere and supplement their income by working 20 hours a week. But yes, we do have a lot of international students. I actually have a graph here, which —

Mr HALL — Sorry, I have not had time to read all those graphs.

Mr AWAN — If you see non-Australian males and females, that actually makes up about 35-odd per cent.

Ms PAPADOPOULOS — Page 36.

Mr HALL — How confident are you that if there were an allowance given for living away from home — let us just throw up a figure like \$2000, which might be a 50 per cent subsidy for on-campus accommodation costs — you would fill your 400 places?

Mr AWAN — If the allowance were paid in such a way that it had to go towards their on-campus accommodation I think it would actually really help students because we have some students who are actually in great financial difficulty. They are falling behind two or three months rental, and they come to us and tell us, 'Look,

we do not have money to pay for this'. What they do is just make sort of instalment payments and then move out, because they simply cannot afford it. Maybe they lose a job or their Centrelink payment does not come through or something happens and they just pull out then say, 'We are moving out'. We cannot do much about it, but if the allowance were paid directly towards on-campus accommodation I think it would be very much a plus point.

Ms PAPAPOULOS — We are fairly certain. We are very confident that it would. There is no doubt about it because where there has been financial assistance via scholarships by the pro vice-chancellor here, there is no doubt. Those have been immediately snapped up and you can see that it makes a huge difference.

Ms WEBB — One thing — just to add to that — is that the commonwealth-supported places scholarships that are available for accommodation do not actually allow for students who are coming from a city to the rural. There is rural to city and rural to rural, but students who are coming to Gippsland from the city — and there are quite a few of them — are not eligible to apply for a scholarship for on-campus accommodation.

Mr HERBERT — Are they means tested?

Ms WEBB — The scholarships, I believe so, yes. It is something that needs looking at as well, to try to have additional scholarships or a subsidy available for on-campus accommodation. They would do better to be on campus, the majority of them.

Mr HERBERT — Just on Martin's question, a little while ago Morwell was one of those places where there was an excess of public housing. I know the walk-ups that were there would often be rented out as student accommodation.

Ms WEBB — It is a waiting list now.

Mr HERBERT — So that is finished?

Ms WEBB — Yes.

Mr HERBERT — Just on that point, in terms of residential students, I know you focus on residential services for on-campus accommodation. Do you provide services to students in terms of looking outside the campus and provide advice or have arrangements with real estate agents for student accommodation off campus?

Ms PAPAPOULOS — Yes, we do. Specifically at Gippsland there is a very, very close relationship with the consumer affairs office that is based in Morwell. If any advocacy is required here at Gippsland, Freda would immediately refer them to consumer affairs, which also comes on campus very often. Across the Victorian campuses, I represent students also at VCAT. We are required to specifically assist them in sourcing accommodation. We do not have arrangements with real estate agents as such, because the university is very wary of any conflict-of-interest situations. It is more about informing, educating and guiding. There are no direct referrals done or given to anyone unless it is Monash-managed or owned accommodation.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you very much, Kristine, Waseem and Freda. We appreciate your time.

Ms PAPAPOULOS — Thank you for the opportunity, and all the best with your work.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education

Churchill — 19 May 2008

Members

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Mr N. Elasmar	Mr G. Howard
Mr P. Hall	Mr N. Kotsiras
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Witnesses

Ms A. Kilby, student advocate and support coordinator,

Ms L. Schmidt, president,

Mr S. Murphy, education vice-president, and

Ms S. Fryer, student residential association, Monash University Gippsland Student Union.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Welcome to this inquiry. The process is that you speak to us for 15 minutes or so and we will ask you questions for the remaining 15 minutes. We have your submission but if there is anything more you wish to put, please do so.

Ms KILBY — My name is Aspen Kilby. I am the student advocate for the student union. I guess just to perhaps highlight a number of things from the submission, we being from a regional university campus are very aware of some of the issues that are facing students and prospective students in the region. Often we see students who are having impacts that are preventing them from studying or in fact affect them so that they drop out of university because of various matters. I guess we will go into a little more what those things are.

Probably the key one that we see is the financial issues that are affecting students. We are in a low socioeconomic region here and students are generally coming to university having to support themselves in some capacity. It may be that they are working two or three part-time jobs in addition to getting study support payments or assistance from their parents to enable them to attend university. We do not have any clear way of assessing how many students do not attend university because of those financial factors.

Other things which we find are having an impact on students are things like the actual industries which are in this region. What we are seeing is that many of the industries are quite heavy on things like construction labourers and related workers — in this area there are many fewer industries that require a professional degree. We actually have some additional statistical information, if the committee would like to receive that. Perhaps we could provide this at the end of our testimony.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you.

Ms KILBY — Additional things just to note include that there is a perception that the regional university is not as good as other universities. Monash Gippsland actually has the same entry score as other Monash campuses and yet there is this perception that it is the second option, that it is not as good. What we find is that many students are actually preferring to go to metropolitan campuses and are therefore leaving the region and also not coming back or are coming back after a longer period of time, so we are actually losing them from the region.

Other matters that we would comment on include the public transport system. We have had discussions with a number of people over at least the last 10 years about the lack of an adequate public transport system servicing the Churchill campus particularly. What we find is that students are using either the V/Line train system or local Latrobe Valley Bus Lines to access the campus, or a combination of the two. There are still instances of students not being able to reach the campus prior to 9 o'clock in the morning. For those students who have classes starting at 9, that is a real issue. In fact it is such an issue that the campus has put on a taxi service for students to cover that gap in the public transport system. Students can use this Monash taxi service to get out to the campus at about 10 past 9, but still they are not getting there for the start of their classes. That is an action that Monash has taken to cover a gap in the local public transport system.

Just regarding the alternative pathways, in our submission we refer to a number of the pathways, including students who complete a TAFE degree and then continue with a Monash degree. We also talk about the diploma and tertiary studies program, which is increasing and has certainly been a great pathway for our local students. I do not have at hand the statistics which show how many students from regional areas consequently do more poorly than metropolitan students, but the difference is marked in this region. We see an alternative entry scheme as being very appropriate. The FSL, which is the equivalent full-time student load, has certainly increased dramatically from 2006 to 2007, and we hope to see that program expanding.

To comment briefly on the scholarships and bursaries which are available in this region and also from the campus, there are obviously the commonwealth scholarships which are available. There are also a number of Monash scholarships, and MUGSU itself provides a joint scholarship with the university which is predominately for off-campus students. I am on the scholarship assessment panel and what we have found is that there is a lot of need out there but people are not applying for these scholarships in the numbers that we would have anticipated. It is hard to assess why that is but certainly we are having very few scholarship applications, such that some of the scholarships are not being used because there are not enough applications. Those scholarships are with some local TAFEs and also some local shire councils.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — You have not looked into the cause of this? You have not looked to see whether the career teachers are advising students accordingly?

Ms KILBY — There have been some proactive measures taken such as changing the submission date. In terms of the process, students will get their offers then they will make their scholarship applications, then they will find out which rounds they have been successful in. The initial closing date for these scholarships was I think back in September when students generally do not know if they have a place or not. We as a scholarship committee decided to put it back to February when students know what they are doing. So 2008 is the first year that that extended date has been implemented but even so there are scholarships which were not taken up this year. I do believe, although Monash is probably in a position to comment more on this, that there was some communication with career teachers in terms of getting those applications but I am not involved in that side of it.

Just to return to the lack of professional people in the regions, we have found that there is a shortage of accountants in particular and other skilled tradespeople in Gippsland. We think that this is because relatively fewer students are taking up those degrees, and informal advice from the business and economics faculty is that it is having trouble getting students into its courses. We think that is a concern as well that students are not studying these courses and then you can see the actual shortage in the professions.

Just a few other statistics to mention from our additional information, which we will provide, we have noticed that there was a poll which was conducted by the Australian Democrats. It was a youth poll for 2008 and it stated that 25 per cent of youth in the Latrobe Valley — that is 15 to 24-year-olds — earned \$149 or less gross per week. We think that just reflects the very low socioeconomic status of this region. Seventy-six per cent of the respondents indicated that they were not receiving youth allowance or a scholarship, and 49 per cent of those respondents believed that the current levels of student assistance were inadequate. I guess from our perspective what we are constantly seeing is students having difficulty because of the low level of studies support payments, and we would urge the inquiry to be aware of that and perhaps make a recommendation around that.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you very much. Anyone else before we start asking questions?

Mr S. MURPHY — My name is Sean Murphy. I am the education portfolio-holder and vice president of the student union. Sorry, am I speaking too early?

The DEPUTY CHAIR — We cannot quite hear you.

Mr S. MURPHY — I want to elaborate on the accommodation difficulties student experience around this area. On top of transport costs, if they are to avoid the inconvenience of having to drive to university to attend their classes, students will need to find accommodation either here or in Morwell-Traralgon — less so in Traralgon because public transport is virtually non-existent from there to Churchill. The average cost of student residence would be about \$130. If you consider that 25 per cent of youth aged 15 to 24 is earning \$150 per week, that is barely enough to survive. Also, in order to classify as independent from your family you would need to earn somewhere in the range of \$18 000 within an 18-month period, but to qualify as being able to receive youth allowance in the first place your family would need to earn less than \$39 000 or something like that, which we believe is not realistic considering the circumstances of the area.

While student residences are very convenient, there is a cost associated with them and it is up to the student to put the two together and find out which they would prefer. The only other option is accommodation within the area, which has its own difficulties. It is a very large responsibility for a student to take on renting or leasing their own property. There are many difficulties associated with that including finding an appropriate housemate, and finding someone who would like to take on the burden of the lease because once you are responsible for that you are locked into a 12-month agreement for the most part. It is very rare for students in this area to find a rental property on a 6-month lease, and it is the same with the student residences here. Once you begin living in a student residence you are either locked into a 6-month or a 12-month term. The 6-month term has an extra cost of \$10 to \$15 a week associated with that. While there is an option for special consideration in student residences, it is a very difficult process, and I am attributing no blame. It is another factor which makes it even less convenient for students to attend Monash Gippsland.

Mr HALL — Sean, if there was support — like a living away from home allowance — for on-campus accommodation, would that make it more attractive to students to live on campus?

Mr S. MURPHY — I believe it would ease the burden of living in student residences and remove some of the difficulties involved from year to year. It may not solve all the issues but it would make it even more likely that the retention rates would be higher.

Mr HALL — Given that the social life, I suppose, in the Latrobe Valley is more concentrated in places like Moreland and Traralgon, still students do not mind living on campus if they can afford it?

Mr S. MURPHY — Yes, but after a while it does tend to get a bit old — living with the same people for a three-month period can be difficult. Students sometimes prefer to move away from residences once they have made connections with the locals to begin living in their own property, and once they have become accustomed to university life. At the beginning it is a lot more difficult, especially if you are coming from more of an outlying area.

Mr HALL — Do you want to add to that, Leslie?

Ms SCHMIDT — I just wanted to say that it might be useful to also include the town of Churchill and rental properties in the town in that assistance, because while there are some difficulties, as Sean outlined, in renting or leasing your own property, it can be much cheaper and more of an option for some students.

Mr HALL — Shared accommodation in Churchill?

Ms KILBY — Yes.

Mr S. MURPHY — For the same cost as one room in residences you can have a between three and four-bedroom house in town. The costs associated with house rent just go down completely, even though the difficulties are there.

Mr HALL — Aspen, I would be interested in your views about what we can do to address that perception problem that you spoke about — that is, that regional universities are a second-rate option, despite the fact that you have got the same ENTER scores to get into programs, despite the fact that the courses have the same material and despite the fact that the employment outcomes for graduates from this campus of the university are generally excellent — as good as, if not better than, some other metropolitan-based university degrees. What can we do to address that perception problem and encourage more students in Victoria and other places to apply to this campus?

Ms KILBY — I can cut to the chase and tell you that I do not have the answers. I know that Monash's approach in the past has been to have specialty courses — flagship courses — which it would use to attract students to the campus. That has worked to a degree, and certainly the new medical degree is an example of that, as well as the new criminal justice degree. In a way those are attracting more people, more services, more money to the campus, which is a good thing because it raises the profile.

I think that we need to engage more with the local schools and even with the outlying schools to make sure that they are aware that Monash is a real option. Those are things that MUGSU has discussed with Monash in terms of us wanting to be involved in promoting to schools that this is a viable option, that it is not second rate, that it does have a good student experience, and that the student experience is comparable to that at metropolitan universities.

Mr S. MURPHY — I would also like to mention the diploma of tertiary studies. While the perception may be that since you need a lower ENTER score to take part in it, it may be second rate, I have found that the majority of the students who have taken part in the degree or in the units associated with it have found it to be extremely beneficial and very useful for the entirety of whatever degree they may end up in. While the perception may be there, the benefits that those particular students are getting out of it are phenomenal.

Mr HALL — Sure. We have got to get out and sell that message, don't we? Maybe part of our report will help address that.

Mr HERBERT — Thank you for your presentation. I have two questions. The first kind of follows on from that issue about perceptions. When we were at the peninsula campus of Monash a number of students seem to do a shandy course: they do some units at Clayton, some at Berwick and some at peninsula. How common is it for students here to do units in Clayton, or do most students do all of their studies here at this campus?

Ms SCHMIDT — My name is Leslie Schmidt. I am the president of MUGSU. I personally only know of a couple of examples where they split their units between campuses.

Mr HERBERT — One of the problems with some regional campuses is the diversity of subject choice. One way you can get around that is to work with another campus to broaden the number of units. Has that been looked at here?

Ms KILBY — That is just a comment on some of the courses and units that are offered. There are units which are available to our students from other campuses, but depending on the degree structure it may not be viable for the students to study those units. I am thinking particularly of courses in education, and potentially nursing, where there is a very tight degree structure which does not allow that. That being said, however, some of the courses that our students study are available via off-campus mode, and so there are instances where students are able to access units they may not access otherwise via off-campus learning.

Mr HERBERT — I guess that leads me into the second question — you read a script there, Aspen. Has anyone here had experience with online delivery in terms of studying units, and how successful is it? What are the advantages and disadvantages of learning subjects online or courses online?

Mr S. MURPHY — I can comment on the flexibility it offers students. Often I have seen cases where students who are not able to attend classes on a regular basis are forced into taking off-campus units just so that they are able to work, perhaps, a full-time job or at least a very large amount of casual hours. It offers the opportunity to get out of the bind of financial difficulties. As for the success of the delivery, I would really have to hand over to Aspen.

Ms KILBY — I could comment on that. You may know that approximately two-thirds of students studying through this campus are off-campus students. They may have a mixed mode, which means that they study some on-campus units and some off campus, but predominantly those are fully off-campus students. Monash offers something like 215 off-campus courses through this campus, so that it is a fairly high proportion. The success of those courses depends on which students you talk to. There is a document called the Monash Experience Questionnaire, which includes responses from off-campus students. From my personal experience, we have a range of issues reported to us by the students; a lack of academic support, administrative errors and late receipt of study materials being just a few of those.

There are certainly concerns from the students' perspective about getting what they paid for and what they need from the course, but we are working with Monash to make sure that that is of general concern to Monash in that they are working together with the student union to make sure that standards are met in terms of course material.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Do you think that the removal of full-fee-paying students would have any impact on the number of students in terms of the courses offered?

Ms KILBY — I am not aware of how many students at this campus are currently falling within that category. We do not think that it will have a huge impact, but we certainly do support it.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — You said that transport was a major problem in terms of students getting to the campus. If you had a magic wand, how would you fix the problem?

Mr S. MURPHY — Currently the system is that from Melbourne to Traralgon and Bairnsdale there is a single line running along the Monash Freeway. Churchill sits outside that line which means you need to cross over from a train to a bus in order to get here. Latrobe Valley Buslines and V/Line do not coordinate their services, so it can take up to an hour and a half to travel the same distance as a 20-minute car ride from, say, Moe to Churchill. This is completely unacceptable. It forces students to spend the majority of their time on campus, time they often need to support themselves. That means they are forced into attempting to find jobs that have that degree of flexibility. The only solution to that is lowering the amount of time it takes to get from anywhere in the Latrobe Valley to Churchill. The solution to that could be anything from coordinating the bus and train services to the university providing direct transport from areas in the region.

Ms KILBY — Just another comment on the integration of services; we met with Latrobe city about this six months ago to try to have something done in this area. At that point we did a test of how long it would take a student to get from Traralgon to the university, and could they get their in time for their class. I think it took over 2 hours and three buses to make the journey from Traralgon to the university.

Mr HERBERT — On the issue of part-time work and supporting yourself, we all know it is very expensive and hard for students to get through uni nowadays. In Melbourne there is a lot of hospitality and service industry work, which means you can do it in the evening; you can work in restaurants, the Crown Casino, whatever. What is it like in terms of employment here? Are there many opportunities for students to earn enough money? Are there enough job opportunities around the area that fit in with student life or not? Is that an issue?

Ms SCHMIDT — I think there is a fair amount of casual work. The information that we will provide to you after notes that 20 per cent of the industries in Gippsland are retail trade. This means a job can have the flexible hours, but being a lower paying job there is not so much return for the student's time.

Ms KILBY — Also, in addition to that, we can attest to the lack of any sort of professional placements that are available. We have something called the co-op program, which is a field placement program which Monash runs. I know that they regularly have great difficulty recruiting employers to be part of that program, meaning that students in general have to wait until the end of the year to do their placement. That is a concern to us because it is meant to be an enrichment program, which means that students actually get some experience in their field of study, but we cannot find the employers to make that possible easily.

Mr S. MURPHY — Gaining employment in the area is really dependent on having connections within the area and understanding the kinds of jobs that are offered within the region. Considering the distance of the catchment area of Monash Gippsland, coming from, say, Drouin to Morwell or Churchill and looking for employment there can be a lengthy process. It has taken me, for example, three years to find a job that has the kind the flexibility required for full-time study. It is quite a difficult process all round.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Thank you very much. We appreciate it.

Witnesses withdrew.

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education

Churchill — 19 May

Members

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Mr N. Elasmir

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Witness

Mr I. Whitehead, former government school principal.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Ian, welcome. Thank you very much for coming.

Mr WHITEHEAD — It is a pleasure. You have had a very long day, I would say.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — It has been a long day. You are our last witness. We ask that you speak for 15 minutes and then we will ask you questions for the last 10 or 15 minutes.

Mr WHITEHEAD — It probably will not be quite 15 minutes.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — That is fine — up to 15 minutes.

Mr WHITEHEAD — Firstly, I would like to congratulate the Parliament for agreeing to such an inquiry. I believe it is a very important topic. No doubt those who initiated the inquiry will have observed, as I have upon tracking my ex-primary school students, that the participation of students in higher education is not necessarily related to student ability but to a whole host of factors that have more to do with family culture, economics, geography and social networks. In fact in many cases it has little to do with the natural talent of the student in question.

Under the terms of reference I would be pleased to comment on the issues I believe have brought such marked geographical differences in participation rates. As a resident of Traralgon, my interest is specifically in the Latrobe Valley. However, the same may be said of areas such as Melbourne's northern suburbs, I would say, and other regional areas.

While I understand that much you will hear you will have heard before at these inquiries, I trust I can, through some home-grown statistics, observations and personal reflections, add to the depth of knowledge that you might have gained through listening to and reading submissions. The inquiry is very wide so I will confine myself to terms of reference (a) and (d), prior to being perhaps brave enough to suggest some strategies to address the barriers.

The first term of reference I will refer to is (a), variations in the number and type of university applications, offers, acceptances and completions in different metropolitan, rural and regional areas. I found when looking at applications, offers and acceptance rates it becomes clear that students from regional areas — you would be very aware of this — do not participate to the same extent as their city counterparts.

This is exacerbated when you take in factors such as independent schools versus government schools, and small country towns versus large regional areas. Interestingly enough, possibly the best set of results in Victorian schools are actually quite often from small country secondary colleges. For instance, if you send your children to a Wycheproof high school or an Ouyen high or, in our own area, Maffra high school, the results of those schools from those small country towns are quite extraordinary. Also, socioeconomic disadvantage is another factor.

All this is intensified when you looked at kids in government schools in regional Victoria in poor socioeconomic areas. Let us look at the results for the Latrobe Valley taken from the 2006 VCE statistics published in the *Herald Sun* last June. One telling statistic relates to student aspirations. This committee has looked at the copy of aspirations — I think it is very important. In the Latrobe Valley the statistics show us that in the 2006 VCE year, a mere 54 per cent of students in the Latrobe Valley even bothered to apply for a university or TAFE place. I guess we are saying nearly 50 per cent of kids in the Latrobe Valley did not even bother to fill in the form. This is despite having this campus of Monash University in the midst of the Latrobe Valley. The percentage comparison for students in the metropolitan area is 81 per cent. My own feeling, based on working in Latrobe Valley schools, is that the issue of aspirations is a cultural one rather than one based on what schools might or might not be doing. One strategy that must be considered is that of being more proactive in encouraging government school students from low socioeconomic areas such as this one to at least consider to a greater extent the tertiary option.

The only other term of reference I will look at is (d), which relates to the potential geographic, economic, social, cultural and other influences on university applications, offers, acceptances and completions across Victorian communities. I will not dwell on the economic factors governing significantly lower participation rates from regional students. My own knowledge and observations back up those mentioned in the written submission from Girton Grammar School in Bendigo — that from the set of successful students the actual take-up rate of students in

regional Victoria pales against that of their city counterparts. As at April 2007 only 57 per cent of Gippsland students who had been successful had actually taken up the tertiary option — that includes those who deferred. This compares to 71 per cent for students in government metropolitan schools.

You will have heard a lot about the economic factor, but while the economic factor has been a well worn path for your respondents — you will have 1000 quotes, I guess, about the costs of relocating and I will not requote those here — there is a cultural factor in areas such as the Latrobe Valley that has not been given the same exposure. In families from low socioeconomic areas, the very thought of a tertiary future for their child is off the radar. Many of these families see universities as, ‘Here is a world with which we are not familiar; a club to which we cannot belong’. But in these families there are some clever, clever kids. I think they are missing out badly. The culture of a family far overrides, in my experience, the culture of the classroom, the culture of a school. I am even more convinced about this since being employed part-time at an independent school in Traralgon.

Tracking students from my previous school revealed overwhelmingly that only students whose parents had been to university followed the tertiary option. There were some exceptionally clever students among those not pursuing further studies. It is a cycle that needs to be broken. Another strategy must relate to how to best break this cycle. Firstly, though, we need to agree it is a cycle worth breaking. Does a more tertiary-educated community make better citizens through their broader education, better opportunities, greater maturity when entering the workforce and contact with a wider spectrum of people including overseas students? If it does, then we must ensure the vast majority of students complete year 12 and a greater percentage of students from a wide socioeconomic spectrum at least consider the tertiary option. With cultural factors, relocation costs and the prospect of significant HECS debts, it is little wonder that so many families in regional Victoria do not consider a university or TAFE education for their children.

I guess the difficult bit is the strategies, and I have tried to keep a little bit away from ‘more money for this and more money for that’, although I think it is unavoidable in some areas. My regional primary school, which is a primary school in a disadvantaged area in the Latrobe Valley — we took our students on a camp and to Melbourne University; when they went to the Melbourne camp we actually took them to Melbourne University. I set up — it was my son actually — some experiments, and we had a very interesting tour. The children observed students at the university, who were really only six or seven years older than themselves. We asked the kids to imagine themselves at the university. Such a tiny beginning may provide powerful motivation; it happened in my family.

The universities themselves perhaps could offer some outreach programs for upper primary and secondary school students. Somehow we must touch a nerve in children which no-one else will touch unless we do it for them. There is a smattering of schemes, I understand, addressing disadvantage, but it would be wonderful if these could be extended to include all successful applicants and students in regional areas whose parents have not had a tertiary education. I understand that no government is going to abolish HECS. There will be no 18-year-old equivalent of the baby bonus, but let us not dismiss these thoughts totally. There must be some creative or lateral solutions to lessen the debt hanging over the heads of young people before they even start their careers. While their parents may be reasonably well off, when young kids start they are not. Perhaps that is the job for a separate think tank. Even with the baby bonus there can be some creative thinking perhaps. Consider the parent who puts aside the \$5000 for later education — \$5000 at 8 per cent compound interest generates over \$20 000 when the student is 18 and over \$34 000 when they are 25, which is just about the time they will be starting to repay their HECS debts. While I understand about inflationary effects, a government guaranteed scheme would provide the starting point for families on all incomes.

In conclusion, in the time that this inquiry has been running, naturally enough I have had my ear to the ground in regard to media reports. Many times I have heard talk about the very issues this inquiry is looking at, and, as I said initially, I think this is a really very relevant inquiry. In a radio report this Saturday there was a spokesman for a group I had not heard of — I am not sure whether you have heard of it or whether it submitted to this group. It is called the Isolated Children’s Parents Association. I certainly had not heard of it. They were bemoaning the fact that they had not had any mention in the budget. I do feel sorry for Kevin Rudd on that particular point, because I think of the thousands of groups around Australia — a new Prime Minister — wondering if they will be mentioned; they were not. They spoke in terms of \$6000 per annum for relocation and living assistance. I think that is probably pretty conservative.

In the VCE system if a child is from Ringwood North and a child is from Tubbut and they wish to enrol in the same course at La Trobe University, they theoretically at least have an equal opportunity to gain access, but in a practical

sense, as you all well know, the scenario is far from equal. I understand there has been a massive number of recommendations made to this committee. I hope my thoughts and perspectives may have been of some assistance. Thank you.

Mr HALL — Thanks, Ian. Thanks for coming in, and thanks for your interest in this inquiry. When you made the comment about tracking students from your previous school and that invariably those who went on to higher education had parents who had also completed degree courses and with those who had not the opposite situation applied — was there some economic rationale mixed up in that as well? Just because a parent had not got a degree — were they in an economic position where they could have afforded to assist their student to study?

Mr WHITEHEAD — In many cases, no. I think some of these students when they get towards later secondary college and they start to think about higher education, sometimes in their minds they do not even ask their parents, because they know they are not going to be able to afford the relocation costs. It does not always correlate, Peter. Quite often some of those smart kids I have talked about have parents with a reasonably good socioeconomic standing, but because their parents have not been to university it does not seem to be in their radar, which is a shame, I think.

Mr HALL — That goes to my second question. You talked about the aspirational levels lifting the horizons of kids, and I think your program of giving primary school-aged students the experience at university is a good first step. Are there any other ways, Ian, which you could recommend to this committee to go about trying to lift the aspirations of many country kids so that higher ed does come on the radar?

Mr WHITEHEAD — I think there is the possibility of an outreach program from universities, and I think it should go right down to primary school students. A lot of students will say when you ask them what they want to be — nearly everything they say is something that requires a tertiary education. You may have some idea of the number of grade 6 boys or girls who want to be vets. It is not easy to be a vet, and quite often students from these low socioeconomic areas do not understand the relationship between effort at school and the eventual outcome. Quite often they will not be hard workers at school, but they still believe that they should become vets or doctors or lawyers. It is hard to know what things parents are putting in children's heads.

Mr HALL — Do you have any inside clues on the deferment issue in the Latrobe Valley in particular — 57 per cent is an extraordinarily low number of kids who actually go on.

Mr WHITEHEAD — Yes, in the Latrobe Valley only 54 per cent of kids even bothered to apply for a tertiary spot, and of that 54 per cent a little over half of them actually followed it through.

Mr HALL — In effect you are getting something like 25 per cent of the year 12 cohort that is actually going on to higher ed next year.

Mr WHITEHEAD — Yes, that is all. The deferment issue is a whole new ballgame. It is very interesting. I did have some statistics, Peter, of the schools in Victoria that have very high deferral rates. Most of them were independent schools in country areas. They were the ones that had deferment rates over 30 per cent. There was only one school in the Melbourne metropolitan area that had a deferment rate over 30 per cent, and that was the Melbourne Steiner school. I think there were only one or two country ones. I know the committee will have heard many times the reasons why students defer, but a great many of those deferrals come from students in country independent schools, not government schools.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Can I ask: should students in regional Victoria or disadvantaged schools receive extra bonus ENTER points?

Mr WHITEHEAD — I understand they do. Extra points are not going to be of assistance though if they still choose not to access the courses. Is it true that some are scaled up?

The DEPUTY CHAIR — All subjects, from what I understand, are scaled — whether scaled up or scaled or down.

Mr WHITEHEAD — But I am not aware that country students get a higher TER.

The DEPUTY CHAIR — No, but should they?

Mr WHITEHEAD — It will help them get into the course they want to get in, but the problem still remains — can they can afford to access the course?

The DEPUTY CHAIR — Ian, thank you very much. It is quite clear that you still have an interest in education even after you have retired, so well done. Thank you.

Mr WHITEHEAD — Thanks very much. Thanks for listening. I hope you have had a good day.

Committee adjourned.