



# Education and Training Committee

## Final Report

### Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education

ORDERED TO BE PRINTED

July 2009

by Authority  
Victorian Government Printer

---

Printed on 100% recycled paper

Parliament of Victoria  
Education and Training Committee

Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education

ISBN 978-0-9805312-2-0

ISBN 978-0-9805312-3-7 Electronic

# Education and Training Committee

## Members

Mr Geoff Howard MP  
*Chair*

Mr Nicholas Kotsiras MP  
*Deputy Chair*

Mr Martin Dixon MP

Mr Nazih Elasmr MLC

Mr Peter Hall MLC

Dr Alistair Harkness MP

Mr Steve Herbert MP

## Staff

Ms Karen Ellingford, Executive Officer

Ms Caitlin Whiteman, Research Officer

Ms Jennifer Jackson, Research Officer

Ms Natalie Tyler, Administration Officer

Parliament House

Spring Street

EAST MELBOURNE VICTORIA 3002

Telephone: (03) 8682 2823

Facsimile: (03) 8682 2818

Email: [etc@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:etc@parliament.vic.gov.au)

Website: <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/etc>



# Chair's foreword

---

It is my pleasure to present the report of the Education and Training Committee on its inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education. This is the largest inquiry ever undertaken by the Committee, attracting unprecedented interest from Victorian communities in every corner of the state. The Committee extends its sincere appreciation to everyone who took the time to contribute written submissions, as well as those who participated in the extensive public hearing program, some of whom travelled long distances to assist in the Committee's investigations. Special thanks must also go to the many young people who contributed greatly to the inquiry by sharing their personal experiences, concerns and aspirations.

There is no doubting the importance of geographical differences in higher education participation, or the profound differences in higher education participation across Victorian communities. In every regional location visited by the Committee, as well as many more that the Committee could not reach during this inquiry, access to higher education is a significant concern. Young people in some metropolitan and interface areas also face significant challenges getting to university, especially those from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. These issues have also received extensive consideration at a national level, as part of the review of Australian higher education undertaken by Professor Denise Bradley and an expert panel on behalf of the Australian Government.

Time and again, the Committee heard about the difficulties faced by young school leavers in rural and regional areas who are contemplating leaving home to study. This exciting time in young people's lives inevitably brings a multitude of challenges, as they farewell family and friends and branch out into new environments. However, an even greater concern for many of these young people and their families is the high cost of university study, particularly the cost of living away from home. The Committee heard that these concerns are responsible for a disproportionately high university deferment rate among rural and regional students, many of whom may never go on to pursue their studies.

Student income support is therefore a major contributing factor in university participation. While the Committee welcomes recent national reforms to enable more students from low-income families to access Youth Allowance, it is concerned that the specific circumstances of rural and regional young people still have not been adequately addressed. Already, many such students defer their studies to meet eligibility criteria for income support and this route to financial independence is set to become even more difficult under the new system. In the Committee's view, all young people who must relocate to undertake their studies should be eligible to receive student income support.

The Committee also found that the causes of geographic differences in higher education participation rates go beyond the obvious barriers of distance and costs. They also stem from differences in the ambitions and aspirations of students and their families, school completion rates and academic achievement levels. Addressing these differences will require a broad range of interventions, which will give Victorian students both the desire and the tools to achieve in education at the highest level.

The Committee welcomes the Victorian Government's recent announcement that it is set to develop a new Higher Education Plan for the state. This plan will support the Victorian Government's contribution to national higher education reforms, and provide for growth in tertiary education provision and participation throughout Victoria. The Committee believes

---

that this report will be a vital resource for those developing and implementing the plan, and calls on them to set and pursue new targets for higher education participation for communities that are currently under-represented. It is only by raising participation rates among these communities that overall participation targets are likely to be met, and the benefits of higher education spread more equitably.

I would like to thank my fellow Committee members for contributing their time, ideas and expertise to this important inquiry. Committee members are unanimous in their belief that university participation rates for under-represented groups must be increased, and that a breadth of initiatives will be necessary to achieve this. Committee members would also like to thank the staff of the Committee secretariat for their invaluable assistance in coordinating the extensive public hearing program, analysing a substantial body of evidence and preparing the final report.

I trust that the recommendations made in this report will provide the impetus for strategies that will improve opportunities for all Victorians to participate successfully in higher education.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Geoff Howard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Geoff Howard MP  
Chair

# Contents

---

Members and staff of the Education and Training Committee .....	iii
Chair's foreword.....	v
Executive summary.....	xiii
Recommendations .....	xxvii
List of figures and tables .....	xxxvii
Acronyms and abbreviations .....	xxxix
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Functions of the Committee .....	1
Terms of reference.....	2
Inquiry methodology.....	2
• Call for submissions	
• Literature review	
• Data analysis	
• Public hearings	
• Interstate investigations	
• International investigations	
• Conferences and seminars	
Definitions .....	8
• Higher education	
• Geographical differences	
• Rural and regional	
• Socioeconomic status	
Structure of the report .....	10
<b>Chapter 2: Context for the inquiry .....</b>	<b>11</b>
Policy context.....	11
• Australian Government higher education policy	
• The Review of Australian Higher Education	
• Victorian Government tertiary education policy	
Higher education participation in Victoria.....	19

---

• Data analysis	
• Higher education applications	
• Higher education offers	
• Higher education enrolments and deferments	
• Other post-school pathways	
• Higher education completions	
Conclusion and recommendations .....	35
<b>Chapter 3: School achievement and completion .....</b>	<b>39</b>
Achievement at school .....	39
• Achievement during compulsory schooling	
• Achievement in the Victorian Certificate of Education	
Year 12 completion .....	43
• Options for completion	
• Year 12 completion and higher education participation	
Differences in school achievement and completion.....	50
• Academic achievement levels	
• Year 12 completion rates	
Lifting school achievement and completion rates.....	58
• School improvement strategies	
• Lifting VCE achievement and completion rates	
Conclusion and recommendations .....	66
<b>Chapter 4: Aspirations towards higher education.....</b>	<b>69</b>
The nature and formation of aspirations.....	69
• The nature of aspirations	
• Forming aspirations	
Raising aspirations towards higher education .....	77
• Concerns about raising aspirations towards higher education	
• Career education	
• University recruitment and outreach	
Using an integrated support approach to raise aspirations .....	97
Conclusion and recommendations .....	98
<b>Chapter 5: Admission into higher education .....</b>	<b>101</b>
The admission process.....	101
ENTER-based selection .....	102



---

• Advantages of ENTER-based selection	
• Limitations of ENTER-based selection	
• Improving equity in ENTER-based selection	
• Complements to ENTER-based selection	
Enabling programs.....	113
• Characteristics of enabling programs	
• Benefits of enabling programs	
Admission into higher education on the basis of VET studies.....	117
• Articulation and credit transfer	
• Admission on the basis of VET studies as an equity strategy	
• Barriers to increased articulation from VET to higher education	
Conclusion and recommendations.....	128
<b>Chapter 6: Provision and accessibility.....</b>	<b>131</b>
University campuses.....	131
• Geographical distribution of university campuses in Victoria	
• Regional university campuses and regional development	
• The influence of campus location on participation	
• Sustaining strong and effective regional university campuses	
Off-campus study.....	150
• Provision of off-campus study	
• Geographical distribution of off-campus students	
• Effectiveness and suitability of off-campus study	
• Supporting off-campus students through study centres	
University centres .....	155
• University centre models	
• Blended learning	
• Blended learning and the student experience	
• Cost effectiveness of blended learning	
TAFE delivery of higher education.....	162
• Current TAFE delivery of higher education	
• Quality and cost effectiveness of TAFE delivery of higher education	
• Increasing collaboration in regional delivery of higher education	
Conclusion and recommendations.....	165

---

<b>Chapter 7: Financial considerations .....</b>	<b>169</b>
The costs of participation.....	170
• Study costs	
• Living costs	
• Opportunity costs	
Sources of income.....	175
• Government income support	
• Paid employment	
• Scholarships	
• Financial support from family	
Deferring costs .....	194
• Higher Education Loan Program	
• Loans to cover living costs	
• Deferred enrolment	
Conclusion and recommendations .....	200
 <b>Chapter 8: Transition and completion .....</b>	 <b>203</b>
Transition to university.....	203
• Academic transition	
• Living environment	
• Social connectedness	
• The impact of transition experiences on retention and completion rates	
Accommodation.....	209
• Types of accommodation	
• Benefits of on-campus accommodation	
• Access to student accommodation	
Student services and transition support programs .....	214
• University and student organisation services and strategies	
• Targeting student services and programs	
Conclusion and recommendations .....	222
 <b>Chapter 9: Indigenous students.....</b>	 <b>225</b>
Context of participation in higher education by Indigenous students.....	226
• Indigenous enrolments in higher education	
• University retention and completion rates among Indigenous students	
• National policy context	
• The Toorong Marnong Accord	

---

School factors influencing Indigenous participation in higher education .....	232
• School retention, engagement and achievement	
• Wannik–Education Strategy for Koorie Students	
Aspirations .....	236
• Creating a culture of high expectations	
• Role models	
• Career education	
Pathways into higher education .....	240
Community-based delivery .....	245
Financial considerations .....	248
Transition and completion for Indigenous higher education students .....	251
• Culturally inclusive study environments	
• Support services for Indigenous students	
Conclusion and recommendations .....	254
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>257</b>
Appendix A: Key research questions .....	257
Appendix B: Written submissions.....	259
Appendix C: Public hearings .....	267
Appendix D: Interstate investigations.....	281
Appendix E: International investigations .....	287
Appendix F: Postcodes comprising regions and local areas in Committee analysis.....	293
<b>References .....</b>	<b>297</b>



# Executive summary

---

---

## Chapter 1 Introduction

---

Higher education generates important benefits for both individuals and society. To students, university study offers an avenue for personal growth and fulfilment, while imparting knowledge and skills that open the door to life opportunities. At the same time, the higher education system produces skilled graduates who are vital to local and national economies and to civil society. It is therefore important that individuals have opportunities to participate in quality higher education, irrespective of their background or home location. Unfortunately, while overall higher education participation in Victoria is high, there are substantial and long-standing differences in the rate of participation across different areas and social groups. These differences arise from a complex mix of interrelated geographical, socioeconomic and cultural factors, which begin to affect students well before the transition from school to university.

Evidence to the inquiry was collected over the period February 2008 to April 2009. The Committee received 189 written submissions and heard evidence from 307 witnesses. Public hearings were held in nine locations around Victoria. The Committee also undertook investigations in the Australian Capital Territory, Western Australia, Finland, Scotland and Canada.

---

## Chapter 2 Context for the inquiry

---

The Committee commenced this inquiry with data analysis aimed at understanding the nature and extent of geographical differences in the rate in which Victorians participate in higher education. This analysis confirmed the existence of pronounced geographical differences in higher education participation across the state. It also revealed that these differences arise at different points in the higher education process, from making a university application, to receiving an offer and then either enrolling, deferring or rejecting the offer of a university place.

In 2007, the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre received 56,327 higher education applications from Victorian domestic applicants. Almost 34,000 of these were made by school leavers, representing 60.1 per cent of total higher education applications in that year. The remaining applications were made by 'mature age' and 'previous school leaver' applicants, who accounted for 33.3 per cent and 6.5 per cent of total applications, respectively.

In 2007, 77.6 per cent of Victorian school leavers who completed the VCE applied for a place in a higher education course at university. There were marked differences in application rates within and across metropolitan, non-metropolitan and interface areas. University application rates were below the state average in each non-metropolitan region except the Western District, and were also low in the interface areas. The university application rate for the metropolitan area was 81.7 per cent, although this figure masks important differences across metropolitan areas.

In 2008, the majority of university applicants across Victoria received the offer of a university place. School leaver applicants from non-metropolitan areas were slightly less likely to receive an offer than their metropolitan counterparts, although non-metropolitan applicants more frequently received an offer in their first preference course. School leaver university applicants from interface areas were least likely both to receive a university offer, and to receive an offer in their first preference course. Consistent with a national pattern, school leavers were more successful in securing university offers than non-school leaver applicants.

In 2007–08, nearly 14 per cent of school leavers in non-metropolitan areas rejected their university offer. This compares to a rejection rate of 8.6 per cent in metropolitan areas and 9.2 per cent in interface areas. Additionally, one in three school leavers from non-metropolitan areas who received a university offer deferred their studies. In comparison, the deferment rate was 10.1 per cent for metropolitan school leavers and 13.4 per cent for school leavers in interface regions. This disproportionately high deferment rate among non-metropolitan school leavers was a recurring theme throughout the inquiry, and is of concern to the Committee.

Another important aspect of participation in higher education is the rate of successful completion. While there is insufficient data to allow detailed analysis of retention and success rates, the Committee notes that past studies have generally found slightly higher completion rates among metropolitan students. Anecdotal evidence received throughout the inquiry supports these findings.

It is important that the transition to higher education is understood within the wider context of all available post-school pathways. This is because most non-university pathways also make a valuable contribution to individuals and society, and may also form a foundation for participation in higher education later in life. Findings from the 2007 On Track survey of Victorian school leavers showed that in most metropolitan regions with lower transition rates to university, relatively high movement into upper and entry level VET meant a reasonably high overall rate of transition to tertiary education. In contrast, non-metropolitan regions had relatively low levels of transition to upper and entry level VET among school leavers, compounding lower levels of transition to higher education.

The Committee's inquiry took place during a period of considerable reappraisal and change in national higher education policy. In May 2009, the Australian Government announced a reform agenda aimed at transforming the scale, potential and quality of the nation's universities. The Victorian Government announced in April 2009 that it will develop a new Higher Education Plan, which will inform the Victorian Government's contribution to the implementation of national reforms, and provide for the substantial growth in tertiary education provision planned for Victoria for the period to 2025.

The Committee believes that the Higher Education Plan presents a valuable opportunity for raising overall higher education participation rates in Victoria, while simultaneously improving equity in participation. In this regard, the Committee recommends that the Victorian Government set participation targets for under-represented groups, particularly those in rural and regional, interface and low socioeconomic status metropolitan areas. These targets should be supported through Victorian Government policies and programs aimed at lifting school achievement and completion of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), raising aspirations for higher education, enhancing entry prospects, and reducing the practical barriers to participation. The Committee also recommends that the Victorian Government maintain and improve the On Track survey of Victorian school leavers to ensure it continues to inform policy and programs at the local, regional and state level, and as a means of monitoring progress towards higher education participation targets.

---

## Chapter 3

# School achievement and completion

---

Together, academic achievement at school and completion of year 12 form an important foundation for participation in higher education. The Committee found that geographical differences in school achievement and completion are among the most fundamental causes of geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education.

Research has consistently found that low achievement during compulsory schooling is associated with a greater likelihood of early school leaving. Where low achievers complete year 12, they are less likely to undertake the VCE or to achieve highly in the VCE, and less likely to develop university aspirations. Achievement in the VCE has a direct impact on access to higher education, because universities generally select students based on the Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER). As well as being more likely to secure a university offer, students with high achievement in the VCE appear to have stronger university aspirations. They are more likely to apply for and accept a university place.

In Victoria, students have a range of academic and vocational options for completion of year 12 or its equivalent. Completion of any of these qualifications confers benefits and can lead to successful post-school transitions. Significant to the inquiry, however, each has different implications for participation in higher education. VCE and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs have been designed with university pathways in mind, and unsurprisingly, students who complete these qualifications have the highest subsequent participation in higher education. Conversely, senior secondary students who participate in vocational and applied programs are less likely to make the transition to university, even where they combine their vocational studies with completion of the VCE.

The Committee found that overall, Victorian students perform well academically in comparison to students in other jurisdictions. Nevertheless, overall strong performance co-exists with marked differences according to location and socioeconomic status. Students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds have lower levels of average achievement from early childhood through to the final year of secondary school. Students in non-metropolitan areas also have lower average achievement than metropolitan students, although this geographic disparity is less marked than socioeconomic differences.

Young people in Victoria are comparatively likely to complete a year 12 or equivalent qualification. Again however, students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds and non-metropolitan areas are less likely to complete year 12 than their counterparts from metropolitan areas and high socioeconomic status backgrounds. Although Victoria's overall rate of year 12 or equivalent completion has increased over recent years, the Committee found that the VCE completion rate has declined somewhat.

The Committee also found evidence of geographical and socioeconomic differences in the type of year 12 or equivalent qualifications undertaken. Students in non-metropolitan areas and students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds are more likely to participate in vocational programs during years 11 and 12. While existing data does not allow definitive conclusions to be drawn, the Committee is concerned that the recent decrease in Victoria's VCE completion rate may be a result of declining VCE completions in low socioeconomic status and non-metropolitan areas. This has the potential to limit options for university study in areas where participation in higher education is already low. The Committee sees a need for further analyses of data associated with this trend, its causes and implications.

Ultimately, increasing participation in higher education in areas that are currently under-represented will require better outcomes from schooling—a challenging goal. The Committee believes that improved academic achievement and increased year 12 or equivalent completion will require system-wide school improvement, particularly in

non-metropolitan and low socioeconomic status areas. The Victorian Government's Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development outlines a range of strategies for achieving this. Another aspect of work in this area should address persistent teacher workforce shortages in some geographical locations and areas of study.

The Committee believes that the Victorian Government should continue to focus on year 12 or equivalent completion as a priority area. The approach to lifting school completion rates must be multi-faceted, and schools should be provided with integrated support to address the multiple causes of early school leaving. Within this, there is a need for policy and programs that support increased completion of the VCE, particularly among under-represented groups. To achieve this, all students must have access to subject choices that match their interests and aptitudes. Additionally, the Committee believes that there should be greater opportunities for students in rural and regional Victoria and disadvantaged metropolitan schools to access revision and extension activities to help boost their achievement in the VCE.

---

## Chapter 4

### Aspirations towards higher education

---

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

Attempts to raise aspirations towards higher education must be informed by an understanding of the nature of aspirations and how they are formed. The Committee heard that university aspirations arise from an array of attitudes and beliefs about the relevance, value and attainability of higher education. These are influenced by a number of complex and interrelated factors, including the family's socioeconomic and cultural background, and the school and community environments.

The Committee recognises that 'high' aspirations need not be university aspirations. Throughout the inquiry, the Committee heard from individuals, schools and communities who highlighted the benefits of other post-school pathways, with some participants even suggesting that aspirations towards higher education may be too well developed in certain areas of Victoria. While acknowledging the value of the full range of post-school pathways, the Committee has focused on the potential to raise aspirations towards higher education as one means of lifting the participation rates of under-represented groups.

Strategies for raising aspirations were a central topic of discussion throughout the inquiry. The Committee heard that career education can influence aspirations by raising awareness of the range of available opportunities, encouraging students to consider a variety of options and pathways by which they may be able to reach their goals. However, career education is a complex and diverse field and the Committee found that the quality of career education in Victorian schools varies. While the Victorian Government's Managed Individual Pathways program was widely supported, the Committee heard that some students require more information about higher education, and more individual support in exploring and planning their post-school pathways. The Committee believes that the Victorian Government could improve the quality of career education in Victorian schools by: phasing in a requirement that all career teachers have a postgraduate (or equivalent) qualification in career education; providing ongoing professional learning for career educators; consulting with the Career Education Association of Victoria to determine appropriate staff time allocations for



career education roles; and supporting and promoting greater engagement of parents in career education activities.

Activities undertaken by universities that foster aspirations may be grouped into the two broad categories of recruitment and outreach. Recruitment activities, often coordinated or undertaken by marketing or dedicated recruitment staff, are motivated by a university's interest in attracting students. Recruitment activities typically provide information about courses, entry requirements and the university through publications, guest speakers and careers fairs or similar events. Outreach activities differ from recruitment or marketing in that they are typically aimed at populations with lower levels of participation in higher education, and are motivated by a desire to improve access and equity for under-represented groups. Rather than promoting one particular university, outreach programs also have the broader aims of demystifying higher education, promoting awareness of university life, fostering university aspirations, and lifting student achievement. The Committee heard that university outreach programs are likely to be most effective where there are strong university-school partnerships, collaborations across institutional boundaries, and engagement of the broader community.

The Committee believes that the Victorian Government should implement a statewide program aimed at raising aspirations and increasing participation in higher education among under-represented groups. The program should engage students from the early and middle years of secondary school, and include activities aimed at raising student achievement. It should also include a rigorous evaluation and research program to identify those strategies most effective in raising aspirations and participation in higher education. The Committee believes that a significant factor in the success of this program will be the involvement of parents and families in career education and aspiration-raising activities. The Committee recognises, however, that raising aspirations will be both difficult and futile if other barriers identified during the inquiry are not addressed. It therefore believes that initiatives to raise aspirations must be accompanied by interventions and supports that provide people from disadvantaged groups with a genuine opportunity to participate in higher education.

---

## Chapter 5

### Admission into higher education

---

Victorian universities have a range of selection processes and entry pathways. At present, the ENTER remains the dominant selection method for school leavers. The ENTER has the advantages of being simple to administer and a comparatively good predictor of success in university studies. However, there is a need for ENTER-based selection to take account of equity principles. While the Special Entry Access Scheme appears to have improved equity in ENTER-based selection, the Committee believes that there is room for further improvement in this area.

The Committee believes that the Victorian Government should undertake research into the limitations of the ENTER as a selection tool for students from non-metropolitan areas and low socioeconomic status backgrounds. The Committee also encourages universities to continue to complement ENTER-based selection with additional mechanisms (such as aptitude testing and recommendation-based selection) to identify capable students who may otherwise be overlooked. The Committee believes that these mechanisms may be effective as equity measures where they are specifically targeted at students from under-represented areas and groups.

The Committee found that enabling programs provide an important alternative entry pathway into higher education for many students. Enabling programs share the common aim of providing alternative entry into higher education, while building academic and other skills to prepare students for the rigours of university study. Students gain an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the range of courses and services available at the university,

and to develop an understanding of expected academic standards. For those who are unsure of their career and study direction, participation in an enabling program is an opportunity to explore academic options and confirm the decision to undertake university study. The Committee believes that there should be greater access to enabling programs and recommends that the Victorian Government work with the Australian Government to provide incentives for universities to increase access to enabling programs for students from under-represented groups.

Articulation from Vocational Education and Training (VET) into higher education is another important alternative pathway that attracted a great deal of comment during the inquiry. VET studies can provide access to university for students who initially failed to gain entry, while prompting others to consider higher education for the first time. Like enabling programs, participation in VET provides opportunities to build skills and confidence and, consequently, students who move from VET into higher education tend to be successful in their university studies.

The Committee found that at some Victorian universities admission to higher education courses on the basis of VET studies is substantial. These universities, working in partnership with TAFE institutes, have expended considerable effort aimed at increasing and enhancing articulation from VET to higher education. Despite this, progress has been uneven across universities, and the Committee sees a need for urgent and substantial improvement, particularly with regard to credit transfer arrangements.

Differences in curriculum and assessment between the VET and higher education sectors increase the difficulty of negotiating articulation and credit transfer arrangements. Sectoral differences in accreditation, governance and funding add another layer of complexity. The Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority has worked to address some of these barriers through the development of the Credit Matrix, and the Committee believes that this work should be prioritised as a matter of urgency. The Committee believes that the Victorian Government can further support increased articulation from VET to higher education by working through the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment to set deadlines and targets to address existing impediments, and by supporting TAFE institutes to negotiate and promote articulation arrangements. To ensure that these changes translate into real benefits for students, the Committee believes that the Australian Government should monitor and reward universities' performance in relation to credit transfer. This will require improved data collection about articulation from VET to higher education, including characteristics of articulating students, particular pathways taken, credit granted and the academic outcomes of these students.

The Committee notes that increased articulation from VET to higher education will not necessarily increase equity in participation in higher education. For this to be achieved, students from under-represented groups must undertake upper level TAFE qualifications and take advantage of opportunities to articulate into higher education. Therefore, the Committee believes that as part of its skills reform agenda, the Victorian Government should put in place strategies to increase participation in upper level VET qualifications among students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds.

---

## **Chapter 6**

### **Provision and accessibility**

---

One of the most obvious differences between metropolitan, outer urban and non-metropolitan areas in terms of higher education is in the level of local provision. Traditional models of on-campus delivery and off-campus distance education are today complemented by other approaches that incorporate elements of both on-campus and off-campus study, and which often rely on collaboration between communities, universities and other education and training providers. Therefore, an important issue addressed during

the inquiry was the way in which these different models of local delivery influence participation rates.

The traditional university experience of on-campus study remains the most common mode of participation in higher education. In Victoria, as in other Australian jurisdictions, higher education campuses are concentrated in metropolitan areas. However, the Committee's investigations made it clear that universities and campuses in rural, regional and interface areas are highly valued by their host communities. Despite the substantial challenges these institutions face, they are seen as playing a vital role in regional development, and in promoting participation in higher education by providing local study opportunities. Participants in the inquiry emphasised the importance not only of a local university presence, but of the quality and range of courses available.

The higher cost of higher education provision in regional areas is well documented and was widely acknowledged by inquiry participants. The Committee believes that funding models should be revised to ensure there are sufficient incentives for universities to deliver a diversity of high quality higher education courses into regional areas, closely linked to labour market needs. Revised funding models should take into account the need for increased collaboration in the delivery of such courses, as well as the need to raise aspirations and demand around courses relevant to local economic growth and employment opportunities.

While campuses in regional and interface areas should be maintained and strengthened, alternative models of delivery are also required. The Committee heard that off-campus study can fill an important need for some students, although it was generally not considered as an effective mode of study for school leavers. Delivery of higher education through 'university centres' and TAFE institutes was often viewed as more useful in meeting the needs of rural and regional communities. University centres differ in terms of their size, functions, staffing arrangements and location. They are smaller in size and more limited in scope than most university campuses, offering few courses, typically in a blended learning mode which combines online and face-to-face teaching and learning. Some centres also support higher degree research students, or have other links with research activities. University centres may be stand alone facilities or co-located with other organisations such as TAFE institutes. The Committee welcomes the expansion of higher education delivery through university centres and TAFE institutes, and believes these models should be extended through greater collaboration between education sectors, in consultation with local communities.

The use of blended learning attracted significant comment throughout the inquiry. While many inquiry participants acknowledged the potential benefits of blended learning, there was a widespread perception that blended learning can be an inferior pedagogy that is disengaging, unsupportive and unappealing to many prospective students. Participants emphasised the importance of retaining substantial face-to-face teaching, group interaction and support if blended learning is to be an attractive and high quality option for regional students. The Committee also heard that for blended learning to be effective, academic staff must be trained in how to design and deliver units in this mode, and be supported by appropriate technological capabilities. The Committee supports these views and believes that the Victorian Government should advocate through the Ministerial Council of Tertiary Education and Employment for a major review by the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency into the provision of blended learning, to benchmark best practice and set mandatory quality guidelines for future delivery in this mode. Further, the Committee believes that higher education accreditation and quality assurance processes must include an assessment of each specific mode and site of delivery to ensure that all students, regardless of location or study mode, are receiving a quality education.

## Chapter 7

### Financial considerations

---

A major task for the Committee was to understand how financial considerations impact on participation in higher education. While the long-term financial rewards are considerable, the costs of participation in higher education are also high. The Committee considered three types of costs associated with participation in higher education: the direct costs of study; the costs of living as a student; and the opportunity cost of foregone income while studying. The Committee found that the high cost of undertaking university study can affect access to university for potential students, as well as the persistence of students once they enrol in a higher education course.

While some participants discussed the impact of the cost of study materials and tuition fees, difficulty meeting the cost of living was the strongest theme to emerge during the inquiry. It is not surprising that people from disadvantaged socioeconomic circumstances and students who live away from home to study are most affected by the costs of participating in higher education. The Committee heard that the cost of living away from home to study is approximately \$15,000 to \$20,000 per year, although some participants suggested that it can cost even more.

Accommodation in on-campus colleges or residences is often the preferred option for students who relocate to study. As well as a convenient location, on-campus accommodation offers a bridge between home and independent living. However, on-campus accommodation is usually the most expensive choice, and often out of reach for many of the students who would benefit most from the additional support available through on-campus residential services. Shared rental accommodation is generally a less costly option, but was still considered prohibitively expensive by many inquiry participants. Participants also felt that transport costs present an additional financial barrier, particularly for those in outer urban, regional and rural areas.

The Committee received a great deal of evidence about the sources of income available to help meet the costs of participating in higher education. These include government income support, scholarships, wages from paid employment, and support from family. The Committee heard that a substantial proportion of students struggle to accumulate sufficient income to meet the costs of undertaking their university course.

Government income support payments (including Youth Allowance, Austudy and ABSTUDY) are a major source of income for many higher education students. Youth Allowance was of most relevance to participants in the inquiry, and the Committee found that many in the community are greatly concerned about eligibility criteria for Youth Allowance. While some participants believed that Youth Allowance is too easily available to students from relatively wealthy families, many more argued that Youth Allowance is not available to those in most need.

The Australian Government announced in May 2009 that it would phase in a lowered age for independent status for government income support (from 25 years to 22 years by 2012), and increase the parental income test threshold for access to the maximum rate of Youth Allowance or ABSTUDY to align with the Family Tax Benefit A income test from 2012. Once legislated, these changes will see increased levels of assistance payable to families most in need. While welcoming these changes, the Committee does not believe they will significantly improve access to higher education for those who must live away from home to study.

Throughout the inquiry, the Committee heard that for many rural and regional students, access to higher education is dependent on their ability to access the Youth Allowance through existing workforce participation criteria for independence. Although there are currently three workforce participation routes to independence, the Australian Government

has announced that it is tightening the criteria. From 2010 only those young people who have worked for a minimum of 30 hours per week for 18 months will be eligible for Youth Allowance under the criteria for independence. The Committee believes that this change will have a disastrous effect on young people in rural and regional areas. The Committee firmly believes that all young people who are required to relocate to undertake university studies should be eligible to receive government income support, and has recommended that the Victorian Government advocate for this change to eligibility criteria for Youth Allowance.

For those in receipt of government income support, the adequacy of payments was an issue raised throughout the inquiry. There was widespread agreement that Youth Allowance payments have not kept pace with rising expenses, and are too low to meet the costs of living, particularly in capital cities. The Committee heard that inadequate income can negatively affect the wellbeing and academic success of students. The Committee agrees that Youth Allowance payments are insufficient and should be increased to reflect the costs of living.

The Committee received evidence that scholarships are an important source of income for many higher education students. The Australian Government provides scholarships through its Commonwealth Scholarships program, while additional scholarships are available through a wide range of organisations, including universities, state and local governments, community organisations and the private sector. Students who have been awarded a scholarship are able to work fewer hours in paid employment, and therefore experience reduced financial and emotional stress. However, the Committee heard that it can be difficult for young people to identify relevant scholarship programs and that application processes are often complex and time consuming. In addition, the Committee heard there are insufficient scholarships available to meet current needs, and the value of scholarships is often not sufficient to facilitate participation in higher education among disadvantaged groups. The Committee was particularly concerned to note that under announced changes to the Commonwealth Scholarships program, the amount available under the new Relocation Scholarship, available from 2010, will be substantially less than the amount available under the existing Accommodation Scholarship, which it replaces.

The Committee believes that further research is needed into the role and effectiveness of scholarships in widening access to higher education for under-represented groups. This research should seek to determine the value of scholarships likely to make a difference in access to higher education for under-represented groups. The Committee also believes that an early intervention approach to scholarships should be piloted. Under this approach, disadvantaged senior secondary students would be provided with a Learning Account which would be made available upon successful completion of secondary school and enrolment in higher education. Students would also be supported to consider higher education as an achievable goal through an integrated package of interventions including a structured career education program, peer mentoring and a transition support program.

The Committee heard that given the inadequacies of government income support, paid employment is an increasingly important source of income for Australian higher education students. Australian students have the highest workforce participation rates of any comparable country. However, the Committee heard that finding and maintaining employment can be difficult for many students, particularly those who have to relocate in order to undertake their studies. Many inquiry participants also suggested that part-time work, if excessive, negatively affects student wellbeing, engagement in university life, and academic achievement, thereby increasing the risk that a student will discontinue their studies.

The Committee found that a common strategy for dealing with the costs of undertaking higher education is to defer the costs. The Higher Education Loan Program offers students the opportunity to delay the payment of tuition fees until their income is above the minimum threshold for compulsory repayment. Some participants argued that a similar scheme should be established to allow students to take out an income contingent loan to cover living

costs while studying. While agreeing that the Higher Education Loan Program provides essential support to students and should be retained, the Committee believes that further analysis and research is needed before income contingent loans to meet living costs are considered for implementation in Australia.

The Committee was concerned to find that many young Victorians who wish to commence a university course defer their studies for financial reasons. There was widespread concern that a significant proportion of students who defer do not subsequently return to study. High deferment in rural and regional Victoria is of major concern to the Committee, given that fewer young people in rural and regional areas complete secondary school, apply to university and accept university offers. While recognising the benefits that a gap year can provide, the Committee does not believe that deferring university studies should be a necessary financial decision. The Committee therefore believes that a fair and accessible system of government income support is essential, combined with additional interventions aimed at reducing the impact of financial barriers on participation in higher education.

---

## Chapter 8

### Transition and completion

---

After the long journey to enrolment, students must complete their studies if they are to enjoy the full benefits of participating in higher education. The Committee heard that the transition to higher education is a period of change during which first-time students need to adapt to the academic, cultural and social environment of university. Participants suggested that the magnitude of the adjustment can be greater for students from rural and remote areas, and for those from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. Difficulties in making this transition may increase the risk that the student will drop out of university.

The importance of accommodation was a particularly strong theme in evidence about supporting students' success at university. In Victoria, higher education students have a range of accommodation options, one of which is on-campus student accommodation. Due to the additional support and social opportunities available, many participants argued that on-campus accommodation is a useful stepping stone to independence, and is ideal for most rural and regional students. There was significant concern among inquiry participants, however, that students from rural areas often miss out on a place in on-campus accommodation, or are unable to access it for financial reasons. The Committee believes that students from rural and regional areas should be given priority in selection processes for on-campus accommodation. Participants also called for increased provision of affordable, supported and supervised accommodation for young students. The Committee agrees that there is a need for the Victorian Government to work with other stakeholders to evaluate the current availability and potential expansion of affordable student accommodation.

Universities provide a range of services aimed at enhancing the first year experience and supporting student transitions, as well as enhancing student wellbeing and success more generally. The Committee considered the importance of these services and programs if targets are to be met for increased and more equitable participation in higher education. Several participants argued for increased funding for universities that educate larger numbers of students who are likely to require greater support to successfully complete their higher education studies. The Committee supports this view and welcomes Australian Government moves to provide a funding loading to help universities provide intensive support to disadvantaged students, with the goal of improving retention and completion rates for these groups.

Student organisations have also traditionally had a strong role in supporting the social transition to university through clubs and societies, orientation week activities and other social events. The Committee heard that the capacity of student organisations to provide

essential support services may have been diminished in recent years as a result of the abolition of compulsory upfront student fees in 2005. The Committee therefore welcomes changes, announced in late 2008, that will allow universities to levy a fee for student services.

While a range of services and programs are already in place, the Committee found that there is a need to ensure that tailored services are targeted at those students with the greatest need. In particular, participants argued for increased targeted support for students from rural and remote areas, such as mentoring programs and pre-university transition initiatives. The Committee also considered how programs that engage parents in transition activities may help students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. The Committee believes that the Victorian Government should work with universities and other stakeholders to strengthen and better target programs and services for students transitioning to higher education. The Committee also sees a role for the Victorian Government to develop a country-city twinning program that provides students at small rural and remote schools with opportunities to visit metropolitan environments and meet peers from elsewhere.

---

## Chapter 9

### Indigenous students

---

Indigenous Australians are the most under-represented group in higher education. The experience of Indigenous students was an important focus for the inquiry, in the context of the Victorian Government's overarching Indigenous policy framework, *Improving the Lives of Indigenous Victorians* and the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) six targets for closing the gaps in outcomes for Indigenous people under the National Indigenous Reform Agreement. Of most relevance to the inquiry, these include increasing school retention, achievement and year 12 attainment, and improving participation in post-secondary education.

The number of Indigenous people enrolled in higher education Australia-wide is increasing. There has also been a shift in enrolments, with a reduced proportion of Indigenous students enrolling in sub-degree programs and an increased proportion enrolling in bachelor and postgraduate programs. Indigenous students are enrolled predominantly in three key disciplines: Society and Culture (33.7%), Education (21.2%) and Health (16.5%).

Indigenous females are more likely to participate in higher education than Indigenous males, and Indigenous students have a different age profile compared to other students. In 2006, the average age of a commencing Indigenous undergraduate student in Australia was 29 years, compared to 22 years for other students. Indigenous students have a subject pass rate 23 per cent below their non-Indigenous peers. They also have lower apparent retention and completion rates than other students. However, Indigenous graduates have higher take-up rates into full-time employment than non-Indigenous graduates, and the mean starting salary for Indigenous graduates is higher.

The Committee is aware that the Australian Government, through a range of initiatives that provide both academic support and financial assistance, aims to increase participation in higher education by Indigenous Australians. The Committee is also pleased to note recent moves in the Victorian higher education sector to improve participation rates for Indigenous students through the Toorong Marnong Accord, which was signed in December 2008 by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association and the Victorian Vice-Chancellors' Committee.

The Committee heard that as with other students, a number of factors affect the ability of Indigenous students to participate in higher education long before the threshold of enrolment has been reached. Lower school participation and achievement was identified as a significant barrier for Indigenous students. The highest level of education achieved for many Indigenous Victorians is year 9 or below, and less than a quarter of Indigenous Victorians have completed year 12. While Indigenous students in Victoria generally perform

better than those in other states, they remain substantially behind other students and cohorts with similar socioeconomic profiles. Average performance remains poor against key measures such as participation, attendance, literacy, numeracy, retention and completion. In addition, the over-representation of Indigenous students undertaking vocational rather than academic studies in years 11 and 12 was identified as an issue of potential concern.

To improve education outcomes for Indigenous students, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in close partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, developed a new education strategy in 2008, known as Wannik. The Committee sees Wannik as a potential means of improving the level of engagement and achievement among Indigenous school students, thereby providing the basis for future participation in higher education. The Committee believes that improved access to computer and multimedia resources, both within and after school hours, will be critical in lifting school achievement for Indigenous students.

The Committee heard that Indigenous students face a range of barriers to the formation of aspirations towards higher education, including those associated with socioeconomic status and perceptions of relevance, affordability and achievability. The Committee believes that in developing a statewide program to raise aspirations, the Victorian Government should include strategies aimed at addressing the specific needs of Indigenous students. The Committee believes that strategies aimed at raising aspirations for higher education within Indigenous communities should focus on three key areas: creating a culture of high expectations; developing and promoting role models and mentoring programs; and improving the quality of career education, taking account of the specific cultural needs of Indigenous students. Aspiration-raising activities should start during the middle years of schooling, and should also aim to engage the parents and families of Indigenous students.

The Committee found that Indigenous students require a range of entry pathways into higher education. Many universities offer special entry programs to enable Indigenous students to access higher education without the need for an ENTER. The Committee found that foundation courses that build skills and confidence can be particularly beneficial for Indigenous students. Evidence to the inquiry also suggests that pathways from VET to higher education, as well as programs to facilitate transition from the workforce, may be effective in improving higher education opportunities for Indigenous people. The Committee believes that Indigenous TAFE students seeking to progress to higher education should be provided with an individualised pathways plan outlining agreed articulation and credit transfer arrangements.

The Committee recognises that Indigenous people have strong connections and commitments within their families and communities, which are essential to their sense of identity. For many Indigenous people, the need to leave their family and community networks to participate in higher education is a major concern. The Committee therefore believes it is especially important for Indigenous people to have opportunities to participate in higher education through a blended learning model that allows them to remain in their local community while studying. The Committee recognises that the success of these models will depend on high levels of engagement with, and responsiveness to, the needs of individual Indigenous communities.

The Committee is aware that financial disadvantage is a significant factor in the lower participation rates of Indigenous Australians in higher education. It heard that the provision of financial support has proven to be a crucial factor both in access to higher education for Indigenous students, and in their success in their chosen course of study. In general, the Committee welcomes changes to ABSTUDY recently announced by the Australian Government. However, as with Youth Allowance, the Committee is concerned that these changes may not go far enough to address the needs identified during the inquiry. The Committee therefore believes that government income support programs should be closely monitored and reviewed to ensure they provide adequate support for Indigenous students to participate successfully in higher education. The Committee also supports the continued



expansion and promotion of targeted scholarship schemes by federal, state and local governments, and the higher education sector.

The Committee sees lower retention and completion rates among Indigenous higher education students as a key concern. The Committee believes that Indigenous students can, and should, benefit from transition support services available to non-Indigenous students. Additionally, the Committee believes that higher education completion rates for Indigenous students can be improved through the continued development of culturally inclusive study environments, and the implementation of additional support services aimed at addressing the specific needs of Indigenous students.



# Recommendations

---

## Chapter 2 Context for the inquiry

---

Pages 36–37

- 2.1 That the Victorian Government work with universities and the Australian Government to support the national participation targets of:
  - 40 per cent attainment of a qualification at bachelor level or above among Australians aged 25–34 by 2025; and
  - 20 per cent of commencing undergraduate enrolments from low socioeconomic status backgrounds by 2020.
- 2.2 That, as part of its new Higher Education Plan, the Victorian Government set targets for participation in higher education among under-represented groups, particularly those in rural and regional, interface and low socioeconomic status metropolitan areas.
- 2.3 That the Victorian Government maintain and continually improve the annual On Track survey of Victorian school leavers and the On Track Longitudinal Study, in order to inform education policy and programs at the local, regional and state levels.

## Chapter 3

### School achievement and completion

---

Page 67

- 3.1 That the Victorian Government continue to focus on lifting year 12 or equivalent completion rates by:
- implementing system-wide school improvement strategies, with particular attention to schools in low socioeconomic and non-metropolitan areas; and
  - providing schools with integrated support that enables them to tackle the full range of factors that contribute to early school leaving.
- 3.2 That the Victorian Government expand the collection and publication of annual data on year 12 completion rates to include analyses of data for different qualifications (VCE, VCAL and VET certificate) between different geographical areas and socioeconomic groups.
- 3.3 That the Victorian Government analyse and report on recent trends in VCE completion rates, including:
- VCE completion rates for Victoria as a whole and for different geographical areas and socioeconomic groups;
  - causes and implications of any changes in VCE completion rates; and
  - strategies to increase VCE completion rates, particularly in low socioeconomic and non-metropolitan areas.
- 3.4 That the Victorian Government support increased completion and higher achievement in the VCE, particularly among under-represented groups, by:
- assisting smaller schools to expand VCE subject choices;
  - developing a scholarship program for VCE students to participate in revision and extension activities;
  - expanding accelerated learning programs;
  - supporting schools to offer access to university-run tertiary extension studies that can contribute to ENTERs; and
  - providing online written and interactive extension and revision materials.

---

## Chapter 4

### Aspirations towards higher education

---

Pages 99–100

- 4.1 That the Victorian Government implement a statewide program aimed at raising aspirations towards higher education for students from under-represented groups. The program should:
- engage students from the early and middle years of secondary school;
  - raise awareness among students and their families of higher education as a worthwhile and viable post-school pathway;
  - integrate and resource targeted programs to assist students to improve academic achievement to meet their aspirations;
  - integrate aspiration-raising activities with other strategies to address the barriers to higher education participation for under-represented groups; and
  - include a rigorous program of evaluation and research.
- 4.2 That the Victorian Government continue to fund the Managed Individual Pathways program, and improve the quality of career education in Victorian schools by:
- phasing in a requirement for all career educators to have a relevant graduate diploma or equivalent qualification;
  - providing additional scholarships for career educators to attain a relevant graduate diploma;
  - providing ongoing professional learning for all Victorian career educators; and
  - consulting with the Career Education Association of Victoria to determine appropriate staff time allocations for career education roles, with the aim of improving levels of individualised student support.
- 4.3 That the Victorian Government, in partnership with local governments, universities and other stakeholders, consider further opportunities for co-location of school and university facilities in areas where participation in higher education is low.
- 4.4 That the Victorian Government develop systemic programs at a school and regional level aimed at engaging parents in career education and aspiration-raising activities, and regularly monitor and review the outcomes of these programs.

## Chapter 5

### Admission into higher education

---

Pages 129–130

- 5.1 That the Victorian Government work with the Australian Government to provide incentives for universities to increase access to enabling programs for students from under-represented groups.
- 5.2 That the Victorian Government undertake research on the limitations of the ENTER as a selection tool for students from non-metropolitan and low socioeconomic status areas. The research should:
- clarify the relationships between location, population density and ENTER, identifying any systemic measurement bias;
  - investigate the effects, if any, of VCE subject availability and choice on ENTER attainment; and
  - identify any modifications in the calculation or use of the ENTER required to make it more equitable.
- 5.3 That the Victorian Government require increased articulation and credit transfer from VET to higher education by:
- prioritising development of the Credit Matrix through the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority as a matter of urgency;
  - setting deadlines and targets to address differences in accreditation, governance and funding between the VET and higher education sectors, through the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment;
  - advocating to the Australian Government that it monitor and reward universities' performance in relation to credit transfer; and
  - funding TAFE institutes to employ pathways coordinators responsible for negotiating and promoting articulation and credit transfer arrangements.
- 5.4 That the Victorian Government develop and implement measures aimed at increasing participation in upper level VET qualifications specifically among students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds.

- 5.5 That the Victorian Government work with the Australian Government to improve and align data collection about articulation from VET to higher education in order to improve knowledge about transitions, including:
- numbers of articulating students;
  - basis of admission for articulating students;
  - geographic, economic, social and cultural characteristics of articulating students;
  - particular pathways taken;
  - credit granted; and
  - academic outcomes of articulating students.

---

## Chapter 6

### Provision and accessibility

---

Page 166–167

- 6.1 That the Victorian Government advocate for Australian Government funding for regional higher education provision that:
- is based on the actual cost of provision in different rural and regional locations;
  - is directed in large part at maintaining and strengthening existing regional campuses;
  - supports expansion of collaborative regional delivery arrangements between universities for high quality higher education courses and increased research capacity;
  - utilises existing facilities and resources (including TAFE institutes) in rural and regional areas, where appropriate;
  - provides incentives for universities to offer high value courses that balance student demand and workforce need; and
  - is sufficient to ensure a high quality face-to-face component in undergraduate courses delivered through blended learning.

- 6.2 That the Victorian Government advocate to the Australian Government that it ensure that accreditation and quality assurance of higher education courses address each mode and site of delivery.
- 6.3 That the Victorian Government advocate through the new Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment for a major review by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency of the provision of blended learning by the higher education sector, to benchmark best practice and set mandatory quality guidelines for future delivery in this mode.
- 6.4 That Skills Victoria work with regional universities and campuses to provide annual detailed advice on local skill shortages in regional Victoria.
- 6.5 That as part of the Victorian Government's ongoing commitment to improving public transport, it review public transport services to education and training institutions in non-metropolitan areas. This review should include consideration of public transport linkages within and between non-metropolitan localities.
- 6.6 That the Victorian Government support TAFE institutes to collaborate and partner with universities in the delivery of higher education courses in regional Victoria.

---

## Chapter 7

### Financial considerations

---

Page 201

- 7.1 That the Victorian Government advocate to the Australian Government for an increase to student income support payments, taking into account costs of living.
- 7.2 That the Victorian Government advocate to the Australian Government that young people who are required to relocate to undertake tertiary studies be eligible to receive Youth Allowance.
- 7.3 That the Victorian Government, in collaboration with universities, pilot an early intervention scholarship program for students from under-represented groups and areas.
- 7.4 That the Victorian Government coordinate an industry placement program to assist higher education students from regional areas and low socioeconomic status backgrounds.



---

## Chapter 8

### Transition and completion

---

Page 223

- 8.1 That the Victorian Government work with higher education providers, other levels of government, and developers to evaluate the current availability and potential further development of affordable supported student accommodation in Melbourne for rural and regional students.
- 8.2 That the Victorian Government work with universities and other stakeholders to strengthen support to students making the transition to university, by:
- assisting small rural and remote schools to provide students with opportunities to visit metropolitan environments and meet peers from other areas as part of a country-city twinning program;
  - examining the causes of lower course completion rates among higher education students from remote areas, and developing options for additional support; and
  - facilitating the development of further targeted support programs reflecting best practice, including mentoring programs, pre-university transition initiatives and activities that involve parents in transition support.

---

## Chapter 9

### Indigenous students

---

Pages 255–256

9.1 That as part of a statewide initiative to raise aspirations towards higher education (recommendation 4.1), the Victorian Government:

- create a culture of high expectations for Indigenous students at all levels of education;
- maintain the scholarship program for high achieving Indigenous school students;
- through the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs, develop and resource a program for Indigenous role model speakers to visit Victorian Indigenous school children, particularly those in the middle years, with the aim of lifting year 12 or equivalent completion;
- ensure that Indigenous students receive individualised and culturally appropriate career education; and
- engage parents and families in these initiatives.

9.2 That the Victorian Government work with universities and Indigenous communities to improve participation in higher education by Indigenous Victorians by:

- supporting targeted, high quality blended learning and community-based models of delivery;
- developing culturally inclusive curriculum and study environments;
- providing targeted scholarship schemes;
- advocating to the Australian Government for increased income support; and
- maintaining mentoring, academic and other support programs for Indigenous higher education students.

9.3 That the Victorian Government, in consultation with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association and the Victorian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, support the development of a career guidance pathway program for Indigenous TAFE students. The program should involve individualised pathway plans outlining agreed articulation and credit transfer arrangements for Indigenous students seeking to progress from TAFE to higher education.

- 9.4 That the Victorian Government implement a program to ensure that all Indigenous school children have access to computers both during and after school hours and that the program be regularly monitored and reviewed.



# List of figures and tables

---

## Figures

---

Figure 2.1	Map showing non-metropolitan regions and local areas used in Committee analysis .....	22
Figure 2.2	Map showing metropolitan regions and local areas used in Committee analysis .....	22
Figure 2.3	School leavers making university applications, by preference level and region (%) (2007–08).....	24
Figure 2.4	Non-metropolitan school leaver applicants receiving university offers, by region (%) (2007–08).....	26
Figure 2.5	Metropolitan and interface school leaver applicants receiving university offers, by region (%) (2007–08).....	26
Figure 2.6	School leaver offer recipients enrolling in, deferring and rejecting university places, by home location (%) (2005–06 to 2007–08) .....	29
Figure 2.7	Non-metropolitan school leaver offer recipients enrolling in, deferring and rejecting university places, by region (%) (2007–08).....	30
Figure 2.8	Destinations of year 12 or equivalent completers, by ABS labour force region (%) (2008).....	33
Figure 3.1	Socioeconomic status of year 12 or equivalent completers, by quartiles of GAT score (%) (2007) .....	52
Figure 3.2	Victorian 19-year-olds with year 12 or equivalent, by home location (%) (1999 to 2006) .....	55
Figure 5.1	Units in selected enabling programs.....	115
Figure 6.1	Distribution of university campuses in Victoria, showing campus size (2009).....	133

## Tables

---

Table 2.1	Victorian domestic higher education applicants, by applicant type and home location (No.) (2007–08).....	23
Table 2.2	School leaver applicants receiving university offers, by home location (%) (2005–06 to 2007–08).....	25
Table 2.3	Non-school leaver applicants receiving university offers, by applicant type and home location (%) (2007–08).....	27
Table 2.4	Victorian year 12 completer deferments, by home location (%) (2004 to 2008).....	30
Table 2.5	Destinations of year 12 or equivalent completers (%) (2008).....	32

Table 2.6	Success and retention ratios for regional, remote and low SES students at Victorian universities (2002 to 2006) .....	34
Table 3.1	Destinations of year 12 or equivalent completers, by senior certificate/study strand (2008) .....	47
Table 3.2	VCE completion rate for 19-year-olds (1998 to 2008) .....	54
Table 3.3	Year 10 to 12 apparent retention rate at Victorian government schools, by DEECD region (%) (1999 to 2008) .....	56
Table 5.1	School leaver ENTER distribution, by home location (%) (2007–08) .....	106
Table 5.2	SEAS applications received by the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (2006–07 and 2007–08) .....	108
Table 5.3	SEAS applications and outcomes at Monash University (2007 to 2009) ..	109
Table 5.4	Commencing undergraduate higher education students admitted to Victorian institutions on the basis of a TAFE award (2006) .....	119
Table 6.1	School leaver university enrolments at metropolitan and regional campuses, by home location (%) (2007–08) .....	140
Table 6.2	Victorian non-school leaver university enrolments at metropolitan and regional campuses, by home location (%) (2007–08) .....	141
Table 7.1	Maximum student contribution to tuition fees in a Commonwealth supported place (2009) .....	170
Table 7.2	Estimated costs for a Victorian journalism student commencing study in 2009, by living situation .....	171
Table 7.3	Estimated cost of reducing the age of independence .....	176
Table 7.4	Maximum fortnightly Youth Allowance payments for single recipients with no dependents, by living situation (2009) .....	179
Table 8.1	Student Progress Units ratios for Monash University domestic students, by living situation (2001 to 2006) .....	211
Table 9.1	Indigenous enrolments in Australian higher education, by award level (1997 to 2007) .....	228

# Acronyms and abbreviations

---

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ABSTUDY	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Study Assistance Scheme
ACE	Adult and Community Education
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
AIM	Achievement Improvement Monitor
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ASG	Australian Scholarships Group
AVID	Advancement Via Individual Determination
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CPI	Consumer Price Index
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
ENTER	Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank
FAST	Foundation for Academic Studies
GAT	General Achievement Test
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOALS	Greater Opportunity of Access and Learning with Schools
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
HEESP	Higher Education Equity Support Program
HELP	Higher Education Loan Program
IB	International Baccalaureate
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
INTRAIN	Indigenous Training and Recruitment Initiative
IT	Information Technology
LGA	Local Government Area
LIFT OFF	Learning in Fife and Tayside: Opportunities for the Future
LLEN	Local Learning and Employment Network
LOTE	Language(s) other than English
LSAY	Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth

MIPs	Managed Individual Pathways
MRS	Monash Residential Services
NAIDOC	National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program–Literacy and Numeracy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PACTS	Parents as Career Transition Support
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SEAS	Special Entry Access Scheme
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas
SES	Socioeconomic status
SNAP	Schools Network Access Program
SPU	Student Progress Unit
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TER	Tertiary Entrance Rank
UAI	Universities Admission Index
VCAA	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VTAC	Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre



# Introduction

---

Having well educated, visionary, well-travelled people in the local population lifts the whole community. They bring hope. They are an inspiration to others and their achievements encourage people to look beyond their own borders, consider what their own potential might be and what they could achieve themselves. Such positivity can only benefit the local community.<sup>1</sup>

---

Higher education contributes to the wellbeing of both the individual and society. For students, university study presents the opportunity for personal growth and fulfilment, while offering knowledge and skills for the future. At the same time, the higher education system produces skilled graduates who are vital to local and national economies and to civil society.

It is important that individuals have opportunities to participate in quality higher education, regardless of location or background. While overall higher education participation in Victoria is high, there are substantial and long-standing differences in the rate of participation across different areas and social groups. These differences arise from a complex mix of interrelated geographical, socioeconomic and cultural factors.

The Committee believes that a number of steps can be taken to increase opportunities for more people to consider higher education, and to participate successfully. Achieving this will require cooperation between education providers, communities and all levels of government.

Through the course of its investigations, the Committee heard from stakeholders across Victoria interested in increasing higher education participation, many of whom have already begun to take action towards this goal. The Committee believes that the enthusiasm of stakeholders and the initiatives and approaches that are already in place provide a strong foundation for expanded and renewed efforts to tackle inequities in higher education participation.

---

## Functions of the Committee

---

The Education and Training Committee comprises seven members of Parliament, with five drawn from the Legislative Assembly and two from the Legislative Council. Mr Geoff Howard MP chairs the Committee.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ms V. Love, Parent, Inverloch, Written Submission, May 2008, 4.

## ***Inquiry into Geographical Differences in Participation in Higher Education in Victoria***

---

The Education and Training Committee is constituted under the *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003*. The Committee's specific function under the Act is to:

Inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on any proposal, matter or thing concerned with education or training if the Committee is required or permitted to do so by or under the Act.

---

### **Terms of reference**

---

On Wednesday 18 July 2007, the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Victoria referred to the Education and Training Committee, an inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education.

The Committee subsequently agreed that it would examine the following key issues associated with the terms of reference:

- a) variations in the number and type of university applications, offers, acceptances and completions in different metropolitan, rural and regional areas;
- b) influences of school retention rates, including enrolments and completions for VCE, VCAL and VET in schools on participation in higher education;
- c) influences of participation in other post-school pathways, including TAFE enrolments and take-up of apprenticeships or other employment opportunities, on participation in higher education;
- d) potential geographic, economic, social, cultural and other influences on university applications, offers, acceptances and completions across Victorian communities;
- e) advantages and disadvantages of participation and non-participation in higher education for school leavers and their families and communities in different metropolitan, rural and regional areas;
- f) potential effects of geographical differences in participation in higher education on skills shortages and the Victorian economy; and
- g) strategies to address any barriers contributing to geographic differences in participation in higher education.

The Committee was due to table a report in Parliament by 30 June 2009.

---

### **Inquiry methodology**

---

#### **Call for submissions**

The terms of reference were initially advertised in *The Age* and *Herald Sun* on Saturday 2 February 2008, and the *Education Age* and *Herald Sun Learn* supplements on Monday 4 February 2008 and Tuesday 5 February 2008, respectively. Advertisements were also placed in *The Weekly Times* and 'Mighty V' Network newspapers in regional Victoria during February 2008 and in the Leader and Fairfax newsprint titles in June 2008. The terms of reference were also advertised in local newspapers in regional and rural Victoria throughout the inquiry, to coincide with the Committee's public hearings.

The Committee also advertised the inquiry to university, TAFE and secondary school students. Advertisements calling for submissions were placed in *Utimes* on Tuesday 18 March 2008 and in university and TAFE institute student publications from March through to August 2008. Prospective students were targeted through advertisements placed in *S Press* September 2008 edition and the *VTAC Guide 2009*.

In addition, in early 2008, the Committee wrote to approximately 730 organisations and individuals, inviting written submissions. This included universities, TAFE institutions, peak bodies in the tertiary education sector, industry bodies, relevant community organisations and local, state and federal governments. A further request for submissions specifically addressed principals, teachers and student leaders in Victorian secondary schools.

Key Research Questions for the inquiry were developed, based on the terms of reference, and provided to some inquiry participants, together with the terms of reference. The Key Research Questions for the inquiry are at Appendix A.

An online submission facility primarily intended for individuals who wished to make short submissions was made available. Fifty-four submissions were received by this means.

The Committee received 189 submissions (refer Appendix B), reflecting the high level of interest in the inquiry. Submissions came from a broad cross-section of the community, including young people, parents, schools, tertiary education providers, local government, peak bodies, community organisations, industry and interested individuals. Submissions were received from across metropolitan and regional Victoria, as well as from interstate and national bodies.

### Literature review

The Committee found extensive international and Australian literature documenting geographical and other variations in higher education participation, and examining the causes and impacts of these differences. Within Australia, much of the available data and research has a Victorian focus, with two major research centres (the Centre for the Study of Higher Education and the Centre for Post-compulsory and Lifelong Learning, both at the University of Melbourne) based in Victoria. A great deal of research has also addressed a number of themes, such as school achievement and aspirations that the Committee found impacted on higher education participation. Many participants drew on this research in submissions and in presentations at public hearings. In particular, participants referred to:

- Destination data, longitudinal reports and annual reports from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's On Track survey of Victorian school leavers;
- Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth research reports, a particularly rich source of information about the characteristics, pathways and outcomes for Australian young people; and
- the work of researchers at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne, particularly Professor Richard James' research on the relationships between rurality, socioeconomic status and higher education participation.

The Committee's report draws on this and other research where established findings support, challenge or expand on the evidence and perspectives of inquiry participants.

## **Data analysis**

In addition the Committee considered data collected by the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre. The Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre publishes data detailing applications, offers, enrolments and deferrals across 17 Victorian regions. However, the Committee requested a data set that would enable analysis of smaller geographic areas. The data set provided to the Committee contained information on 79 areas which approximate Victoria's Local Government Areas, and covers the years 2005–06, 2006–07 and 2007–08. The data set also included variables relating to fee type, course location, field of study, preference level and Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER).

Using this data, the Committee calculated application, offer, enrolment and deferment rates for different Victorian localities and regions. Separate analyses were carried out for school leavers and for older applicants. These analyses are discussed in detail in Chapter 2, with further analyses on specific issues detailed throughout the report.

## **Public hearings**

A series of formal hearings was held over the period February 2008 to March 2009, in which 307 witnesses participated (refer Appendix C). Five hearings took place at Parliament House, with representation from the many peak agencies with an interest in the inquiry. The final hearing at Parliament House, in March 2009, involved representatives of eight of Victoria's universities in a roundtable discussion, to reflect on issues raised during the inquiry.

The nature of the inquiry called for a geographically diverse public hearing schedule. The Committee undertook hearings in Hamilton, Colac, Rosebud, Churchill, Bairnsdale, Robinvale, Ouyen and Benalla. These hearings attracted a high level of interest from local communities. This showed the importance of the inquiry to Victorians living in geographic areas that are currently under-represented in higher education participation. The Committee is also aware that geographic differences are not only reflected in differences between regional and metropolitan Victoria. Within metropolitan Melbourne, substantial differences in higher education participation exist between suburbs, closely associated with differences in socioeconomic status. The Committee therefore conducted hearings in Lilydale and Sunshine, both of which have lower rates of higher education participation when compared to other suburban locations.

The Committee was given the opportunity to observe technologies used in distance learning at the Telstra Executive Briefing Centre in Melbourne, in March 2009. As an example of these technologies, the Committee participated in a live video connection to hear evidence from a student in Morwell and an academic in Shepparton. These technologies have been promoted as a potential means of expanding higher education opportunities in remote geographic locations.

## **Interstate investigations**

In June 2008, the Committee travelled to Canberra to conduct public hearings with representatives of Universities Australia and the Group of Eight, as well as with staff and students of two higher education institutions. The Committee was also briefed by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

In April 2009, the Committee investigated a unique model of regional higher education operating within the community of Geraldton, Western Australia. Established in 2002, the Geraldton Universities Centre has several features that made it a useful site for the Committee's investigations, especially its strong community input and ownership through the Geraldton Universities Access Group. The Group successfully lobbied for Commonwealth supported places to be allocated to the community rather than to a university provider. Also unique is the collaboration of multiple university partners delivering higher education programs at one site, with 'high tech, high touch' as a guiding principle to combine face-to-face delivery with cutting-edge technology. The Geraldton Universities Centre initially operated utilising existing community infrastructure, and a purpose-built facility was later established.

In Geraldton, the Committee met with students, staff and other stakeholders in the Geraldton Universities Centre, and in Perth, it met with representatives of the three universities involved in the Centre, and a representative of the Office of Higher Education, Department of Education Services.

Individuals involved in interstate investigations are listed in Appendix D.

### International investigations

From 25 August to 5 September 2008, the Committee conducted international investigations for the inquiry, as well as for its *Inquiry into Effective Strategies for Teacher Professional Learning*. Finland, Scotland and Canada were identified as countries with particular relevance to both inquiries. Several members of the Committee, along with the Executive Officer, met with Ministers and representatives of government departments and agencies, universities, peak bodies and other organisations in the education sector. Individuals involved in these discussions are listed in Appendix E.

#### *Finland*

Finland has gained the attention of the education world by topping the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results in 2000, 2003 and 2006. Finland also ranks amongst the most equitable countries in terms of school achievement, with one of the lowest levels of between school variation and a smaller achievement gap between students according to socioeconomic status.<sup>2</sup> Given the importance of achievement at school as a prerequisite to higher education participation, the Committee believed it was important to investigate the factors contributing to the success of Finnish students.

The Committee was also interested to learn more about Finland's approach to regional higher education provision. Low population density and difficult geographical conditions have presented challenges for the equitable provision of education in Finland.<sup>3</sup> However, the country has been relatively successful in improving the geographical accessibility of higher education through a long-standing policy focus on regional delivery.<sup>4</sup> A rapid expansion of higher education in regions from the 1960s to the 1980s saw disparities in the

---

<sup>2</sup> Norton Grubb and others, *Equity in Education Thematic Review: Finland: Country Note* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005), 12.

<sup>3</sup> Jussi Valimaa, 'Geopolitical and Cultural Coordinates for Finnish History,' in *Finnish Higher Education in Transition: Perspectives on massification and globalisation*, ed. Jussi Valimaa (Jyväskylä: Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä, 2001), 25–29.

<sup>4</sup> John Davies and others, *Thematic Review of Tertiary Education: Finland* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006), 21.

regional background of Finnish university students almost disappear.<sup>5</sup> Today, Finland has one of the densest university networks in Europe, with 21 universities and 26 polytechnics serving a population of approximately 5.3 million. While ongoing 'structural development' in the sector will involve a number of mergers, coalitions and alliances, most existing campuses will be retained.

### *Scotland*

Increasing the participation of under-represented groups has been a focus of Scottish higher education policy for more than a decade. Research commissioned by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (published in 1998) revealed marked differences in the participation rates of students from different areas, and found that these were correlated with socioeconomic disadvantage.<sup>6</sup> Between 2000 and 2004, higher education institutions shared £1.35 million per annum for 'widening participation' activities.<sup>7</sup> While higher education policy in Scotland has been subject to continuing review and change, the emphasis on widening participation has remained. Widening participation activities, policies and programs were a central focus of the Committee's discussions in Scotland.

A second theme of the Committee's discussions in Scotland was the country's efforts to improve the geographic accessibility of higher education through flexible learning. In particular, the Committee was interested to learn about the ways in which Scottish higher education institutions support flexible learning through the provision of 'learning centres' and opportunities for students from remote areas to meet with each other and their tutors. The UHI Millennium Institute was a model that was of particular interest to the Committee.

### *Canada*

Canada stands out amongst OECD countries as having the highest level of participation in post-secondary education, with nearly half of all Canadian adults aged 24 to 65 holding a tertiary qualification. Canada also compares well on measures of social equity in education, with below average variance in achievement between students and between schools. These factors, as well as the many demographic, cultural, historical and geographical similarities between Canada and Australia, led the Committee to include Canada in its international investigations. Of particular relevance to the inquiry were policies and programs in the provinces of Quebec and Ontario. Key topics for discussion were the various approaches to student financial support and the high level research programs implemented by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation and the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to support participation in higher education by students from under-represented groups.

## **Conferences and seminars**

During the course of the inquiry, Members and staff attended the following relevant conferences and seminars.

---

<sup>5</sup> Jussi Valimaa, 'A Historical Introduction to Finnish Higher Education,' in *Finnish Higher Education in Transition: Perspectives on massification and globalisation*, ed. Jussi Valimaa (Jyväskylä: Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä, 2001), 45.

<sup>6</sup> Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, *Participation in Higher Education in Scotland* (Edinburgh: SHEFC, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, *Learning for All: The report of the SFEFC/SHEFC widening participation review group* (Edinburgh: SHEFC, 2005), 28.

### ***Higher Education Summit***

In April 2008, three Committee members and the research officer attended the 6<sup>th</sup> annual Higher Education Summit. The Summit brings together leaders from the higher education sector, government and business to examine issues and developments in higher education. Of particular relevance to the inquiry were discussions of: how regional universities contribute to their communities; the role of higher education in producing qualified graduates and meeting national and local skill needs; and directions in higher education equity policy at the national level.

The Summit also provided context for the inquiry by familiarising Committee members with broader issues and trends in the higher education sector. These include: the place of higher education within the tertiary education system; diversity and specialisation in higher education; research management; funding; internationalisation; and the move towards greater engagement with the community sector, business, government and the general public.

### ***Forum on Higher Education and Social Inclusion***

Committee members and staff were invited by the Group of Eight to attend the Higher Education and Social Inclusion Forum on 16 July 2008. The Forum was a joint initiative of the University of Melbourne, Australian National University, the Group of Eight and the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Speakers from Australia, New Zealand, England and the United States highlighted concerns about higher education participation rates across geographical areas and socioeconomic groups, and discussed the strategies employed to tackle these inequities. The Forum extended the Committee's understanding of a range of issues surrounding higher education participation, including: the relationships between higher education participation and school attainment and achievement; best practice approaches to student recruitment and outreach; entry requirements and pathways; student finances and financial support mechanisms; and Indigenous higher education.

### ***Centre for the Study of Higher Education seminar series***

Between June and August 2008, two staff members attended a series of seminars hosted by the University of Melbourne's Centre for the Study of Higher Education. *Investing in the Future: Renewing Australian Tertiary Education* included seminars dealing with the aims and functions of higher education, the Review of Australian Higher Education, higher education funding, and performance standards and indicators. Each seminar contributed useful background for the Committee's inquiry.

On 9 June 2009, the executive officer attended a further seminar hosted by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, *The 2009 Federal Budget: What it Means for Tertiary Education*.

### ***Centre for the Economics of Education and Training Annual National Conference***

On 31 October 2008, the research officer attended the Centre for the Economics of Education and Training Annual National Conference. The theme of the conference was ensuring relevance, quality and inclusion in an expanded education and training system. Relevant papers addressed: inclusion in Vocational Education and Training (VET) and

higher education; Australia's qualifications framework; and individual returns from participation in education and training.

### *Australian Higher Education Congress*

In March 2009, three Committee members attended the Australian Higher Education Congress. The Committee was principally interested in papers addressing future directions in regional higher education provision and closer ties between universities and TAFE institutes.

---

## Definitions

---

### Higher education

Under the Australian Qualifications Framework, higher education is classified as a type of post-secondary education leading to the award of associate, bachelor and higher (doctoral or masters) degrees, as well as some types of diploma, advanced diploma, graduate certificate and graduate diploma. While the Committee has not excluded higher degrees or sub-bachelor level qualifications from consideration, the weight of evidence gathered for this inquiry is focused on higher education participation at the level of bachelor degree. This emphasis is reflected in the Committee's report.

In Victoria, most higher education programs are offered by nine public universities, including eight Victorian universities and the Australian Catholic University, which has two Victorian campuses. Victoria's universities are:

- Deakin University
- La Trobe University
- Monash University
- RMIT University
- Swinburne University of Technology
- University of Ballarat
- The University of Melbourne
- Victoria University.

Four Victorian universities—RMIT University, Swinburne University of Technology, the University of Ballarat and Victoria University—are dual or multi-sector institutions, awarding both higher education and VET qualifications. In addition, four Victorian TAFE institutes offer higher education courses, as do a number of interstate universities and more than 50 registered higher education providers.<sup>8</sup> Charles Sturt University, based in New South Wales, has a campus in Albury and is a significant provider of higher education to Victorian students.

---

<sup>8</sup> Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), Written Submission, May 2008, 9.



## Geographical differences

While geographical differences in participation in higher education are the central focus for this inquiry, geographical characteristics, such as access to university campuses, only partially explain participation differences. The Committee found that geographical differences in higher education participation are linked to a number of interrelated factors, including attainment and achievement at school and the aspiration to attend university. These factors are deeply influenced by underlying differences in individuals' backgrounds, such as socioeconomic status, gender and cultural background. The Committee therefore believes that strategies designed to lift participation rates in under-represented areas are unlikely to be effective if they focus only on issues of distance and accessibility. In this report, the Committee takes a broad view of geographical differences in higher education participation, encompassing the geographical, social, economic and cultural dimensions of the issue.

## Rural and regional

In its written submission to the inquiry, Australian Catholic University observed that there are no 'clear and consistent' definitions for the terms 'rural' and 'regional'.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, research examining higher education participation and geographical location has used a variety of geographical classification systems. For example, a study by Jones compared participation of young people from mainland capital cities, large urban regions, large provincial cities, small provincial cities, other provincial areas and remote areas.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, James' influential studies of rurality and socioeconomic status employed only metropolitan and rural categories.<sup>11</sup>

The Committee uses the term 'rural and regional' to refer broadly to those areas of Victoria outside of Melbourne, including regional cities, rural towns and remote or isolated communities. In so doing, the Committee does not wish to imply that regional Victoria is homogeneous. While there are some issues that are, to greater or lesser extent, common to most regional and rural areas, there are also substantial differences. Professor Richard Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, emphasised this point:

There is a whole set of issues around country Victoria ... and we should not roll it all into one. We need a good geographically-sensitive view. East Gippsland is not the Mallee et cetera, or the south-west of Victoria.<sup>12</sup>

In its report, the Committee seeks both to describe broad patterns and trends across geographic areas, and to identify issues and concerns particular to specific regions or localities. Where relevant, the report differentiates between, for example, regional centres and smaller or more remote towns. In discussing particular localities, the Committee has deferred to inquiry participants' own descriptions and categorisations of their communities.

<sup>9</sup> Australian Catholic University, Written Submission, March 2008, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Roger G. Jones, *Education Participation and Outcomes by Geographic Location*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 26 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Richard James and others, *Rural and Isolated School Students and their Higher Education Choices: A re-examination of student location, socioeconomic background, and educational advantage and disadvantage*, Commissioned Report 62 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 16.

## Socioeconomic status

Throughout the inquiry the Committee received a great deal of evidence about the influence of socioeconomic status on participation in higher education. Socioeconomic status is an abstract and subjective concept that refers to a person's overall position in society. Most commonly, this is defined and measured in terms of occupational prestige, educational attainment and income. Some conceptualise socioeconomic status and socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage more broadly, taking into account ideas such as access to material and social resources and the ability to participate in society.<sup>13</sup> As a powerful predictor of outcomes in a range of life domains, including education, socioeconomic status is an important concept for policymakers and social researchers.<sup>14</sup>

Measurement of socioeconomic status can be undertaken at the level of the individual or the family. However, because individuals and families of a given socioeconomic status are often concentrated in particular areas,<sup>15</sup> socioeconomic status can also be measured for geographic areas. In research and data about higher education participation, analyses of socioeconomic status are often based on such geographic measures. This relationship between socioeconomic status and geographical location meant that socioeconomic status was of great relevance to the Committee's inquiry.

---

## Structure of the report

---

Chapter 2 sets the scene for the inquiry by outlining the state and federal policy context for the higher education sector. It also summarises existing research findings and the Committee's data analysis regarding differences in higher education participation across geographical areas and population groups. The next five chapters identify and discuss key factors that contribute to participation differences, particularly in relation to initial access to higher education. These factors are: school achievement and completion (Chapter 3); aspirations towards higher education (Chapter 4); university selection and admission processes (Chapter 5); provision of and access to higher education (Chapter 6); and financial considerations (Chapter 7). Chapter 8 looks at students who have commenced a higher education course, examining the factors that impede or support academic success and course completion. Finally, Chapter 9 discusses participation in higher education by Indigenous people.

---

<sup>13</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Information Paper, *An Introduction to Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) 2006*, Cat. no. 2039.0 (Canberra: ABS, 2008), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Gary Marks, *The measurement of socioeconomic status and social class in the LSAY project*, Technical Paper 14 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 1999), 2.

<sup>15</sup> Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), Written Submission, May 2008, 13.

# Context for the inquiry

---

... to summarise the problem in simple if crude terms: on a per capita basis, for every ten people from medium or higher socioeconomic backgrounds who go to university, only five people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds do so. On a similar per capita basis, for every ten people from urban locations who go to university, only six people from rural or isolated Australia do so.<sup>16</sup>

---

Over the past two decades, issues of participation and equity have become an important focus for policymakers and researchers within the higher education sector. In 1990, Australia became the first country to introduce a comprehensive framework for equity in higher education. The recent Review of Australian Higher Education has continued this focus on participation and equity. Aware that its inquiry is not the first time that geographical differences in higher education participation have been examined in the policy context, the Committee reviewed past and current policy and programs that have sought to reduce imbalances in participation.

Understanding the nature and extent of geographic differences in participation in higher education across Victoria is an important foundation for investigating the causes of participation disparities, and strategies for their reduction. The Committee is aware of the current data that exists in this area, including findings from the On Track survey of Victorian school leavers, as well as Australian Government performance data on the access, participation, success and retention rates of different student groups. However, the Committee wished to complement this research with its own analysis of data on each stage of the higher education participation process. This analysis confirmed the existence of pronounced geographical differences in higher education participation across the state, and highlighted the points at which these differences occur.

---

## Policy context

---

A review of the policy context at a Victorian, Australian and international level revealed that there has been substantial activity in identifying differences in higher education participation, and in implementing access and equity measures to reduce the differences. While the most substantial policy development in this area has been undertaken by the Australian Government, the Victorian Government plays a complementary role.

---

<sup>16</sup> Richard James, *Socioeconomic Background and Higher Education Participation: An analysis of school students' aspirations and expectations* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2000), 1.

## **Australian Government higher education policy**

The Australian Government is the major policymaker in higher education, and is also the main source of funding for the sector. The Australian Government first addressed issues of equity in higher education in the 1980s, prompted by research revealing differences in higher education participation rates for different social groups. With the 1990 report *A Fair Chance for All: Higher Education That's Within Everyone's Reach*, the Australian Government instituted a comprehensive equity framework for Australian higher education. *A Fair Chance for All* identified equity as a 'central concern' in higher education, and set out the following goal:

... to ensure that Australians from all groups in society have the opportunity to participate successfully in higher education. This will be achieved by changing the balance of the student population to reflect more closely the composition of society as a whole.<sup>17</sup>

Within this broad objective, specific goals and targets were outlined for six groups that had been identified as being under-represented in higher education: people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; women in non-traditional areas of study; people from non-English speaking backgrounds; people with disabilities; and people from rural and isolated areas. Under the new policy framework, universities were required to develop 'equity plans' to address under-representation, while the Australian Government provided designated funding for equity activities.

The introduction of Australia's comprehensive equity framework in 1990 was an international landmark in higher education equity.<sup>18</sup> It has underpinned a range of equity initiatives, and initiated a focus on equity issues that was refreshed with the 2003 policy statement *Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future*. Nevertheless, as recent reviews have shown, overall there has been little if any growth in participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, with the participation of some groups actually declining.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Australian Government equity performance indicators***

Coinciding with the introduction of an equity framework for higher education, in 1990, the Australian Government developed a system of indicators to measure higher education participation for target 'equity groups'. 'Access', 'participation', 'retention' and 'success' indicators were developed to show the proportion of domestic students belonging to each equity group, referenced against the proportion of the total Australian population aged 15 to 64.

These performance indicators are an important source of information about disparities in higher education participation throughout Australia. Over the years, they have shown enduring differences in participation according to both socioeconomic status and rurality. In 2006, while people from low socioeconomic status postcodes made up 25 per cent of the Australian population, only 15.6 per cent of higher education students were from these

---

<sup>17</sup> Australian Government Department of Employment, Education and Training and the National Board of Employment, Education and Training, *A Fair Chance for All: National and Institutional Planning for Equity in Higher Education: A Discussion Paper* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1990), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Richard James, 'Social equity in a mass, globalised higher education environment: the unresolved issue of widening access to university' (Faculty of Education Dean's Lecture Series, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 18 September 2008), 5.

<sup>19</sup> Australian Council for Educational Research, Written Submission, March 2008, 1–2.

areas—a figure that has changed very little since data collection began.<sup>20</sup> Participation rates for students from rural and isolated areas have declined over the period 1996 to 2005.<sup>21</sup>

The Australian Government equity performance indicators have provided data about the level of participation in higher education by various groups, although some inquiry participants argued that the usefulness and accuracy of the data is limited due to the use of postcodes to measure socioeconomic status.<sup>22</sup> This measure of socioeconomic status is problematic because it does not take into account individual circumstances. Perhaps more importantly, one participant observed that postcodes conflate the two issues of socioeconomic status and rurality, and therefore make it difficult to differentiate the effects of each.<sup>23</sup> In response to similar concerns raised at a national level, the Australian Government has recently announced that it will investigate the possibility of moving from proxy measures of socioeconomic status, such as postcode, to measures based on individual and family circumstances.<sup>24</sup> The Committee supports such a change, which could enhance understanding of the relationships between socioeconomic status, rurality and participation in higher education.

## The Review of Australian Higher Education

The Committee's inquiry took place during a time of considerable reappraisal and change in Australian higher education policy, including two major Australian Government reviews. Of most relevance to the inquiry, the Review of Australian Higher Education (also known as the Bradley Review) examined and reported on the higher education sector's fitness for purpose in meeting the needs of the Australian community and economy, the future direction of the sector, and options for reform.<sup>25</sup> Released in December 2008, the review recommended significantly increased Australian Government funding for both teaching and research, as well as substantial and wide-ranging reforms to funding and regulation, accreditation and quality assurance, student income support, regional and outer urban provision and data collection.<sup>26</sup>

Also in 2008, a Review of the National Innovation System was charged with identifying gaps and weaknesses in Australia's innovation system, and with developing proposals to address these.<sup>27</sup> The review's report, *Venturous Australia: Building Strength in Innovation*, recommended that research funding be increased to cover the full costs of research,<sup>28</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, for Universities Australia, *Participation and Equity: A review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people* (Melbourne: CSHE, 2008), 23.

<sup>21</sup> Deakin University, Written Submission, March 2008, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Dr H. Coates, Principal Research Fellow, Australian Council for Educational Research, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 4; Professor R. Larkins, Chair, Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 18; Ms C. Murphy, Deputy Principal, Office of Admissions, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 31; Dr G. Withers, Chief Executive Officer, Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 11.

<sup>23</sup> Dr H. Coates, Principal Research Fellow, Australian Council for Educational Research, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Australian Government, *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 57.

<sup>25</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, xviii–xxv.

<sup>27</sup> Australian Government Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, 'Review of the National Innovation System Fact Sheet,' DIISR, <http://www.innovation.gov.au/Section/AboutDIISR/FactSheets/Pages/ReviewoftheNationalInnovationSystemFactSheet.aspx> (accessed 1 July 2009).

<sup>28</sup> Cutler & Company Pty Ltd, for the Australian Government Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, *Venturous Australia: Building strength in innovation* (North Melbourne: Cutler & Company Pty Ltd, 2008), 68–69.

complementing the call for increased public funding for university research made by the Review of Australian Higher Education.

Responding to these reviews, in May 2009, the Australian Government announced a reform agenda aimed at transforming the scale, potential and quality of the nation's universities.<sup>29</sup> The agenda includes targets for increased participation, as well as major reforms to funding for teaching and learning, student income support, and regulation and quality assurance. Australia's innovation and research systems will see increased research funding, measures to promote research excellence, and support for business and public sector innovation and collaboration. Supporting these reforms, the Australian Government will also invest in education and research infrastructure.

The following sections summarise some of the key reforms of most relevance to the Committee's inquiry.

### ***Participation and funding***

Significantly, the Australian Government has announced plans to increase and widen participation in higher education, in line with recommendations from the Review of Australian Higher Education. A target has been set for 40 per cent attainment of a qualification at bachelor level or above among Australians aged 25 to 34, to be met by 2025.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, a target has been set for the participation of Australians from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, who are to comprise 20 per cent of undergraduate enrolments by 2020.<sup>31</sup> The Committee supports these national participation targets, but notes that socio-demographic contexts should be taken into account when translating these national targets to state and local level goals.

To facilitate expanded participation, the Australian Government has announced a shift towards funding on the basis of student demand.<sup>32</sup> The Australian Government will fund a Commonwealth supported place for any undergraduate domestic student accepted into an eligible accredited higher education course with a recognised public higher education provider.<sup>33</sup> This contrasts with the current funding system by which places are allocated to individual institutions. The change to demand driven funding is planned for 2012, to be preceded by staged increases to existing caps on over-enrolment. According to the Australian Government, the reforms will allow an additional 50,000 students to attend university by 2013.<sup>34</sup>

To uphold quality in an expanded system, a new national regulatory and quality authority, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, will be established to audit standards and performance, and to enhance national consistency.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Australian Government, *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, 12.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, 9.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 17.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, 18.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, 31.

### *Provision in regional areas*

The Review of Australian Higher Education concluded that more needs to be done to provide sustainable provision in regional areas, suggesting that regional provision, when combined with appropriate outreach and support initiatives, will help to improve higher education participation rates among students from these areas.<sup>36</sup> The review recommended an additional \$80 million per year from 2012 in funding for sustainable higher education provision in regional areas to replace the existing regional loading.<sup>37</sup> It emphasised innovative, collaborative, local solutions to provision in regional areas,<sup>38</sup> and raised the possibility of some rationalisation of existing regional university campuses.<sup>39</sup> In response, the Australian Government has allocated \$2 million for a feasibility study to explore how Charles Sturt University and Southern Cross University might come together to improve provision for students and rural communities.<sup>40</sup> The Australian Government has also committed to examining the cost of providing quality teaching and research in regional Australia, and developing a new, more logical basis for funding to address the current limitations of the regional loading.<sup>41</sup>

Issues of regional provision are discussed in Chapter 6 of the report.

### *The Australian tertiary education sector*

Enhancing links between the higher education and Vocational Education and Training (VET) sectors was another central theme in the Review of Australian Higher Education. The review argued that to achieve this, the Australian Government should assume primary responsibility for funding and regulation of the entire tertiary sector.<sup>42</sup> The Australian Government has responded to this recommendation by announcing the formation of a single tertiary education ministerial council (Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment), and signalling its intention to work closely with the states and territories to develop cohesive national regulatory arrangements for VET.<sup>43</sup> Of particular relevance to the Committee's inquiry, the Australian Government also announced that it will commission the Australian Qualifications Framework Council to improve articulation and connectivity between VET and higher education.<sup>44</sup>

### *Student income support*

The Review of Australian Higher Education outlined a package of recommended reforms to student income support, intended to increase the level of financial support available, while targeting assistance more precisely at students in need.

The Australian Government announced its intentions with regard to student income support in the 2009–10 federal budget. Subject to the passage of legislation, a first phase of reforms

---

<sup>36</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 42.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, 112.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, 113.

<sup>40</sup> Australian Government, *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 41.

<sup>41</sup> Australian Government, 'Strengthening Regional Higher Education Provision,' *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheet 11 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 1.

<sup>42</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 184.

<sup>43</sup> Australian Government, *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 43.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

will be implemented on 1 January 2010. Among these changes, the Parental Income Test threshold for Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY<sup>45</sup> will be increased from \$32,800 to \$42,559, allowing more students to access these programs as dependents, and increasing the rate of payment to many existing recipients.<sup>46</sup> However, changes to the eligibility criteria for Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY will make it more difficult for young people to qualify as independent on the basis of previous participation in the workforce.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, equity and merit-based scholarships will be exempted from means testing for the purposes of student income support,<sup>48</sup> and the existing Commonwealth Scholarship Program will be replaced with two new scholarships.<sup>49</sup> The Student Start-up Scholarship of \$2,254 per annum will be awarded to all university students receiving income support.<sup>50</sup> For eligible students moving away from home for study, a Relocation Scholarship will provide \$4,000 in the first year and \$1,000 each subsequent year.<sup>51</sup> These changes will provide scholarship support to a larger number of students, although the amount awarded to relocated students will decrease.

A second phase of reforms is to be implemented by 2012. These changes include an increase to the fortnightly Personal Income Test threshold (from \$236 to \$400).<sup>52</sup> Access to income support will be extended to coursework masters students, and the 'age of independence' will be progressively reduced from 25 years to 22 years.<sup>53</sup>

Issues associated with student finances and income support were a key focus of the Committee's inquiry and are discussed in Chapter 7.

## **Victorian Government tertiary education policy**

While the Australian Government has primary responsibility for higher education funding and policymaking, the Victorian Government also has a significant role in tertiary education. A strong policy framework supports post-school transitions through measures to increase year 12 or equivalent completion, enhance pathways advice and guidance to young people, and support policymaking and programs with data collection on student transitions. At the same time, the Victorian Government has a complementary role in higher education, and is responsible for the state's VET sector.

---

<sup>45</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Study Assistance Scheme.

<sup>46</sup> Australian Government, 'Student Income Support—Parental Income Test,' *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheet 15 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 1.

<sup>47</sup> Australian Government, 'Student Income Support—Workforce Participation Criterion,' *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheet 22 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 1.

<sup>48</sup> Australian Government, 'Student Income Support—Exempt Equity and Merit-Based Scholarships,' *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheet 21 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 1.

<sup>49</sup> Australian Government, 'Student Income Support—Increased Assistance for Students and Families,' *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheet 24 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 1–2.

<sup>50</sup> Australian Government, 'Student Income Support—The Student Start-up Scholarship,' *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheet 17 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 1.

<sup>51</sup> Australian Government, 'Student Income Support—Relocation Scholarship,' *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheet 18 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 1.

<sup>52</sup> Australian Government, 'Student Income Support—Personal Income Test Threshold,' *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheet 19 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 1.

<sup>53</sup> Australian Government, *Universities, Innovation and Education Revolution* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 9.



*Post-school transitions*

The Victorian Government's policy in the area of post-school transitions is to ensure that an increasing proportion of young people will make a smooth transition from compulsory school education to further education, training and employment.<sup>54</sup> The Victorian Government does not have an explicit policy aimed at increasing the rate of participation in higher education in Victoria.<sup>55</sup> Instead, the policy focus is on facilitating transitions into a range of meaningful pathways by lifting the rate of completion of year 12 or its equivalent,<sup>56</sup> and by providing effective pathways advice and guidance.

A key initiative aimed at facilitating post-school transitions has been the establishment of 31 Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) in Victoria. The role of the LLENs is to facilitate partnerships and broker initiatives between local stakeholders aimed at improving the education, training and employment outcomes of young people 15 to 19 years of age. Within this broad aim, lifting the proportion of young people completing year 12 or its equivalent is a major focus.<sup>57</sup> The Victorian Government is currently committed to funding the LLENs initiative through to 2011.<sup>58</sup> Another important program, discussed in Chapter 4, is the Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) program, which ensures that all young people in government schools aged 15 and above are provided with an individual pathway plan for their continued participation in education, training or employment.<sup>59</sup>

Another way in which the Victorian Government supports post-school transitions is through the annual On Track survey of Victorian school leavers. Initiated in 2002, On Track has been designed to provide data that can guide government policy and programs at the school, local and regional level.<sup>60</sup> Evidence to the inquiry pointed to a strong awareness of the On Track survey and its findings. In submissions and at public hearings throughout Victoria, schools, universities, LLENs and others referred extensively to findings from the On Track survey, both at the local and school level, and for Victoria as a whole. The Committee also heard examples of On Track data being used to inform planning and practice. For example, Mr Tony Edwards, Project Manager, Access and Success, Victoria University, told the Committee that Access and Success has used On Track data to identify schools that might benefit from partnership with the university.<sup>61</sup> The Committee is also aware that since Victoria's initiation of the On Track survey, a number of other Australian states have implemented their own annual school leaver surveys, modelled on On Track.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Mr G. McLean, General Manager, Youth Transitions Division, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 July 2008, 2.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Office for Education Policy and Innovation, Department of Education (Victoria), *Local Learning and Employment Networks: A Victorian Government Initiative* (Melbourne: Department of Education, 2007), 1.

<sup>58</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), 'Frequently Asked Questions,' Local Learning and Employment Networks, <http://www.llen.vic.gov.au/what/faq.asp#H2N10072> (accessed 1 July 2009).

<sup>59</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), 'Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs),' DEECD, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/sensecyouth/careertrans/mips/default.htm> (accessed 26 June 2009).

<sup>60</sup> Richard Teese, Kira Clarke and John Polesel, *The On Track Survey 2007 Statewide Report: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2007), 1.

<sup>61</sup> Mr T. Edwards, Project Manager, Access and Success Project, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 27.

<sup>62</sup> Mr G. McLean, General Manager, Youth Transitions Division, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 July 2008, 3.

The Committee is of the view that On Track is a valuable source of information, both for policy development and for practice and planning at the regional and school level. The Committee therefore believes that the On Track survey should be continued and improved where necessary.

### *The Victorian tertiary education sector*

Victoria's eight public universities are established under individual state Acts of Parliament. The Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation administers the Acts that establish the universities, governing bodies and accountability requirements.<sup>63</sup> Private providers wishing to offer higher education courses in Victoria must apply to the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority for registration as a non self-accrediting higher education institution and for accreditation of their proposed higher education courses.<sup>64</sup>

The Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, through Skills Victoria, develops higher education policy and regulation in Victoria. It also manages stakeholder relations with universities and supports the legislative responsibilities relating to higher education, including the university council appointment process.<sup>65</sup> Skills Victoria also represents the interests of Victorian universities and higher education providers in national forums.<sup>66</sup>

The Victorian Government provides funding and in-kind support to higher education institutions. While state governments do not fund teaching and learning, the Victorian Government contributes some research funding to universities.<sup>67</sup> The Victorian Government also makes in-kind and financial contributions to university land and infrastructure.<sup>68</sup> For example, through the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, the Victorian Government has provided \$37 million in funding for university learning and research infrastructure in regional areas.<sup>69</sup> The Victorian Government also supports higher education in the health sciences through the provision of infrastructure to community health services to support clinical placements.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to its complementary role in higher education, the Victorian Government has primary responsibility for the state's VET system. Increasing participation is a key focus of VET policy in Victoria. In the 2008 policy statement *Securing Jobs for your Future – Skills for Victoria*, the Victorian Government outlines its goal of increasing the number of people undertaking training, particularly in fields relevant to economic and social needs.<sup>71</sup> To facilitate increased participation in training, funding will be provided for additional training places over the next four years. Under *Skills for Life – the Victorian Training Guarantee*, all

---

<sup>63</sup> Skills Victoria, 'Universities,' Skills Victoria, <http://www.skills.vic.gov.au/corporate/providers/universities> (accessed 1 July 2009).

<sup>64</sup> Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, 'Higher Education,' VRQA, <http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/higher/default.htm> (accessed 1 July 2009).

<sup>65</sup> Skills Victoria, 'Universities,' Skills Victoria, <http://www.skills.vic.gov.au/corporate/providers/universities> (accessed 1 July 2009).

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, various initiatives described in Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), *Innovation: Victoria's Future* (Melbourne: DIIRD, 2008).

<sup>68</sup> Department of Education and Training (Victoria), *Higher Education in Victoria: Opportunities for 2005 and Beyond* (Melbourne: DET, 2005), 14.

<sup>69</sup> Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), Written Submission, May 2008, 28.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), *Securing Jobs for your Future – Skills for Victoria* (Melbourne: DIIRD, 2008), 10.

young people up to 20 years of age are entitled to a government subsidised place at any qualification level.<sup>72</sup>

In April 2009 the Victorian Government announced the development of a new Higher Education Plan for the state.<sup>73</sup> The plan, which is being developed by an expert panel in consultation with stakeholders, will inform the Victorian Government contribution to the implementation of the Australian Government's higher education reforms, providing for growth in tertiary education provision. The plan will identify the implications of this expansion for Victorian Government policies and programs, propose options for implementation, and identify priorities for Victoria's dealings with the Australian Government.<sup>74</sup> The plan will develop policy responses in a range of areas. Of most relevance to the Committee's inquiry, these include: industry needs for higher education graduates into the future; the particular needs of regional and outer urban communities; models of provision for ready access to higher education and VET for all Victorians; and the interface between higher education, VET and school education.<sup>75</sup> Implementation issues that will need to be addressed by the Victorian Government relating to the adoption of participation and performance targets for the tertiary sector will include: infrastructure provision; funding; academic workforce; quality; planning; and accommodation.<sup>76</sup>

The Committee welcomes the development of the Higher Education Plan, believing it to be a timely response to the Australian Government's reforms to the higher education sector. The Committee encourages the Victorian Government, in developing the plan, to have particular regard for improving equity in higher education participation. In particular, the Committee believes that the Victorian Government should identify priority areas for increasing participation in higher education among under-represented groups. The Committee's findings and recommendations provide a foundation for identifying and responding to the needs of communities in rural and regional Victoria, interface areas and low socioeconomic status areas.

---

### Higher education participation in Victoria

---

Geographical and other differences in higher education participation rates are not new. A 1983 review found that decades of research had identified long-standing differences in higher education participation rates according to geographical location, socioeconomic status, gender and cultural and language background.<sup>77</sup> Since then, research evidence about these differences has grown. It is now firmly established that people from rural and remote areas, those from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, and Indigenous Australians are significantly under-represented among higher education students in Australia and Victoria.

---

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, 15.

<sup>73</sup> Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation (Victoria), 'Victoria's New Plan for Higher Education,' Jobs Media Release 2 April 2009, The Premier of Victoria, <http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/minister-for-skills-workforce-participation/victorias-new-plan-for-higher-education.html> (accessed 25 June 2009).

<sup>74</sup> Supplementary information provided by the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), June 2009.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> D. S. Anderson and A. E. Vervoorn, *Access to Privilege: Patterns of Participation in Australian Post-Secondary Education* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1983).

## Data analysis

While aware of past research, the Committee reviewed current data on each stage of the admissions process, covering applications, offers, enrolments and deferments. The Committee also examined any geographical differences in the rate at which higher education students complete undergraduate degrees. The Committee obtained and analysed data from the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC), which processes the vast majority of undergraduate applications, and manages the offer process for all Victorian universities.<sup>78</sup> The Committee complemented this analysis with a review of findings from the On Track survey of Victorian school leavers and the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), as well as Australian Government data.

The Committee obtained VTAC data for a three-year period, covering 2005–06, 2006–07 and 2007–08.<sup>79</sup> Geographical participation patterns remained relatively consistent across the three data sets examined. Except where the data indicated a trend or substantial variation, analyses presented in this chapter are therefore based on 2007–08 data.

The Committee's dataset does not include international applicants. Hence, all analyses of VTAC data presented in this chapter, and elsewhere in the report, refer to Victorian domestic students only.

In Victoria, some TAFE institutes and Independent Tertiary Colleges offer a small number of higher education courses. However, the Committee's dataset only includes higher education applications, offers, enrolments and deferments at Victorian universities. The small number of students participating in a higher education course outside of a university are counted in the Committee's dataset as participating in a TAFE or Independent Tertiary College course. Hence, the Committee's analysis slightly understates total higher education participation among Victorian school leavers.

In recognition of the different circumstances of current school leavers and non-school leaver applicants, the Committee's analysis of VTAC data separately considers these categories. As school leavers comprise the majority of applicants, and because the availability of data about school leavers makes calculation of application rates possible, the Committee's analysis focuses largely on this category of applicant. However, the Committee acknowledges that non-school leavers are also an important demographic to be considered if higher education participation rates are to be lifted. The Committee has therefore commented on non-school leaver university applicants where differences emerged in comparison with the school leaver cohort.

Successful completion of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and award of an Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER) is generally a requirement for school leavers seeking a place at university. Hence, only students who have met these two requirements are included in data provided by VTAC and in the Committee's analysis of school leavers. This means that in contrast to some other data sources, VTAC data excludes Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) students, as well as students who failed to complete the VCE. This is a critical point because there are substantial geographical differences in the proportion of young people that reach year 12, and those who successfully complete the VCE. Differences in the proportion of VCE completers who

---

<sup>78</sup> A small proportion of undergraduate applications are handled directly by universities. These applicants are not included in the Committee's analysis of VTAC data.

<sup>79</sup> For each data set, the first number in the label refers to the year in which applications were made, while the second refers to the year in which offers were made.

apply for, are offered, and subsequently accept a place at university add to prior differences in school completion rates. Thus, in interpreting the Committee's analysis of applications, offers, enrolments and deferments, underlying differences in school retention and completion rates need to be considered. The important issue of year 12 completion is discussed in Chapter 3.

### *Geographic definitions*

Analysis of geographic differences in higher education participation rates required the Committee to divide the VTAC data into geographic areas. At the most detailed level, the Committee examined data for 79 small areas which approximate Victoria's Local Government Areas (refer Figures 2.1 and 2.2). These are referred to throughout the chapter as 'local areas'. For clarity, and because small numbers in some local areas lead to substantial year-to-year variation, the following discussion largely omits consideration of individual local areas. Nevertheless, data at this detailed level reveal some important variations within regions, as well as highlighting local areas, such as Frankston in Melbourne's south that are of particular concern.

The Committee then grouped data from the 79 local areas into 17 larger regions, representing ten non-metropolitan regions, six metropolitan regions and one interface region:

- Non-metropolitan regions

The ten non-metropolitan regions approximate Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Statistical Divisions, with the difference being that the Committee's regions are made up of whole postcodes and local areas.

- Metropolitan regions

The Committee constructed six metropolitan regions into which the local areas could be grouped: North, South, East, West, Central and South-East.

- Interface region

The eight remaining local areas are on Melbourne's fringe, commonly referred to as 'interface' municipalities. These are: Cardinia, Hume, Melton, Mornington Peninsula, Nillumbik, Whittlesea, Wyndham and Yarra Ranges. While interface areas share attributes of both urban and rural communities, they also have distinct geographical and socio-demographic characteristics. In recognition of this, they have been grouped into a separate category in the Committee's analysis.

Figures 2.1 and 2.2 depict the 79 local areas and 17 regions. A list of postcodes comprising these can be found at Appendix F.

Figure 2.1: Map showing non-metropolitan regions and local areas used in Committee analysis

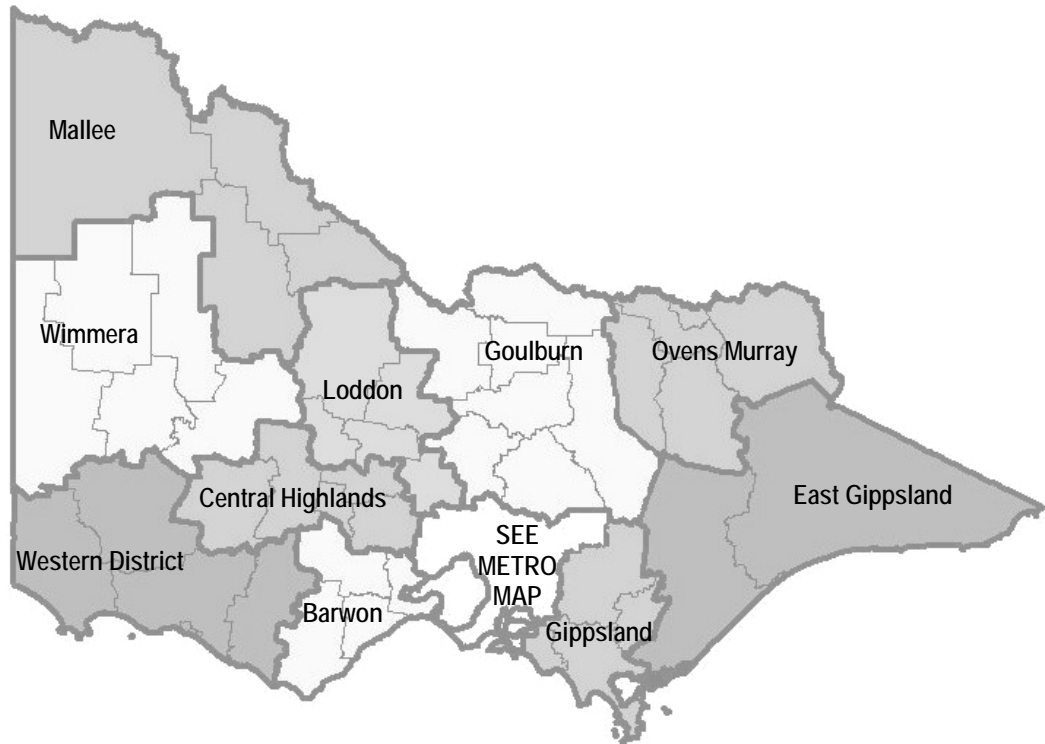


Figure 2.2: Map showing metropolitan regions and local areas used in Committee analysis



Note: The 'local areas' used in the Committee's analysis approximate, but do not precisely match, Local Government Areas. The Committee used concordance tables to identify those postcodes that are 'split' across more than one LGA. The whole of any split postcode was assigned to the LGA that encompassed the largest proportion of that postcode.

Source: Education and Training Committee, July 2009.

## Higher education applications

The Committee's analysis commenced with an examination of the rates of application for university, and the offers made by universities on the basis of these applications. Application rates are important because they give some indication of the level of interest in undertaking university study.

In 2007–08, VTAC received tertiary applications from 65,312 Victorians. The majority of these applicants (86.2%) included one or more preferences for university courses. The remaining applications included preferences only for courses at TAFE institutes and/or Independent Tertiary Colleges. Table 2.1 shows the number and proportion of higher education applicants from three distinct applicant categories, by home location.

Table 2.1: Victorian domestic higher education applicants, by applicant type and home location (No.) (2007–08)

Home location	School leaver	Previous school leaver	Mature age	Total
Metropolitan	17,891	1,813	11,907	31,611
Interface	6,684	757	3,483	10,924
Non-metropolitan	9,290	1,113	3,389	13,792
<b>Total Victoria</b>	<b>33,865</b>	<b>3,683</b>	<b>18,779</b>	<b>56,327</b>

Note: 'School leaver' includes only students who completed the VCE and received an ENTER in 2007. 'Previous school leaver' applicants completed year 12 and received an ENTER in an earlier year, with this qualification the basis for their application. 'Mature age' applicants include all applicants applying on a basis other than a senior secondary qualification.

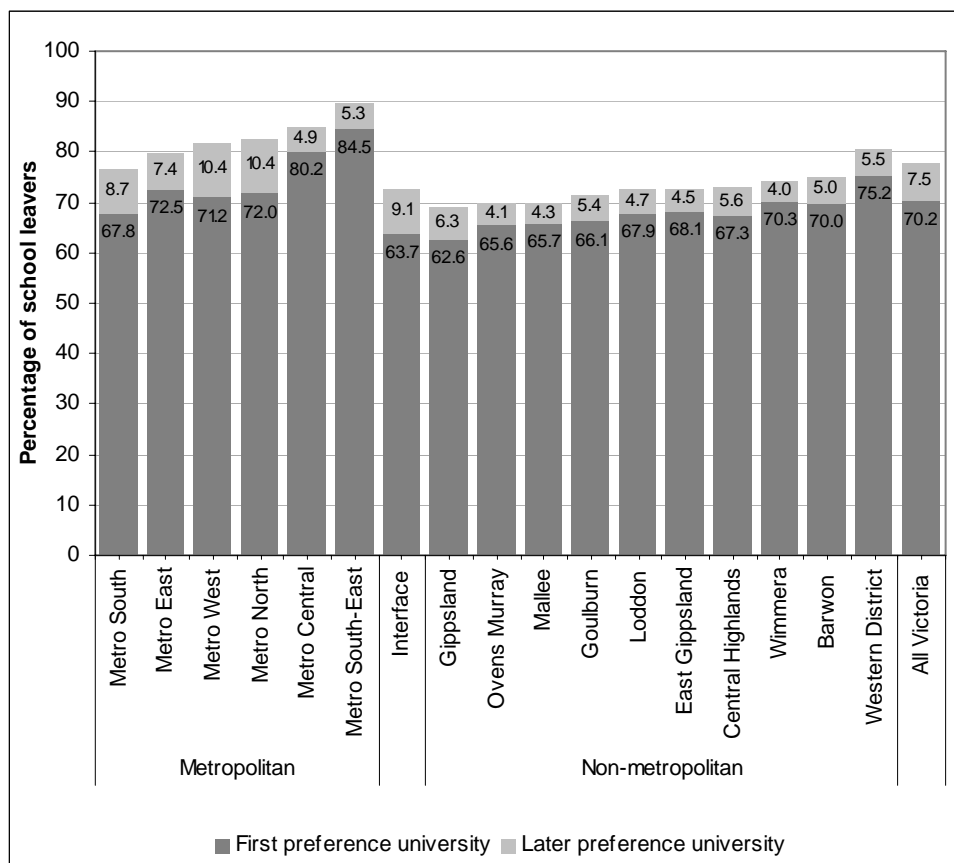
Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 2007–08 VTAC data, May 2009.

Almost 34,000 school leavers applied for higher education in 2007–08, representing 60.1 per cent of higher education applicants in that year. 'Mature age', the next largest applicant group with 18,779 applicants, comprised 33.3 per cent of higher education applications in 2007–08. The smallest applicant group, 'Previous school leaver', made up 6.5 per cent of higher education applicants.

### *Applications by school leavers*

Figure 2.3 shows the percentage of 2007–08 school leavers from the 17 regions across Victoria that applied for a place in a higher education course. It shows the large proportion of applicants who chose a university course as their highest preference, as well as those who included one or more university preferences, but who listed a non-university tertiary course as their first choice.

Figure 2.3: School leavers making university applications, by preference level and region (%) (2007–08)



Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 2007–08 VTAC data, May 2009.

In 2007–08, 77.7 per cent of school leavers across Victoria applied for a place in a university course. The overall application rate was 81.6 per cent in metropolitan areas and 72.8 per cent in both non-metropolitan and interface areas.

There were marked differences within metropolitan, interface and non-metropolitan areas. University application rates were below the state average in each non-metropolitan region except the Western District, dipping to 70 per cent or less in the Gippsland, Ovens Murray and Mallee regions.

Compared to the non-metropolitan and interface areas, the university application rate for the metropolitan area was high. However, this masks important differences across metropolitan areas. In the Metro South-East region, almost 9 in 10 school leavers (89.8%) applied for a university higher education course, compared to only 76.5 per cent of those from the Metro South region—a difference of 13.3 percentage points. Total university applications were above the state average in the Metro Central (85.1%), Metro North (82.4%), Metro West (81.6%) and Metro East (79.9%) regions. In most of those areas, however, as well as in the Interface, a relatively large proportion of university applicants did not have a higher education course listed as their highest preference. This could reduce applicants' chances of receiving a university offer, thereby impacting on participation rates.

### Higher education offers

University entrance is competitive, as there are less university places available than the number of applications for these places. Across Victoria in 2007–08, the majority of university applicants received the offer of a place in at least one of the courses they applied



for. However, the proportion of applicants receiving offers varied between different metropolitan, interface and non-metropolitan areas.

An applicant's chances of receiving an offer rest on a number of factors including the ENTER attained, and the choice of course, institution and campus. Offer rates in a particular area reflect a combination of factors including achievement levels, application rates, entrance requirements and selection processes at nearby institutions and, potentially, the quality of pathways advice at school. Using the available data, it is not possible to precisely link variations in offer rates to each of these factors, however, these issues are discussed in various chapters of the report.

### *Offers to school leaver applicants*

The Committee found that over the three years from 2005–06 to 2007–08, school leavers from non-metropolitan areas were only slightly less likely to receive a university offer than their metropolitan counterparts (refer Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: School leaver applicants receiving university offers, by home location (%) (2005–06 to 2007–08)

Home location	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08
Metropolitan	74.4	75.6	74.4
Interface	64.0	65.8	65.8
Non-metropolitan	73.1	74.9	73.3
All Victoria	72.2	73.7	72.6

Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 2005–06, 2006–07 and 2007–08 VTAC data, May 2009.

In 2007–08, the university offer rate for metropolitan school leavers was 74.4 per cent, just 1.1 percentage points higher than the rate for non-metropolitan applicants. Further analysis shows that non-metropolitan university applicants were more likely than those in metropolitan areas to have received an offer in the course that they had listed as their first preference (41.1% compared to 36.8%, respectively).

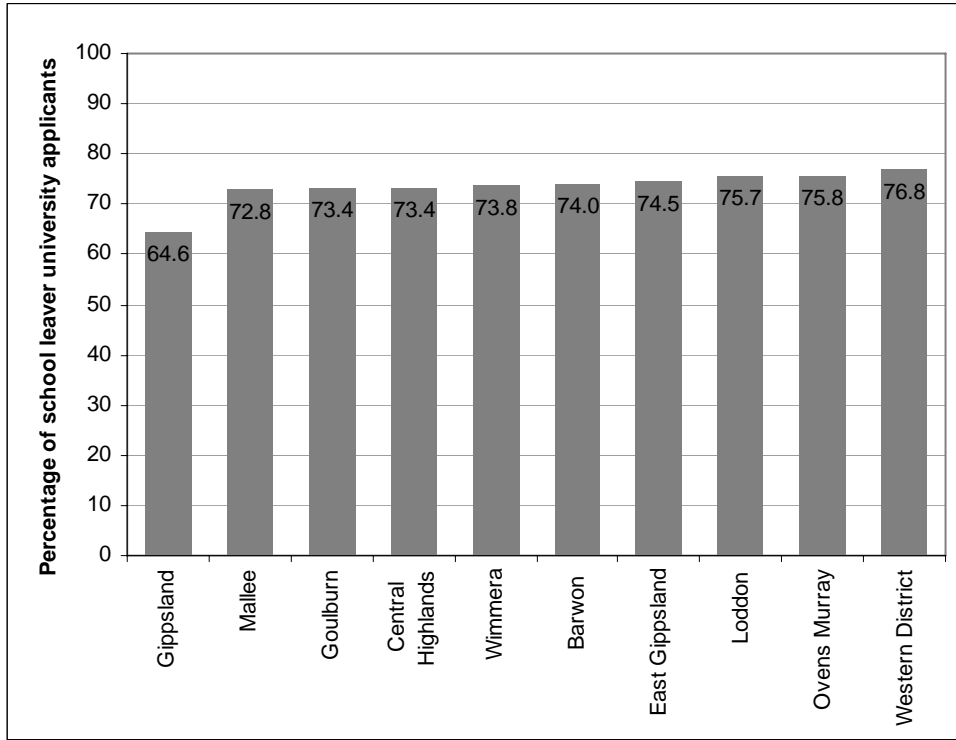
University applicants from interface areas were least likely to receive a university offer, with only 65.8 per cent of school leaver applicants offered a higher education place in 2007–08. They were also least likely to receive an offer in their first preference course (33.7%).<sup>80</sup>

Further geographic differences emerged when the data was examined in more detail. Figures 2.4 and 2.5 show the proportion of school leaver university applicants that received the offer of a university place in 2007–08, across the 17 metropolitan, interface and non-metropolitan regions.

With the exception of Gippsland, the university offer rate for each non-metropolitan region was above the state average of 72.6 per cent. In the Ovens Murray region, a relatively high offer rate off-set to some extent that region's lower application rate, while the high rate of offers to school leavers in the Western District built on a relatively high application rate. For the Gippsland region, the particularly low offer rate for university applicants (64.6%) compounded the effects of a low application rate.

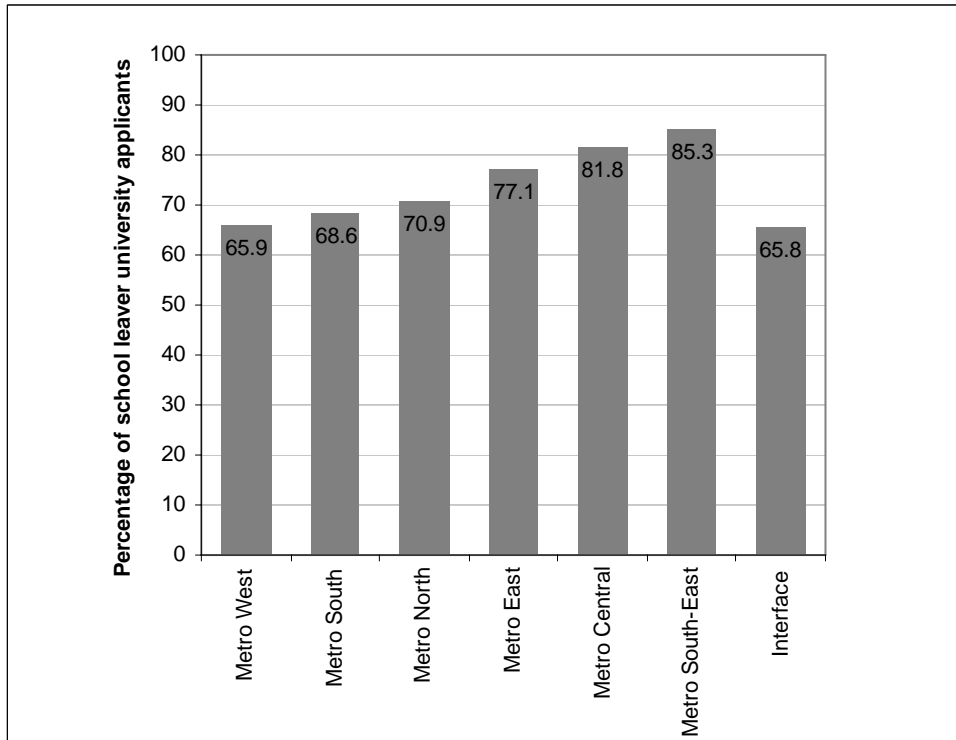
<sup>80</sup> Education and Training Committee analysis of 2007–08 VTAC data, May 2009.

Figure 2.4: Non-metropolitan school leaver applicants receiving university offers, by region (%) (2007–08)



Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 2007–08 VTAC data, May 2009.

Figure 2.5: Metropolitan and interface school leaver applicants receiving university offers, by region (%) (2007–08)



Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 2007–08 VTAC data, May 2009.

University offer rates across metropolitan and interface areas varied more widely than offer rates in non-metropolitan Victoria (refer Figure 2.5). The offer rate was highest in the South-East region (85.3%) and lowest in the West (65.9%) and the Interface (65.8%) regions. More than a quarter of school leaver applicants also missed out on a university place in the South and North metropolitan regions.

### *Offers to non-school leaver applicants*

The pattern of offers was somewhat different for non-school leaver university applicants (refer Table 2.3).

Table 2.3: Non-school leaver applicants receiving university offers, by applicant type and home location (%) (2007–08)

Applicant type	Metropolitan	Interface	Non-metropolitan	All Victoria
Previous school leaver	51.7	44.5	66.5	54.5
Mature age	66.3	66.8	74.6	67.6
Total non-school leaver	64.3	62.8	72.5	65.5

Note: 'Previous school leaver' applicants completed year 12 and received an ENTER in an earlier year, with this qualification the basis for their application. 'Mature age' applicants include all applicants applying on a basis other than a senior secondary qualification.

Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 2007–08 VTAC data, May 2009.

Consistent with a national pattern,<sup>81</sup> in 2007–08, Victorian non-school leaver university applicants were less successful in securing university offers than their school leaver counterparts. This was particularly so for those applying on the basis of earlier year 12 results, of whom only 54.5 per cent received a university offer. Interestingly, however, for both categories of non-school leaver applicants, those from non-metropolitan areas were more likely than metropolitan and interface applicants to receive an offer. This can probably be attributed at least in part to less intense competition for university places at non-metropolitan university campuses.

### *Overall offer rates*

The greater success in securing a university offer among non-school leaver applicants from non-metropolitan areas means that there is little difference in overall university offer rates between metropolitan and non-metropolitan applicants. In its submission to the inquiry, Deakin University reviewed data on offers, concluding that non-metropolitan and metropolitan applicants experience similar success in receiving the offer of a university place.<sup>82</sup> Deakin University therefore argued that application rates should be of greater concern than offer rates in any efforts to increase the rate of higher education participation among under-represented groups:

Hence the issue is really about the rate of application of rural and regional students for higher education study, rather than their capacity to win a place. The inequities which exist in the rate of application between metropolitan and rural and regional students are the main cause of the under-representation of the latter group in university study.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Undergraduate Applications, Offers and Acceptances 2008* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 2.

<sup>82</sup> Deakin University, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*

In the main, the Committee agrees with this assessment. However, it notes that closer analysis reveals particularly low offer rates in some non-metropolitan areas. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that efforts to improve application rates in under-represented areas would automatically yield the same rate of university offers. The Committee therefore believes that efforts to improve application rates must also be accompanied by strategies to maximise the likelihood that these applications will be successful.

### **Higher education enrolments and deferments**

Once an applicant receives the offer of a place in a higher education course, they must decide whether or not to accept the offer. An applicant who accepts the place they have been offered generally has the choice either of enrolling and beginning study, or deferring, usually for one year. Describing the outcomes of this process across different geographical areas, Ms Elaine Wenn, Director, Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre, observed:

Although we have got a number of differences in terms of ... the starting characteristics of the applicant population across the regions and the outcomes of the selection process across the regions, there would appear to be just as big, if not larger, differences across the regions in terms of what the successful applicants actually do, having received an offer.<sup>84</sup>

The Committee's analysis of enrolments and deferments across Victoria's metropolitan, interface and non-metropolitan regions supports this observation, revealing differences in both the overall acceptance of offers, and the proportion of offer recipients deferring their place in higher education.

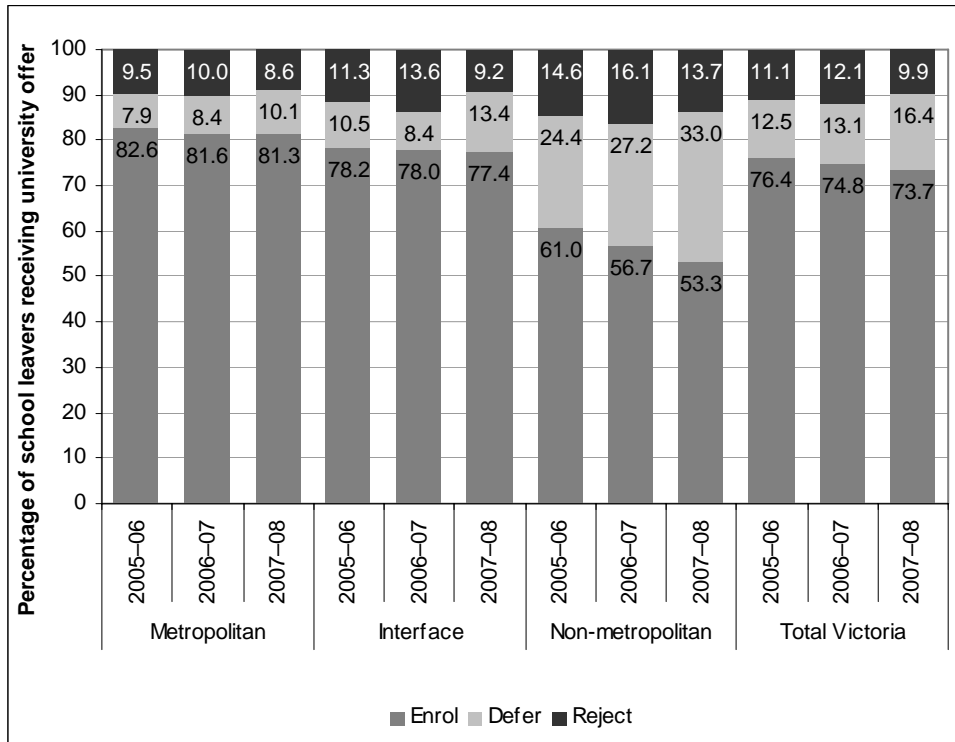
#### ***Overall acceptance rates among school leavers***

The Committee found that overall, the proportion of school leaver offer recipients that accepted a university place was generally high, and remained relatively stable over the three years for which data was obtained (refer Figure 2.6).

---

<sup>84</sup> Ms E. Wenn, Director, Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 5.

Figure 2.6: School leaver offer recipients enrolling in, deferring and rejecting university places, by home location (%) (2005–06 to 2007–08)



Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 2005–06, 2006–07 and 2007–08 VTAC data, May 2009.

When enrolments and deferrals are both seen as constituting acceptance of an offer, the percentage of school leaver offer recipients accepting university places was similar in metropolitan and interface areas. Overall acceptance rates were lower in non-metropolitan areas. In 2007–08, the overall acceptance rate for non-metropolitan applicants was 86.3 per cent, 3.8 percentage points below the Victorian average. Nearly 14 per cent rejected their university offer, compared to rejection rates of 8.6 per cent and 9.2 per cent in metropolitan and interface areas, respectively. Professor Richard Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, told the Committee that this higher rejection rate on the part of young people from non-metropolitan areas was a 'little known' aspect of differential access to higher education.<sup>85</sup>

### *Deferment rates among school leavers*

A more striking trend in Figure 2.6 is the high and increasing rate of deferment in non-metropolitan areas. In 2007–08, one in three school leavers from non-metropolitan areas who received a university offer deferred their studies. This represented a marked increase from almost one in four just two years earlier. In comparison, the deferment rate was 10.1 per cent for metropolitan school leavers with a university offer, and 13.4 per cent for those from interface areas. The disproportionately high deferment rate among non-metropolitan school leavers was a recurring theme throughout the inquiry, and is of concern to the Committee.

<sup>85</sup> Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 15.

## *Inquiry into Geographical Differences in Participation in Higher Education in Victoria*

The upwards trend in deferment has also been highlighted by findings from the On Track survey of Victorian school leavers. Table 2.4 presents On Track data on deferment rates over the period 2004 to 2008. On Track data shows deferments as a percentage of total year 12 completers, not just those offered a university place. Hence, deferment rates reported by On Track appear low in comparison to the Committee's analysis of VTAC data, which is based on school leavers who received the offer of a university place.

Table 2.4: Victorian year 12 completer deferments, by home location (%) (2004 to 2008)

Home location	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Metropolitan	5.1	5.0	6.0	6.5	8.2
Non-metropolitan	9.6	10.6	13.3	15.9	18.5

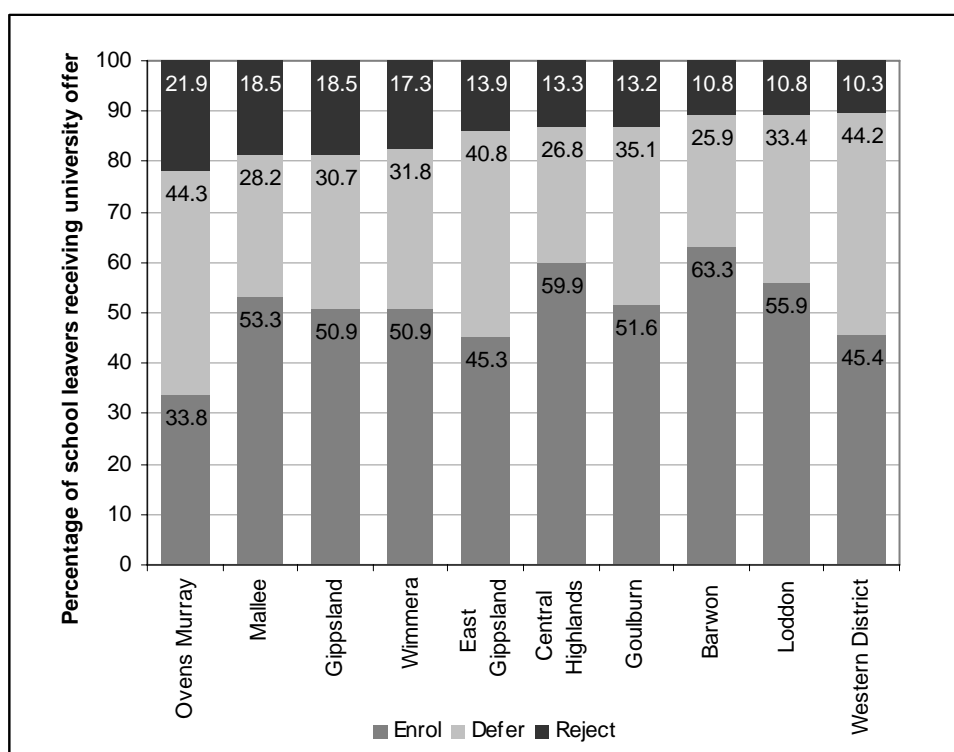
Note: Unlike the Committee's analysis of VTAC data, On Track data on school leavers includes year 12 completers who undertook the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning. On Track geographic analysis also differs from the Committee's, and therefore the interface area is not shown as a separate location.

Source: Compiled by the Education and Training Committee based on On Track survey statewide reports 2004 to 2008.

On Track data show that the rate of deferment has risen in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan Victoria over the past five years. While the increase has been slight in metropolitan areas, deferment has risen substantially in non-metropolitan Victoria, such that the disparity between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas has increased from 4.5 percentage points in 2004 to 10.3 percentage points in 2008. In other words, a year 12 graduate from non-metropolitan Victoria is now more than twice as likely to defer a university place than their metropolitan counterpart.

While the rate of deferment was high throughout non-metropolitan Victoria, analysis of VTAC data also reveals variations between non-metropolitan regions (refer Figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7: Non-metropolitan school leaver offer recipients enrolling in, deferring and rejecting university places, by region (%) (2007–08)



Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 2007–08 VTAC data, May 2009.

The proportion of non-metropolitan school leaver offer recipients deferring was highest in the Ovens Murray region, where a 44.3 per cent deferment rate for offers co-existed with a high offer rejection rate (21.9%). In 2007–08, two other non-metropolitan regions had more than 4 in 10 offer recipients defer their university studies: Western District (44.2%) and East Gippsland (40.8%).

The lowest non-metropolitan deferment rate (25.9%) was in the Barwon region. A closer analysis of Barwon's local areas shows that the region's lower deferment rate is the result of a relatively low (23.4%) deferment rate for Greater Geelong, while deferment rates were substantially higher in Colac Otway (43.4%), Queenscliffe (39.1%), Golden Plains (27.3%) and Surf Coast (27.0%).<sup>86</sup> Lower deferment in Greater Geelong can almost certainly be attributed to Deakin University's strong presence in Geelong and the city's proximity to Melbourne.

A closer examination of metropolitan and interface regions also revealed high deferment rates among school leavers in some local areas. While the overall deferment rate was 13.4 per cent for the interface region and 10.1 per cent in metropolitan areas, rates varied at the regional and local area level. In 2007–08, there were three metropolitan local areas in which more than one in five of those who received a university offer deferred: Glen Eira in Melbourne's south-east (21.4%), Port Phillip in central Melbourne (21.3%) and Frankston in the south (20.3%).<sup>87</sup> Glen Eira and Port Phillip are both high socioeconomic status areas with strong higher education participation, and it is likely that school leavers in these areas have somewhat different reasons for deferring than rural and regional school leavers. However, the higher rate of deferment in Frankston is of particular concern, as it also had the lowest university application (68.6%) and offer (59.3%) rates of any metropolitan local area.<sup>88</sup> Adjacent to Frankston in the Mornington Peninsula local area, 31.4 per cent of applicants who received a university offer deferred their place at university—a deferment rate that approaches that of non-metropolitan Victoria.<sup>89</sup>

While school leavers defer further study for many reasons, the Committee heard that the high cost of relocating and living away from home is a major contributor to the disproportionately high deferment rates in non-metropolitan areas. The relationship between financial considerations and young people's decision to defer their studies is discussed in Chapter 7.

### *Enrolment and deferment rates among non-school leavers*

The Committee also examined enrolment and deferment rates for non-school leaver applicants. Overall, non-school leaver applicants who received a university offer were less likely to accept a place in higher education than school leavers.<sup>90</sup> Among those applying on the basis of a previous year 12 qualification, 81.5 per cent of those with a university offer accepted their place, of whom 74.8 per cent enrolled and 6.7 per cent deferred.<sup>91</sup> There were only small differences across metropolitan, interface and non-metropolitan areas, with the overall acceptance rate highest among offer recipients from non-metropolitan areas.<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Education and Training Committee analysis of 2007–08 VTAC data, May 2009.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*

Among mature age applicants without a VCE qualification, acceptance was lower again, with 77.2 per cent of those receiving a university offer accepting their place.<sup>93</sup> Mature age applicants with a university offer were slightly less likely to enrol and slightly more likely to defer if they were from a non-metropolitan area, however, the differences were relatively small.<sup>94</sup> This analysis indicates that in terms of acceptance of university offers, and particularly in relation to deferment, geographical differences are most pronounced among school leaver applicants.

## Other post-school pathways

While the Committee's inquiry is focused primarily on participation in higher education, it is important that the transition to higher education is also understood within the wider context of other post-school destinations. This is important because most non-higher education pathways also make a valuable contribution to individuals and to society. Furthermore, because some pathways (such as higher level VET) are more likely than others to lead into later university study, immediate post-school pathways have implications for participation in higher education later in life. The On Track survey of Victorian school leavers is a valuable source of information on the full range of post-school destinations. Table 2.5 shows the destinations of young people who completed year 12 or its equivalent in 2007, based on On Track findings.

Table 2.5: Destinations of year 12 or equivalent completers (%) (2008)

Destination	Completers (including deferrers)
University	44.1
Certificate IV and above VET	14.4
Entry level VET	3.7
Apprenticeships/Traineeships	9.9
Employed	24.0
Looking for work	3.8

Note: Year 12 or equivalent completers who have deferred are shown here according to their main activity in early 2008.

Source: Sheldon Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria: Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008), 10 (adapted).

Findings from the On Track survey also reveal marked geographical differences in the destinations of Victorian school leavers. Figure 2.8 shows the destinations of students completing year 12 or equivalent in 2007, across 14 ABS Labour Force Regions.

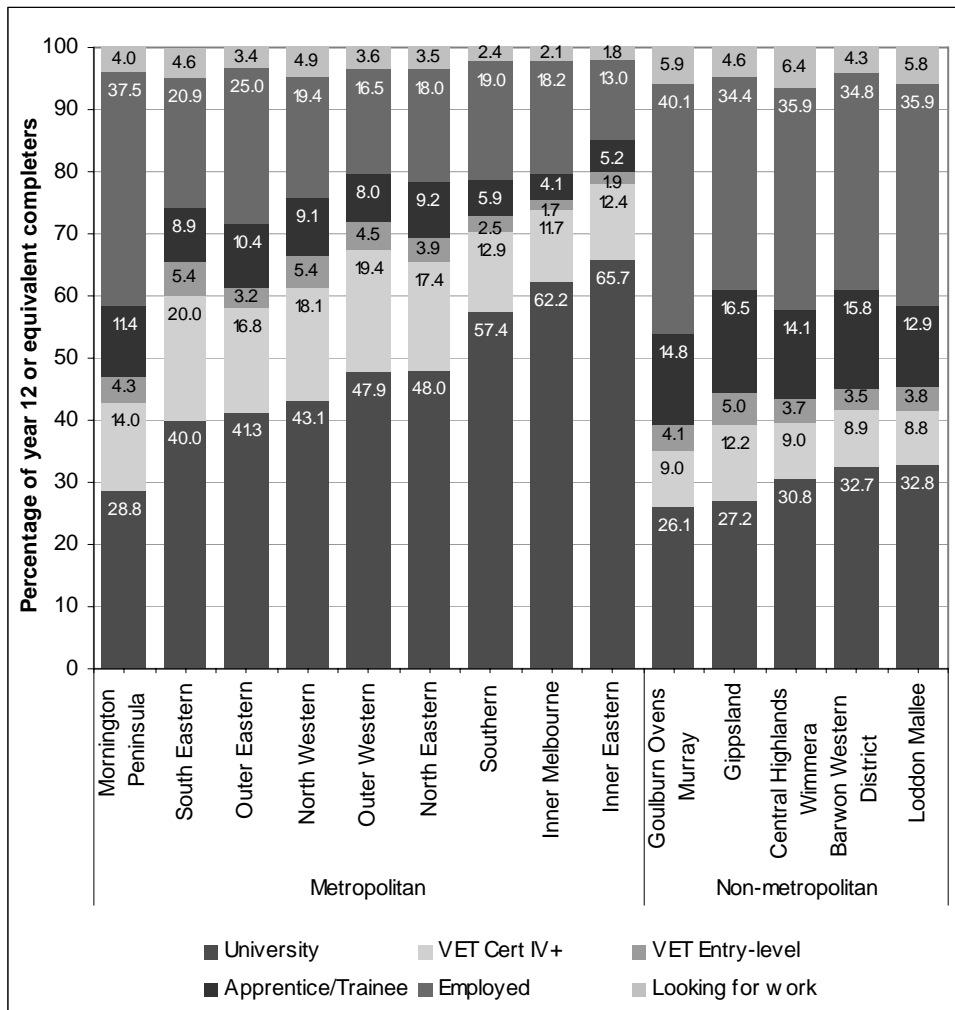
---

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*



Figure 2.8: Destinations of year 12 or equivalent completers, by ABS labour force region (%) (2008)



Source: Sheldon Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria: Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008), 77 (adapted).

In most metropolitan regions with lower levels of participation in higher education, relatively high movement into upper and entry level VET meant reasonably high overall transition to tertiary education. At the same time, medium levels of transition to VET in the Inner East and Inner Melbourne regions supplemented the state's highest rates of transition to university. In contrast, non-metropolitan regions and the Mornington Peninsula saw relatively low levels of transition to upper and entry level VET, compounding low levels of participation in higher education. In these regions there was higher take-up of apprenticeships and traineeships, as well as higher proportions in employment and looking for work.

### Higher education completions

The Committee was also interested in investigating geographic differences in the rate at which Victorian students follow their studies through to completion. Unfortunately, while administrative and survey data enable accurate and detailed analysis of application, offer, enrolment and deferment rates across geographical areas, it is more difficult to assess the proportion of students from different areas that successfully complete their university studies. Some students will change their course or institution, or may stop studying for a period, later resuming and completing their studies. Nonetheless, On Track, Australian

## *Inquiry into Geographical Differences in Participation in Higher Education in Victoria*

Government data and the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth provide some information about higher education completion rates throughout Victoria.

In addition to a yearly survey of school leavers, On Track includes a longitudinal component which tracks the pathways of a sample of Victorian young people who completed school in 2003. Approximately two-thirds (67.7%) of those who began university study in 2004 were still enrolled at university in 2007.<sup>95</sup> However, university students originally from non-metropolitan areas were less likely to still be studying at university than their metropolitan counterparts. While only 61.0 per cent of non-metropolitan university entrants were still at university, 71.8 per cent of metropolitan university entrants remained.<sup>96</sup> In part, this is because non-metropolitan entrants were more likely to have completed their course. However, a slightly higher rate of discontinuation was the main reason for the smaller proportion of non-metropolitan entrants still enrolled at university in 2007.<sup>97</sup>

Australian Government performance data offers more detailed information about the progress of university students from different geographical areas. Table 2.6 shows the year-to-year retention and success ratios for students from regional, remote and low socioeconomic status areas at Victorian universities. 'Retention' measures the proportion of students who continue their studies from the previous year, while 'success' measures the successful completion of units of study. A ratio of one indicates that students from a group are equally likely as those from other backgrounds to continue their studies or pass units. A higher or lower ratio indicates above average and below average outcomes, respectively.

Table 2.6: Success and retention ratios for regional, remote and low SES students at Victorian universities (2002 to 2006)

		2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Regional	Retention	0.99	1.00	0.99	1.00	0.99
	Success	1.01	1.01	1.01	1.02	0.99
Remote	Retention	0.91	0.80	0.86	0.87	0.87
	Success	0.98	0.98	1.00	1.00	0.99
Low SES	Retention	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Success	0.96	0.97	0.96	0.97	0.97

Note: Australian Government student statistics for Victorian universities do not include Australian Catholic University or Charles Sturt University's Albury-Wodonga campus.

Source: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Victoria: Equity Performance Indicators 2002 to 2006* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2006).

The data shows that students from regional and low socioeconomic status backgrounds at Victorian universities have been as likely or almost as likely as other students to continue their university studies from year-to-year. While students from low socioeconomic status areas pass enrolled units at a slightly lower rate than other students, over the period 2002 to 2005, regional students were more likely to pass than their peers. Students from remote areas also passed units at rates that approached or equalled the average. However, their retention ratio was lower, indicating a greater likelihood of drop-out. In its submission, the Australian Council for Educational Research noted that while retention of regional and urban

<sup>95</sup> Anne Walstab and Stephen Lamb, *On Track Longitudinal 2007 Results* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2007), 16.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*, 19.

students has remained stable over 15 years, retention of students from remote and isolated areas has declined.<sup>98</sup>

Researchers have also used data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth to examine the associations between student background and attrition (drop-out) and completion rates at Australian universities. Reviewing the findings of several studies, Marks noted that Australian students from urban areas have been found to be slightly more likely to complete a course than those from non-urban areas.<sup>99</sup> Among students from non-urban areas, one study found that completion was lowest among students from isolated regions, while another found that students from 'large provincial cities' were most likely to leave without completing, while those from 'small provincial cities' were least likely to do so.<sup>100</sup> Marks concluded that 'there were no clear metropolitan/non-metropolitan differences in course completion since there was much variation in course completion among students from non-metropolitan areas'.<sup>101</sup> He also found that once a student has enrolled at university, socioeconomic status has only a small influence on that student's chances of completing a course.<sup>102</sup>

The evidence regarding the impact of geographical background on retention and success at university is somewhat mixed, in part due to the different sources of data and the different methods used to produce estimates. The Committee nevertheless received anecdotal evidence to suggest that geographic differences may exist in higher education completion rates across Victoria. Factors supporting transitions to university and the successful completion of higher education courses are discussed in Chapter 8.

---

## Conclusion and recommendations

---

Evidence from a variety of sources demonstrates that there are substantial and long-standing differences in the rate in which people from different geographical areas participate in higher education. The Committee found that these differences arise at different points in the participation process.

There are marked differences in higher education application rates within and across the metropolitan, non-metropolitan and interface regions of Victoria. On average, non-metropolitan school leavers are only slightly less likely to receive a university offer than their metropolitan peers. However, there are substantial differences in enrolment, deferment and rejection rates throughout Victoria. The most striking trend identified by the Committee was the high and increasing rate of deferment in non-metropolitan areas. The disproportionately high rate of deferment among non-metropolitan school leavers was a recurring theme throughout the inquiry, and is of concern to the Committee.

Specific issues associated with participation in higher education among those from interface areas emerged during the inquiry. These areas typically have low university application rates, coinciding with low rates of university offers. This suggests that although interface areas are often treated by policymakers in the same way as metropolitan areas, they share similar disadvantages in terms of access to higher education as non-metropolitan areas.

---

<sup>98</sup> Australian Council for Educational Research, Written Submission, March 2008, 3.

<sup>99</sup> Gary N. Marks, *Completing University: Characteristics and Outcomes of Completing and Non-completing Students*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 51 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2007), 3.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, 27.

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*

Within Melbourne, some lower socioeconomic status areas also share similarities with the interface areas, with low higher education application and offer rates.

The Committee also considered participation in higher education within the context of alternative post-school pathways. In this regard, the On Track survey of Victorian school leavers is a valuable source of information. The Committee believes that the Victorian Government should maintain On Track and improve it where necessary to ensure that it continues to inform policy and programs at the local, regional and state levels.

Following two recent Australian Government reviews relevant to the higher education sector, the Australian Government recently announced a reform agenda aimed at transforming the scale, potential and quality of the nation's universities. The Victorian Government has recently announced that it will develop a new Higher Education Plan, which will inform the Victorian Government's contribution to the implementation of national reforms, and provide for the substantial growth in tertiary education provision predicted for the period to 2025.

The Committee believes that the development of the Higher Education Plan presents an invaluable opportunity for the Victorian Government to implement policies and programs aimed at raising overall participation rates, while simultaneously improving equity in higher education in Victoria. In this regard, the Committee recommends that the Victorian Government set participation targets for under-represented groups, particularly those in rural and regional, interface and low socioeconomic status metropolitan areas. These targets should be supported through Victorian Government policies and programs aimed at raising aspirations, enhancing entry prospects, increasing motivation to accept university offers, and reducing the practical barriers to participation. The Committee believes that the On Track survey of Victorian school leavers will be important in informing the Higher Education Plan, and in monitoring its effectiveness in raising participation in higher education by under-represented groups.

## **Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the Victorian Government work with universities and the Australian Government to support the national participation targets of:**
- 40 per cent attainment of a qualification at bachelor level or above among Australians aged 25–34 by 2025; and
  - 20 per cent of commencing undergraduate enrolments from low socioeconomic status backgrounds by 2020.
- 2.2 That, as part of its new Higher Education Plan, the Victorian Government set targets for participation in higher education among under-represented groups, particularly those in rural and regional, interface and low socioeconomic status metropolitan areas.**

2.3 That the Victorian Government maintain and continually improve the annual On Track survey of Victorian school leavers and the On Track Longitudinal Study, in order to inform education policy and programs at the local, regional and state levels.



# School achievement and completion

---

A good higher education system must sit on a strong school system, otherwise it is going to be wobbly.<sup>103</sup>

---

Successful study at university rests on a foundation of knowledge and skills developed over several years of prior education. Consequently, school achievement and completion are relevant to higher education participation. Geographical and socioeconomic differences in academic achievement, and in the proportion of students completing year 12, are fundamental causes of geographical differences in higher education participation rates. With this in mind, the Committee has considered levels of academic achievement and school completion rates throughout Victoria. The Committee also examined the different options for completing year 12 available to Victorian students, focusing on their different implications for participation in higher education.

---

## Achievement at school

---

Participation in higher education is dependent on achievement at school, both during the compulsory years and in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). Professor Richard James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, argued that achievement at school is far more crucial to participation in higher education than is commonly acknowledged:

... many people think the differential access to higher education is to do with the perceived cost or the actual cost of going on to university. In fact it is far more closely related to levels of school achievement as far as we can tell from the data. Cost is an issue, of course, for some people, but cost comes in as a consideration once people have got to the point of transition—once they have got close to the point of considering university as an option. But many of the under-represented groups that I am talking about have already left school by year 10 or year 11. University has not been on the horizon for a long time.<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 17.

<sup>104</sup> Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 11.

Achievement at school, in the early and middle years of schooling and in year 12, is therefore a precondition to higher education participation for most students.

### **Achievement during compulsory schooling**

Achievement during the early and middle years of schooling has important implications for higher education participation, because of its associations with school completion, senior secondary study choices, academic achievement in the VCE, and the development of higher education aspirations.

Research in Australia and internationally has consistently found that low achievement during compulsory schooling is strongly associated with early school leaving.<sup>105</sup> A 2008 study based on Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) data found that low achievement in the four domains of reading literacy, mathematical literacy, scientific literacy and problem solving was associated with an increased likelihood of non-completion of school.<sup>106</sup> According to the study, more than a third of students in the lowest achievement quartile were non-completers, compared with fewer than five per cent in the highest achievement quartile.<sup>107</sup> This study accords with findings from earlier LSAY research which found that student achievement in literacy and numeracy was 'probably the strongest correlate' of year 12 participation.<sup>108</sup>

The relationship between low achievement and non-completion is also apparent from young people's explanations as to why they did not complete school. The 2008 On Track survey of early school leavers revealed that four out of ten early leavers cited not coping with schoolwork or falling behind at school as a reason for their decision to leave.<sup>109</sup> The contributions of inquiry participants echoed the findings from previous research on early school leaving and achievement at school. Young people who had left school before completing year 12 referred to difficulty with school work,<sup>110</sup> a lack of one-on-one assistance,<sup>111</sup> unsuitable subjects offered,<sup>112</sup> lack of relevance of school learning,<sup>113</sup> and incompatible teaching and learning styles<sup>114</sup> as factors in their decision making. Professor James argued that if school achievement levels are lifted, school completion improves, giving younger people greater options to participate in higher education.<sup>115</sup>

Achievement at earlier stages of schooling also has implications for study choices in the final years of school, which in turn affects participation in higher education. Research has consistently found that lower achievement is associated with a greater likelihood of participation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) activities, including VET in Schools

---

<sup>105</sup> Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), Written Submission, May 2008, 12.

<sup>106</sup> David D. Curtis and Julie McMillan, *School Non-completers: Profiles and Initial Destinations*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 54 (Camberwell: ACER, 2008), 8.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Gary Marks and others, *Patterns of participation in year 12 and higher education in Australia: Trends and issues*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 17 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2000), 11.

<sup>109</sup> Sheldon Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria: Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009), 95.

<sup>110</sup> Ms S. Clark, Student, Southern Grampians Adult Education, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 27.

<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Mr J. Jonson, VCAL Student and Young Leader Program Participant, Morrison House, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 11.

<sup>113</sup> Mr N. Ainger, Student, Southern Grampians Adult Education, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 26.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 11.



in years 11 and 12.<sup>116</sup> Earlier achievement is also related to subject choices within the academic senior secondary curriculum. Recent LSAY research has found that those who had been among the highest achievers in year 9 were more likely to study physical sciences and advanced mathematics subjects in year 12. They were also more likely to undertake traditional humanities subjects.<sup>117</sup> In turn, students undertaking these subjects are more likely to go on to participate in higher education.<sup>118</sup> Students in the lower achievement quartiles were more likely to take up subjects in business, economics, technology, arts and home sciences.<sup>119</sup>

For those who reach year 12, low achievement in the compulsory years of schooling predicts low achievement in senior secondary school, and is therefore a precursor to a lower likelihood of participation in higher education. The skills gained in the early and middle years of schooling lay the foundation for achievement in year 12. Ms Marg O'Shea, Careers Coordinator at Copperfield College in Melbourne's outer west, set out this argument:

In relation to the variation in rates of participation in higher education, in my experience part of that is due to a skills issue — literacy particularly and academic skills. There are a significant number of students who when they get to their senior years of schooling do not have the skill levels to achieve the ENTER scores to get into university.<sup>120</sup>

Research supports this assertion. Analysis of LSAY data has found that achievement in literacy and numeracy in year 9 is a key determinant of Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER).<sup>121</sup> A 2001 LSAY study found that students in the highest achievement quartile in year 9 also achieved the highest median TER, while the lowest year 9 achievers attained the lowest median TER.<sup>122</sup> Related to this, a subsequent LSAY study found that students who applied for university in year 12 but did not receive an offer generally had lower achievement in literacy and numeracy in year 9.<sup>123</sup>

Finally, the Committee heard that achievement during compulsory schooling is related to the development of aspirations for university study. Professor Richard Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, told the Committee that until achievement is raised, university aspirations will continue to be low in non-metropolitan and low socioeconomic status areas.<sup>124</sup> On Track and LSAY have shown that students with higher levels of achievement are more likely to have higher aspirations for further study.<sup>125</sup> This relationship between achievement and aspirations is not

<sup>116</sup> A number of these studies are reviewed in Sue Fullarton, *VET in Schools: Participation and Pathways*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 21 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2001), 9–10.

<sup>117</sup> Sue Fullarton and others, *Patterns of Participation in Year 12*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 33 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2003), 34.

<sup>118</sup> Sue Thomson, *Pathways from School to Further Education or Work: Examining the Consequences of Year 12 Course Choices*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 42 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2005), 30–32.

<sup>119</sup> Sue Fullarton and others, *Patterns of Participation in Year 12*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 33 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2003), 34.

<sup>120</sup> Ms M. O'Shea, Careers Coordinator, Copperfield College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 3.

<sup>121</sup> Gary Marks, Julie McMillan and Kylie Hillman, *Tertiary Entrance Performance: The Role of Student Background and School Factors*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 22 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2001), 13.

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Gary N. Marks, *Unmet Demand? Characteristics and Activities of University Applicants Not Offered a Place*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 46 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2005), 6.

<sup>124</sup> Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 17.

<sup>125</sup> Sheldon Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria: Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009), 13; Sheldon Rothman and Julie McMillan, *Influences on Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 36 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2003), 9.

straightforward, however, and it appears that each can influence the other.<sup>126</sup> The way in which aspirations influence higher education participation is discussed in Chapter 4.

## Achievement in the Victorian Certificate of Education

Throughout the inquiry, the Committee heard from senior secondary students who aspired to university study, and who were acutely aware of the need to achieve a high ENTER to gain entry to their preferred course.<sup>127</sup> Schools may help students to align their efforts at school with ENTER requirements in a chosen course, as described by one student from Melbourne's west:

I just had a mid-year exam. I got my mid-year score, which was pretty good. There are teachers here who help us predict our ENTER. I got my ENTER, and I have got to work a bit harder to reach my goal.<sup>128</sup>

This and many other personal accounts demonstrated students' strong awareness of the importance of the ENTER in gaining access to higher education courses.

Research supports students' perceptions, showing that ENTER is strongly related to higher education offers and enrolments. LSAY research shows that as TERs decline, so too does the likelihood of receiving a university offer.<sup>129</sup> A study of 2001 school leavers found that the mean TER of students who applied to university and did not receive an offer was 54, compared to a mean of 70 for the sample as a whole, and a mean of 80 for those who enrolled at university in either 2002 or 2003.<sup>130</sup> The Committee's analysis of VTAC data showed the same relationship between a student's ENTER and their success in securing a university offer.<sup>131</sup>

On Track data provides another way of assessing the relationship between achievement during the VCE and university entrance, revealing a 'very strong' relationship between performance in the General Achievement Test (GAT)<sup>132</sup> and university entry.<sup>133</sup> Of those students who completed the VCE in 2007 and who were placed in the top quartile of GAT achievement, three-quarters (75.7%) were enrolled in university in early 2008. In contrast, only 16.9 per cent in the lowest GAT achievement quartile had enrolled in a university course.<sup>134</sup>

As well as directly affecting access to university, achievement in senior secondary school and perceptions of academic ability are related to the future intention to participate in higher education. As TERs decline, the likelihood of applying to university declines,<sup>135</sup> indicating lower aspirations for university study and/or doubts about the likelihood of securing an offer or being successful in higher education studies. Higher TERs are also associated with a

---

<sup>126</sup> Sheldon Rothman and Julie McMillan, *Influences on Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 36 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2003), 9.

<sup>127</sup> For example, Mr A. Meyers, Year 11 Student, Sunshine College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 11; Ms S. Elliott, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Written Submission, April 2008, 12; Mr T. Szmidel, Vice-Chairman, Colac Otway Youth Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 22; Ms C. Manley, Year 12 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 14.

<sup>128</sup> Mr D. Nguyen, Year 12 Student, Sunshine College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 12.

<sup>129</sup> Gary N. Marks, *Unmet Demand? Characteristics and Activities of University Applicants Not Offered a Place*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 46 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2005), 9.

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*, 16.

<sup>131</sup> Education and Training Committee analysis of 2007–08 VTAC data, May 2009.

<sup>132</sup> The General Achievement Test is a general skills and knowledge test undertaken by VCE students.

<sup>133</sup> Sheldon Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria: Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009), 14.

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Gary N. Marks, *Unmet Demand? Characteristics and Activities of University Applicants Not Offered a Place*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 46 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2005), 9.

greater likelihood of enrolling after receiving an offer,<sup>136</sup> perhaps suggesting that students with higher levels of academic achievement have stronger university aspirations than lower achieving applicants. In the 2008 On Track survey, approximately one in five school leavers (21.0%) who were not participating in further education or training said that they were unsure of their ability to cope with tertiary study, although this was not the most common reason for non-participation.<sup>137</sup> Among those not participating in further education or training, lower achievement in the GAT was also associated with less interest in further study and a stronger preference for employment.<sup>138</sup>

---

### Year 12 completion

---

Increasing the rate of school completion is currently a central objective of educational policy in Victoria and other Australian states and territories. The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, made by all Australian education ministers in 2008, identifies the rate of year 12 or equivalent completion as one of three key areas in which Australian school education requires 'significant improvement'.<sup>139</sup>

The Victorian Government, in its ten year policy statement *Growing Victoria Together: A Vision for Victoria to 2010 and Beyond*, set a target of 90 per cent attainment of year 12 or equivalent among young people by 2010, with a number of initiatives aimed at progress towards this target.<sup>140</sup> This focus is reaffirmed in the 2008 *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development*. One of six major goals outlined in the blueprint is for an increase in the number of young people completing year 12 or equivalent.<sup>141</sup>

### Options for completion

Victorian students have four options for completing year 12 or its equivalent:

1. Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE)
2. International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma program
3. Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) at Intermediate level or higher
4. Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualification at Certificate II level or higher.

Senior secondary qualifications can be completed in a range of different settings. Schools are the main providers of the VCE and IB, although some TAFE institutes also offer VCE studies. Students can undertake the VCAL at school or at approximately 50 Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector providers.

---

<sup>136</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Sheldon Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria; Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009), 56.

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*, 57–58.

<sup>139</sup> Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Melbourne: MCEETYA, 2008), 5.

<sup>140</sup> Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), *Written Submission*, May 2008, 19.

<sup>141</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development* (Melbourne: DEECD, 2008), 2.

### *Victorian Certificate of Education*

The VCE is the main senior secondary qualification in Victoria. Students completing the VCE may select from more than 90 subjects within nine core curriculum areas: the Arts; English; Health and Physical Education; Languages other than English (LOTE); Mathematics; Science; Business Studies; Humanities; and Technology. Each VCE 'study' is broken up into four units numbered 1, 2, 3 and 4.<sup>142</sup> To complete the VCE, students must satisfactorily complete at least 16 units, including:

- At least three units from the English Group, comprising Foundation English, English, English Language, English as a Second Language and Literature. No more than two of these units may be at the Unit 1 and 2 level.
- At least three sequences of Units 3 and 4, from either VCE studies or VCE VET programs.<sup>143</sup>

Each unit of VCE study has between two and four outcomes that must be achieved in order to gain satisfactory completion. It is up to schools to decide whether or not a student has satisfactorily completed the units in their VCE program. Satisfactory completion is reported as an 'S', and not meeting the requirements for satisfactory completion is reported as an 'N'.<sup>144</sup> The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority reports that in 2008, 96.6 per cent of students eligible to complete the VCE did so satisfactorily.<sup>145</sup>

In addition to gaining the 'S' or 'N' awarded by the school, students typically gain study scores for their VCE studies by undertaking a combination of school-based and external assessments.<sup>146</sup> A study score shows how a student performed in a VCE study or VCE VET program, relative to all other students doing that same study. It is calculated to a maximum of 50 using the scores achieved in each of three graded assessments for the study.<sup>147</sup>

Completion of VCE does not necessarily lead to an ENTER. To be awarded an ENTER, and therefore be eligible to apply for university, students must complete both Units 3 and 4 of one English study (from the group above) and a sequence of Units 3 and 4 in three other studies. They must also attain a study score for these.<sup>148</sup> Students may combine VCE studies and VET programs to apply for an ENTER, although the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre places certain restrictions on some combinations.<sup>149</sup>

The VCE is the main pathway into higher education for senior secondary students in Victoria, and is accepted for entry to all Australian universities. While the VCE has an academic focus, students may also choose to undertake vocational qualifications as part of their VCE.

---

<sup>142</sup> Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 'Where to now? Guide to the VCE, VCAL and Apprenticeships & Traineeships for 2010: Glossary,' VCAA, <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vcaa/vce/publications/wheretow/vceglossary.htm> (accessed 2 July 2009).

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *Senior Secondary Certificate Statistical Information 2008* (Melbourne: VCAA, 2009).

<sup>146</sup> Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 'Where to now? Guide to the VCE, VCAL and Apprenticeships & Traineeships for 2010: What must I do to get my VCE?,' VCAA, <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vce/publications/wheretow/howtograduate.htm> (accessed 2 July 2009).

<sup>147</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*

### *International Baccalaureate Diploma*

The IB is an educational program administered by the International Baccalaureate Organisation, a non-profit educational institution based in Geneva. The IB offers programs at three levels: Primary Years, Middle Years and the two-year Diploma program for senior secondary students. All three levels are offered throughout Australia, mostly in non-government schools.<sup>150</sup>

The IB Diploma was accredited in 2006 by the then Victorian Qualifications Authority as a Victorian senior secondary certificate of education. It is offered by 10 schools in Melbourne and four in regional Victoria,<sup>151</sup> with 629 Victorian students undertaking the IB in 2008, representing a nine per cent increase from 2007.<sup>152</sup> The IB Diploma offers a broad curriculum, including the student's first language, a second language, mathematics, science, humanities and arts, as well as a Theory of Knowledge program which fosters cross-cultural understanding and reflects the IB's core educational principles.<sup>153</sup> In addition, IB Diploma students complete 150 hours of community service, sports activities and a creative pursuit. Unlike the VCE, the IB Diploma program does not include VET options.<sup>154</sup>

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development describes the IB Diploma as being 'designed for students with university pathways in mind'.<sup>155</sup> Students who qualify for the IB Diploma receive a notional ENTER, calculated by the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre and used to compare the results of applicants who have studied under different Australian educational systems. The IB Diploma ENTER is accepted by universities in Australia, and overseas universities also use IB exam results in their admission processes.<sup>156</sup>

### *Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning*

The VCAL is a senior secondary certificate with an applied learning focus, developed as an alternative to the VCE. The VCAL was developed in response to the Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria, conducted in 2000. A key finding of the review was that upper secondary qualifications need to cater to a wider range of students than in the past, providing for students with diverse educational experiences and skill levels.<sup>157</sup> As well as arguing for greater flexibility within the VCE, the review suggested the development of an alternative senior secondary learning program to cater for a small proportion of students.<sup>158</sup>

Students can enrol in the VCAL at either the Foundation, Intermediate or Senior level, although only Intermediate and Senior VCAL are considered to constitute year 12 or equivalent qualifications.<sup>159</sup> At each level, the VCAL combines classroom learning with

---

<sup>150</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), *Provision of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program in Victorian Government Schools: Guidelines* (Melbourne: DEECD, 2008), 3.

<sup>151</sup> Victorian Government, 'Secondary Schools,' Live in Victoria, <http://www.liveinvictoria.vic.gov.au/living-in-victoria/education-and-childcare/secondary-schools> (accessed 2 July 2009).

<sup>152</sup> Miki Perkins, 'International Baccalaureate students set to go,' *The Age*, 5 January 2009.

<sup>153</sup> International Baccalaureate, 'Theory of Knowledge,' IB, <http://www.ibo.org/diploma/curriculum/core/knowledge/index.cfm> (accessed 2 July 2009).

<sup>154</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), *Provision of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program in Victorian Government Schools: Guidelines* (Melbourne: DEECD, 2008), 3.

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Peter Kirby, *Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria: Final Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education, Employment and Training, 2000), 78.

<sup>158</sup> *ibid.*, 81.

<sup>159</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), 'Youth Guarantee – Frequently Asked Questions', <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/sensecyouth/delivery/youthguarantee-fs.htm> (accessed 19 June 2009).

options such as TAFE study, structured workplace learning and school-based apprenticeships. While the VCAL is flexible and tailored to meet individual students' interests and requirements, each student's learning program must include units from each of four curriculum strands: Literacy and Numeracy Skills; Industry Specific Skills; Work Related Skills; and Personal Development Skills. The VCAL aims to help students develop knowledge and vocational skills that prepare them for work and participation in the community. It also assists students to develop the knowledge and skills to make informed vocational choices and facilitates pathways to employment and/or further learning.<sup>160</sup>

### ***VET in Schools***

The VET in Schools Program was introduced in 1994 to expand opportunities and improve outcomes in post-compulsory schooling by enabling students to complete nationally recognised VET certificates while at school.<sup>161</sup> Through the program, students undertake vocationally oriented subjects as part of their VCE or VCAL studies. Studies that can be completed as part of the VET in Schools Program include: VET subjects undertaken as part of the VCE studies (which may contribute to the student's ENTER); other vocational education studies; and training undertaken as part of a School-Based Apprenticeship.<sup>162</sup> Schools have varied arrangements for the delivery of VET in Schools, but these typically involve partnerships with industry and training providers including TAFE institutes and Group Training Organisations.

### **Year 12 completion and higher education participation**

In terms of higher education, successful completion of school can be seen as the 'first hurdle' for young people: generally speaking, it is a prerequisite to having the option of participating in university study.<sup>163</sup> Consequently, young people who do not complete year 12 generally do not come to the point of considering whether to apply for or accept a place in higher education.

Various inquiry participants pointed to the association between year 12 completion rates and participation in higher education, arguing that the lower university participation rates among young people in particular areas can be attributed in part to lower school retention and completion rates in those areas.<sup>164</sup> Deakin University set out this argument in its submission:

... if rural, regional and isolated students remain in school until year 12 at a much lower rate than their metropolitan peers, the applicant pool of school leavers for these students will be relatively much smaller. School retention is therefore a major influence on the lower application rates for higher education in rural Victoria.<sup>165</sup>

---

<sup>160</sup> Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *VCAL Information Sheet: The VCAL: An Introduction* (Melbourne: VCAA, 2008).

<sup>161</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), 'Vocational Education and Training in Schools,' DEECD, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/sensecyouth/qualsprograms/vet.htm> (accessed 10 July 2009).

<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 17; Rural Education Forum Australia, Written Submission, April 2008, 3; Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, May 2008, 2–3.

<sup>164</sup> For example, Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, May 2008, 3; Deakin University, Written Submission, March 2008, 5–6; Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Written Submission, March 2008, 3; The Hon J. Gillard, Australian Government Minister for Education, Written Submission, April 2008, 15–16; Mr M. Horn, Senior Manager, Research and Policy Centre, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 53; Australian Council for Educational Research, Written Submission, March 2008, 2; South West Association of Post Primary Principals, Written Submission, April 2008, 5; Hobsons Bay City Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 3; University of Ballarat, Appendix to Written Submission, March 2008, 1.

<sup>165</sup> Deakin University, Written Submission, March 2008, 6.

This link between retention at school and transition to university has also been emphasised in the research literature on higher education participation.<sup>166</sup>

However, while school completion rates are clearly related to higher education participation rates, different year 12 or equivalent qualifications are associated with different post-school pathways. On Track data allows examination of the post-secondary destinations of 2007 school completers from four different study streams: VCE Non-VET; VCE VET; VCE VCAL; and VCAL only (refer Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Destinations of year 12 or equivalent completers, by senior certificate/study strand (2008)

Destination	VCE Non-VET		VCE VET		VCE VCAL		VCAL Only		All	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
University	12,100	52.5	2,365	30.1	45	2.4	0	0.0	14,510	44.1
VET Cert. IV+	3,066	13.3	1,438	18.3	220	11.7	5	8.2	4,729	14.4
VET Entry level	715	3.1	320	4.1	181	9.6	7	11.5	1,223	3.7
Apprentice	700	3.0	640	8.1	550	29.1	20	32.8	1,910	5.8
Trainee	792	3.4	422	5.4	121	6.4	4	6.6	1,339	4.1
Employed	4,976	21.6	2,318	29.5	588	31.2	16	26.2	7,898	24.0
Looking for work	718	3.1	352	4.5	182	9.6	9	14.8	1,261	3.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>23,067</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>7,855</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1,887</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>32,870</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Sheldon Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria: Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009), 19 (adapted).

Data from Table 3.1 informs the following discussion of the destinations of VCE students, dual-certificate students and VCAL students.

### *Destinations of VCE students*

On Track data shows, unsurprisingly, that VCE completers have the highest level of transition into higher education. In 2008, just over half (52.5%) of all 2007 VCE non-VET completers had gone on to university. In contrast, no VCAL completers and only 2.4 per cent of dual-certificate VCE VCAL students enrolled in a university course.

At the same time, different types of VCE studies are associated with a different likelihood of participating in higher education. Of all 2007 VCE completers, those who only undertook non-VET studies were substantially more likely to enrol in university than those who undertook VET studies as part of the VCE (52.5% compared to 30.1%, respectively). VCE students who completed VET studies were somewhat more likely to enrol in entry level and upper level VET courses, and also had higher participation in apprenticeships, traineeships and employment, compared with students completing only VCE non-VET studies. Other research has found that Victorian VET in Schools students are more likely than non-VET students to choose vocational post-school pathways.<sup>167</sup>

This pattern of lower transition to higher education among VCE students undertaking VET in Schools may support the contention that VET options can divert students away from more academic pathways that may lead to higher education. This view was set out by the

<sup>166</sup> Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne, *Participation and Equity: A review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people* (Canberra: Universities Australia, 2008), 26–28.

<sup>167</sup> Reviewed in John Polesel and others, *VET in Schools: A post-compulsory education perspective* (Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2004), 18–19.

University of Ballarat, which argued that while participation in VET in Schools does not preclude entry into higher education, there is a tendency to stream students towards more vocational outcomes.<sup>168</sup>

On the other hand, the movement of VET in Schools students into more vocational post-school pathways may reflect the preferences and characteristics of students that choose to take up VET in Schools, rather than a process of 'streaming'. Australian research into the characteristics of VET in Schools students has found that while the program can, and does, appeal to university-bound students, it is primarily accessed by less academic students, with students in the two lowest achievement quintiles over-represented among VET in Schools students.<sup>169</sup>

Participants drew the Committee's attention to research that suggests that participation in VET in Schools may actually increase the likelihood of participation in higher education for some types of student.<sup>170</sup> One 2001 study compared the destinations of VET and non-VET students with a similar achievement profile. It found that academically weak students who participated in VET studies were more likely to progress to further study, including university, than those who did not.<sup>171</sup> However, this finding has not been supported by recent On Track data. Both the 2007 and 2008 On Track surveys show that VCE students in the lowest quartile of achievement were less likely to go on to university if they participated in VET in Schools. VCE students from the highest achievement quartile who participated in VET were also less likely to enrol in university than their high-achieving non-VET peers.<sup>172</sup>

### *Destinations of dual-certificate students*

A growing number of students are completing both the VCE and the VCAL. For dual-certificate students who completed their studies in 2007, Table 3.1 shows that the most common post-school destination was employment, accounting for 31.2 per cent of completers. The next most popular destinations were apprenticeships (29.1%) and upper level VET (11.7%). A small proportion (2.4%) of VCE VCAL students went on to university study, indicating that while most VCAL students choose a vocational destination, dual-certificate study can be a pathway to higher education.

### *Destinations of VCAL students*

On Track data in Table 3.1 shows that students who completed the VCAL in 2007 had higher rates of transition into the workforce (employed and looking for work) and employment-based training as apprentices and trainees when compared to other year 12 completers. They were more likely to take up entry level VET courses, but less likely to enrol in VET courses at Certificate IV level and above. Inquiry participants acknowledged that while a very small number of VCAL students pursue university study, the VCAL is generally seen by VCAL providers and students as a pathway into work or further VET study.<sup>173</sup> This

---

<sup>168</sup> University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 18.

<sup>169</sup> John Polesel and others, *VET in Schools: A post-compulsory education perspective* (Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2004), 16.

<sup>170</sup> Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, March 2008, 5; Centre for Regional Development, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 5.

<sup>171</sup> John Polesel, 'Vocational education and training in schools in Victoria: An appraisal six years down the track,' *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* 53, no. 2 (2001): 325-329.

<sup>172</sup> Richard Teese, Kira Clarke and John Polesel, *The On Track Survey 2007 Statewide Report: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2007), 18.

<sup>173</sup> Centre for Regional Development, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 5; South West Association of Post Primary Principals, Written Submission, April 2008, 6; University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 18.



assumption underpins the design of the program and reflects the preferences of a majority of VCAL students.

According to On Track data, no 2007 VCAL completers were enrolled at university in early 2008, although the Committee notes that of the previous cohort of VCAL completers, 0.7 per cent made a transition to university study.<sup>174</sup> While movement from the VCAL to university study is minimal, it appears that a very small number of VCAL graduates enrol in a higher education course. This indicates that a small group of VCAL students has, or develops, the inclination to undertake university study. The Committee heard from one such student from Hamilton in Victoria's south-west. Ms Laura Scott was combining the VCAL with a Diploma of Business and Legal Practice through TAFE, and hoped to subsequently gain entry to Deakin University at Warrnambool to study as a mature age student.<sup>175</sup>

Some inquiry participants were of the view that increased movement from the VCAL into higher education could and should be encouraged.<sup>176</sup> However, evidence suggests that this may require a change in the way the VCAL is regarded by the university sector. One university representative argued that the VCAL is viewed within the higher education sector as 'less than' the VCE.<sup>177</sup> Dr John Henry, Board Member, Smart Geelong Region LLEN, similarly argued that universities 'need to connect to VCAL as a quality learning pathway'.<sup>178</sup> The Committee heard that Deakin University has taken steps in this direction, examining the feasibility of pathways from the VCAL into some degree programs, and has approved a new pathway into the Bachelor of Primary Education. While the university was not expecting large numbers of applicants through this route, it was working with schools in the Geelong region to promote the option.<sup>179</sup>

As the VCAL has been specifically created to cater for students with a preference for applied learning and vocational outcomes, the Committee believes that it should continue to focus on the needs of this group of students. At the same time, it is important that participation in the VCAL does not rule out future participation in higher education for the small proportion of students who have the aspiration for university study. The Committee encourages universities to continue to work with other education and training providers to enhance opportunities and pathways for students to move between sectors, where appropriate. The Committee also encourages VCAL providers to ensure that students are aware of opportunities for continued participation in education and training, including potential pathways into university study. These pathways are further discussed in Chapter 5.

---

<sup>174</sup> Sheldon Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria; Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009), 21–22; Richard Teese, Kira Clarke and John Polesel, *The On Track Survey 2007 Statewide Report: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2007), 16.

<sup>175</sup> Ms L. Scott, Former Student, Southern Grampians Adult Education, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 26.

<sup>176</sup> Ms R. Heckenberg, Head and Lecturer, Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 23; Dr J. Henry, Board Member, Smart Geelong Region LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 19; Mr B. Baker, Convenor and Member, South West Regional Youth Affairs Network, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 10–11.

<sup>177</sup> Ms R. Heckenberg, Head and Lecturer, Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 23.

<sup>178</sup> Dr J. Henry, Board Member, Smart Geelong Region LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 19.

<sup>179</sup> Dr J. Henry, Board Member, Smart Geelong Region LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 19; Deakin University, Written Submission, March 2008, 7.

## Differences in school achievement and completion

---

Overall, Victoria's education system supports strong student achievement, and comparatively high levels of year 12 or equivalent completion. Despite strong performance overall, however, the Committee found that there are substantial geographical and socioeconomic differences in school achievement and completion rates.

### Academic achievement levels

The Committee reviewed achievement data from a variety of sources to examine the academic performance of Victorian students relative to students in other jurisdictions. The Committee also considered geographical and socioeconomic differences in achievement within Victoria.

#### *Overall achievement levels for Victorian students*

Results from national and international testing show high average academic performance by Victorian students. The National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) commenced in 2008 with the purpose of providing comparable national literacy and numeracy data. Under the program, students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 undertake standard national tests in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions (Spelling and Grammar) and Numeracy.<sup>180</sup> Results from the first round of testing indicate that along with the Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales, Victorian students were top performers.<sup>181</sup>

Coordinated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international triennial test of the academic performance of 15-year-olds. PISA assesses competencies in three core domains, referred to as reading literacy, scientific literacy and mathematical literacy.<sup>182</sup> In the latest tests, the average performance of Victorian students across all three domains was similar to or above that of students in all Australian jurisdictions other than the Australian Capital Territory and Western Australia.<sup>183</sup> The achievement of Victorian students in PISA, while not topping that of students in other Australian jurisdictions, was well above OECD averages.

A 2009 Victorian Auditor-General's report assessed literacy and numeracy achievement trends in Victoria over the period 1998 to 2007.<sup>184</sup> The audit focused on data from the statewide VCE and Achievement Improvement Monitor (AIM) assessments, and returned mixed findings. Although noting improvements in some domains among some year levels, the Auditor-General concluded that there was no marked improvement in average literacy and numeracy achievement across age groups over the period examined.<sup>185</sup>

---

<sup>180</sup> Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy: Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy* (Melbourne: MCEETYA, 2008), 2.

<sup>181</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> Sue Thomson and Lisa De Bortoli, *Exploring Scientific Literacy: How Australia measures up. The PISA 2006 survey of students' scientific, reading and mathematical literacy skills* (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2008), 2–3.

<sup>183</sup> *ibid.*, 166, 202, 70.

<sup>184</sup> Victorian Auditor-General's Office, *Literacy and Numeracy Achievement*, Victorian Auditor-General's Report (Melbourne: VAGO, 2009).

<sup>185</sup> *ibid.*, 2.

*Geographical and socioeconomic differences in achievement levels*

Many participants in the Committee's inquiry highlighted the influence of socioeconomic status on achievement at school, and therefore on higher education participation.<sup>186</sup> This relationship between socioeconomic status and achievement has been extensively documented by researchers and policymakers.<sup>187</sup> Reviewing previous research on the relationships between socioeconomic status and literacy and numeracy, Rothman and McMillan noted lower levels of average achievement from early childhood through to the final year of secondary school among students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds.<sup>188</sup>

Results from PISA and NAPLAN also show marked differences in achievement according to socioeconomic status. In 2006, Australian 15-year-olds from the highest socioeconomic status quartile attained average scores in PISA that were above those of the lowest quartile by 87 score points in scientific literacy, representing approximately two-and-a-half years of formal schooling.<sup>189</sup> In the domains of reading literacy and mathematical literacy, the scores of students from the lowest socioeconomic status quartile were below those from the highest socioeconomic status quartile by 84 score points and 78 score points, respectively.<sup>190</sup> Across each domain tested, low socioeconomic status students were under-represented at the highest achievement levels and over-represented among the lowest achievers.<sup>191</sup> Similarly, results from 2008 NAPLAN testing showed higher scores among students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 where their parents had higher levels of educational attainment.<sup>192</sup>

Results from NAPLAN and PISA also show some differences in achievement levels between metropolitan, regional and remote areas, although geographical differences are less marked than socioeconomic differences. Across Australia in 2006, students from remote areas scored slightly lower in PISA scientific, mathematical and reading literacy tests than students in 'provincial' areas. In turn, provincial students achieved slightly lower average scores than metropolitan students.<sup>193</sup> Victoria's NAPLAN results show a different pattern. While students from regional areas tended to perform less well than their metropolitan counterparts, students from remote areas tended to do better than both

<sup>186</sup> For example, Mr M. Gallagher, Executive Director, Group of Eight, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 3; Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, May 2008, 5; Mr R. Juratowitch, Campus Principal, Kurnai College, Gippsland Education Precinct, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 2; Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 10–11; Mr D. Conley, Youth Services Coordinator, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 5; Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 15; Mr D. McLean, Parent, Alexandra, Written Submission, April 2008, 3.

<sup>187</sup> A number of these studies are reviewed in Sheldon Rothman and Julie McMillan, *Influences on Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 36 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2003), 5.

<sup>188</sup> Sheldon Rothman and Julie McMillan, *Influences on Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 36 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2003), 5.

<sup>189</sup> Sue Thompson and Lisa De Bortoli, *Exploring Scientific Literacy: How Australia measures up. The PISA 2006 survey of students' scientific, reading and mathematical literacy skills* (Australian Council for Educational Research: Camberwell, 2008), 241.

<sup>190</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> *ibid.*

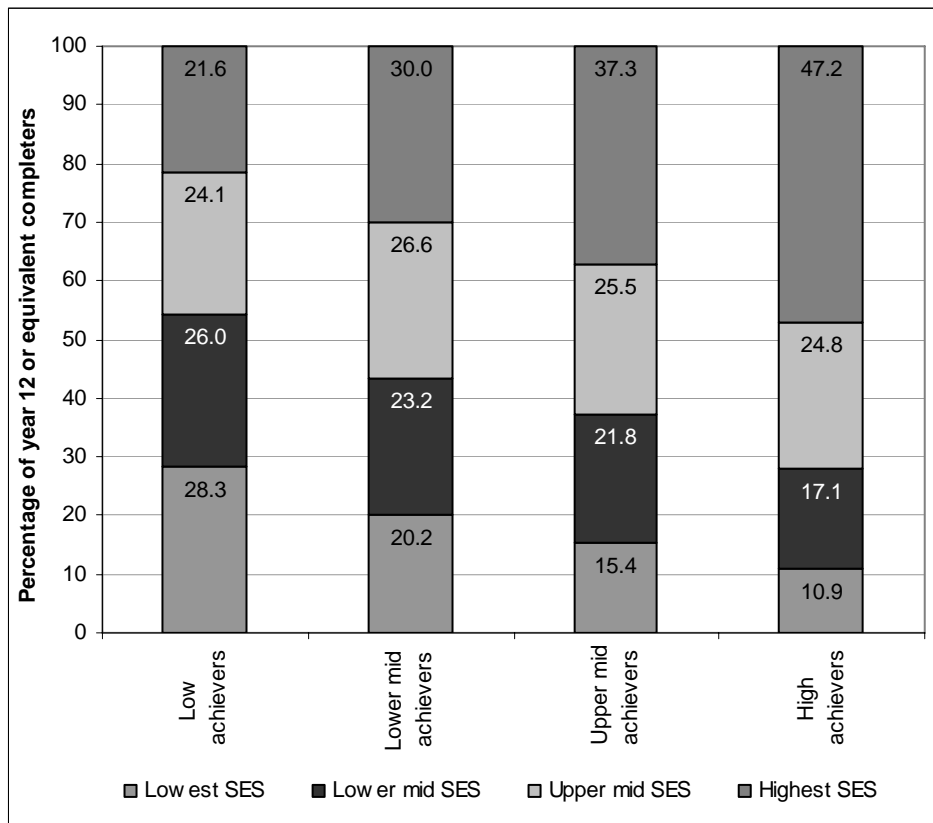
<sup>192</sup> Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy: Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy* (Melbourne: MCEETYA, 2008), 53.

<sup>193</sup> Sue Thompson and Lisa De Bortoli, *Exploring Scientific Literacy: How Australia measures up. The PISA 2006 survey of students' scientific, reading and mathematical literacy skills* (Australian Council for Educational Research: Camberwell, 2008), vii.

metropolitan and regional students.<sup>194</sup> This result was unique to Victoria, where only a small number of students from remote areas participated in NAPLAN testing.

Socioeconomic and geographical differences in achievement carry through to senior secondary school. Data from the On Track survey show substantial differences in GAT achievement according to socioeconomic status (refer Figure 3.1). In 2007, students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds comprised just 10.9 per cent of students in the highest GAT achievement quartile, which was dominated by students from the highest socioeconomic status backgrounds (47.2%). At the same time, students from the lowest socioeconomic status quartile made up the largest proportion (28.3%) of students in the lowest achievement quartile. The On Track report concluded that given the strong relationships between socioeconomic status, GAT score and post-school destination, it is important that low socioeconomic status students be supported to reach higher levels of achievement.<sup>195</sup>

Figure 3.1: Socioeconomic status of year 12 or equivalent completers, by quartiles of GAT score (%) (2007)



Source: Sheldon Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria; Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009), 26 (adapted).

<sup>194</sup> Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy; Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy* (Melbourne: MCEETYA, 2008), 53, 105, 154-204.

<sup>195</sup> Sheldon Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria; Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009), 27.

The Committee also found clear geographical differences in VCE achievement. Numerous participants highlighted the lower average ENTERs achieved by students from non-metropolitan and interface areas, compared with those in metropolitan areas. These views were supported by the Committee's analysis of VTAC data.<sup>196</sup> The implications of geographical differences in ENTER attainment are discussed in Chapter 5.

### Year 12 completion rates

As well as examining achievement levels, the Committee also considered the related issue of year 12 or equivalent completion rates in Victoria. The Committee examined geographical and socioeconomic differences in the types of year 12 or equivalent qualifications attained, in addition to its consideration of overall year 12 or equivalent completion rates.

#### *Overall year 12 or equivalent completion rates for Victorian students*

In comparison with most Australian jurisdictions, the rate of year 12 or equivalent completion in Victoria is high. One nationally agreed measure of completion, based on estimates from the ABS Survey of Education and Work, is the proportion of 20- to 24-year-olds to have completed year 12 or an equivalent qualification. On this measure, completion in Victoria improved from 81.8 per cent in 2000 to 86.1 per cent in 2007,<sup>197</sup> above the 2007 national average of 83.5 per cent.<sup>198</sup>

Another measure in use by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is the year 12 or equivalent completion rate at age 19, calculated using the Department's administrative data and ABS population estimates. This measure also shows improvement, with the rate of year 12 or equivalent completion increasing 13 percentage points, from 71.0 per cent in 1999 to 84.0 per cent in 2006.<sup>199</sup>

At the same time as the rate of year 12 or equivalent completion in Victoria has risen, the balance between different types of year 12 completion has shifted. Significantly, completion of the VCE, the main pathway into higher education for school leavers, has decreased. According to the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), the VCE completion rate for 19-year-olds declined from 67.0 per cent in 1998 to 62.9 per cent in 2008 (refer Table 3.2).

Together with this apparent decline in VCE completions, participation in the VCAL has grown steadily since its introduction, following a pilot with 546 students in 2002. Enrolments grew to 5,137 the following year,<sup>200</sup> reaching 15,641 in 2008.<sup>201</sup>

---

<sup>196</sup> Education and Training Committee analysis of 2007–08 VTAC data, May 2009.

<sup>197</sup> Victorian Government, 'Growing Victoria Together Progress Report,' appendix to *Service Delivery*, Victorian State Budget Paper 2008–09 No. 3 (Melbourne: Department of Treasury and Finance, 2009), 394.

<sup>198</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), *Summary Statistics for Victorian Schools*, Issue 1 (Melbourne: DEECD, 2008), 2.

<sup>199</sup> Supplementary information provided by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, July 2008.

<sup>200</sup> University of Ballarat, Appendix to Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

<sup>201</sup> Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *Senior Secondary Certificate Statistical Information 2008* (Melbourne: VCAA, 2009).

## *Inquiry into Geographical Differences in Participation in Higher Education in Victoria*

Table 3.2: VCE completion rate for 19-year-olds (1998 to 2008)

Year	19-year-olds who have successfully completed VCE (No.)	Target population of 19-year-olds in Victoria (No.)	VCE completion rate (%)
1998	41,768	62,299	67.0
1999	42,110	61,956	68.0
2000	43,039	64,106	67.1
2001	44,010	66,066	66.6
2002	44,796	67,050	66.8
2003	46,404	67,836	68.4
2004	47,733	69,640	68.5
2005	47,039	70,324	66.9
2006	46,958	71,103	66.0
2007	46,543	72,771	64.0
2008	46,845	74,424	62.9

Source: Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *Senior Secondary Certificate Statistical Information 2008* (Melbourne: VCAA, 2009), 4.

The Committee heard that the VCAL comprises a substantial proportion of the total senior secondary cohort at some government schools. Mr Rob Juratowitch, Principal of the Gippsland Education Precinct campus of Kurnai College, told the Committee that approximately one-third of the College's senior cohort undertake the VCAL, while the remaining two-thirds enrol in the VCE. Mr Juratowitch told the Committee that the College had 'real internal debates about what is the right amount of VCAL', noting that while the College 'could almost become a VCAL school ... we want to keep our academic focus as well'.<sup>202</sup> Another small rural school said in a submission that strong VCAL enrolments at the school were 'perhaps higher than we would like', arguing that this was related to 'low student aspiration'.<sup>203</sup>

It may be that an increase in VCAL participation helps to explain the declining VCE completion rate. Ms Toni Burgoyne, Principal, Portland Secondary College, told the Committee that some students enrol in the VCAL despite being 'equally able to get a high score at VCE', attracted by strong school-based apprenticeship opportunities in the region.<sup>204</sup> Similarly, the most recent On Track report highlights a decline in VET in Schools participation among VCE students, concurrent with increasing VCAL participation. The report suggests that the VCAL may be attracting some students who in the past would have undertaken the VCE while participating in VET in Schools.<sup>205</sup>

The Committee is pleased to see the high levels of participation in VCAL and VET in Schools. A central objective of these programs is to engage and retain students who may not otherwise complete year 12 or equivalent.<sup>206</sup> There was widespread agreement among inquiry participants that the growth in courses offered in the vocational curriculum has

<sup>202</sup> Mr R. Juratowitch, Campus Principal, Kurnai College, Gippsland Education Precinct, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 6.

<sup>203</sup> Lakes Entrance Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 1.

<sup>204</sup> Ms T. Burgoyne, Principal, Portland Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 22.

<sup>205</sup> Sheldon Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria: Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009), 17.

<sup>206</sup> Mr G. McLean, General Manager, Youth Transitions Division, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 July 2008, 4.

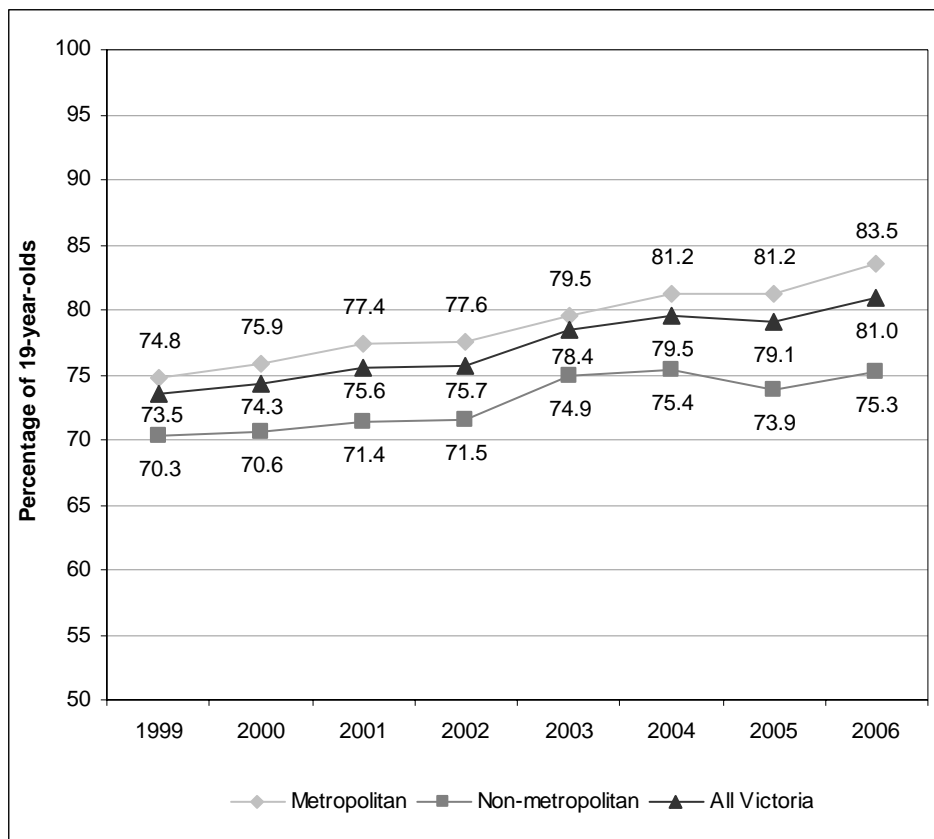
contributed to improvements in year 12 or equivalent completion rates.<sup>207</sup> The Committee acknowledges that the VCAL may be a more suitable senior secondary qualification for some senior secondary students who might previously have undertaken the VCE.

*Geographical and socioeconomic differences in year 12 or equivalent completion*

Throughout the inquiry, many participants commented on the lower rates of year 12 completion among young people in non-metropolitan Victoria, in interface areas, and in some metropolitan areas.<sup>208</sup>

Figure 3.2 shows year 12 or equivalent completion rates for 19-year-olds in Victoria, differentiated for metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas.

Figure 3.2: Victorian 19-year-olds with year 12 or equivalent, by home location (%) (1999 to 2006)



Source: Supplementary information provided by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), July 2008 (adapted).

<sup>207</sup> For example, Chisholm Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, March 2008, 4; Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, Written Submission, March 2008, 8; Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Written Submission, March 2008, 3; Frankston Learning City Stakeholder Network, Written Submission, March 2008, 2; Orbest Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 1; South West LLEN, Written Submission, April 2008, 2; Victorian Council of Social Service, Written Submission, April 2008, 4; Dr J. Henry, Board Member, Smart Geelong Region LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 19; South West Association of Post Primary Principals, Written Submission, April 2008, 6; Ms J. Golden, Executive Director, Education Programs, Gordon Institute of TAFE, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 71–72.

<sup>208</sup> For example, Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 14, 21; Dr J. Oriel, Head, Student Equity Unit, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 54; Ms M. Pendergast, Principal, Warrnambool College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 34; Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), Written Submission, May 2008, 14–15; Professor S. Walker, Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 33; Ms R. Moore, Student, RMIT University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2009, 2–3.

Figure 3.2 shows that completion of year 12 or equivalent increased over the seven years to 2006 in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan Victoria. However, in metropolitan areas this increase was greater, and built on a completion rate that was already substantially higher. In these areas, the completion rate grew 8.7 percentage points to reach a high of 83.5 per cent in 2006. In contrast, the non-metropolitan completion rate rose only 5 percentage points to 75.3 per cent of 19-year-olds in 2006.

The apparent retention rate is another measure that contributes to the picture of school completion. Year 10 to 12 apparent retention rates express year 12 enrolments as a proportion of the year 10 enrolment two years prior.<sup>209</sup> They are ‘apparent’ because they do not take into account a number of factors including repetition of a year, early school leaving prior to year 10, movement between school sectors or to other types of education and training provider, or movement within and between states. Nevertheless, apparent retention rates are an approximate measure of students’ progression through the years of schooling.

Table 3.3 shows year 10 to 12 apparent retention rates for government schools across nine Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) regions over the decade to 2008.

Table 3.3: Year 10 to 12 apparent retention rate at Victorian government schools, by DEECD region (%) (1999 to 2008)

Region	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Western Metropolitan	81.9	80.7	81.6	83.2	83.9	83.8	82.1	81.4	81.2	81.1
Northern Metropolitan	81.5	82.7	83.6	86.0	85.7	88.7	86.7	87.7	88.1	88.0
Eastern Metropolitan	85.8	90.1	91.4	91.7	93.1	92.9	94.1	90.4	88.5	85.3
Southern Metropolitan	77.5	76.8	81.3	80.2	81.4	79.7	80.8	80.2	82.8	79.5
Barwon South Western	75.9	75.4	77.9	78.9	76.4	78.5	75.9	74.5	72.8	72.2
Grampians	75.1	71.8	73.4	73.9	73.4	71.8	74.3	73.7	72.9	71.6
Loddon Mallee	77.3	76.4	77.1	81.9	82.0	80.5	79.4	77.1	74.9	78.0
Hume	70.5	67.3	71.0	74.0	74.8	73.8	71.4	69.4	73.7	67.6
Gippsland	71.7	67.9	72.5	70.9	70.3	72.6	75.8	69.8	72.3	69.9
All metro regions	81.7	82.8	84.9	85.5	86.3	86.4	86.2	85.1	85.3	83.3
All non-metro regions	74.3	72.1	74.7	76.4	75.9	76.0	75.6	73.1	73.4	72.2
All government schools	79.2	79.0	81.3	82.3	82.7	82.9	82.7	81.1	81.3	79.7

Source: Compiled from Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), *Summary Statistics for Victorian Schools: March 2009* (Melbourne: DEECD, 2009), 1; Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), *Summary Statistics for Victorian Schools: February 2007* (Melbourne: DEECD, 2007), 25

Table 3.3 makes clear that there is a substantial and ongoing gap between apparent retention rates in metropolitan and non-metropolitan government schools. In the most recent year (2008) the apparent retention rate in non-metropolitan regions (72.2%) was approximately 11 percentage points lower than that in metropolitan regions (83.3%). Victoria’s overall apparent retention rate fluctuated in the period shown, rising to a peak of 82.9 per cent in 2004, and then declining to 79.7 per cent in 2008. The disparity between metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions increased slightly over the period.

<sup>209</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Summary Statistics Victorian Schools February 2007* (Melbourne: DEECD, 2008), 33.



Table 3.3 also shows differences in apparent retention rates within both the non-metropolitan and metropolitan groupings. Among metropolitan regions, 2008 apparent retention rates were highest in the Northern (88.0%) and Eastern (85.3%) regions, and lower in the Western (81.1%) and Southern (79.5%) regions. Among the non-metropolitan regions, apparent retention rates were lowest in Hume (67.6%) and Gippsland (69.9%) and highest in the Loddon Mallee region (78.0%). It might be expected that more detailed analysis of apparent retention rates would reveal further variations within both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas.

Related to these geographical differences in retention and year 12 or equivalent completion, students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds are less likely to complete school. These differences were highlighted by a number of inquiry participants,<sup>210</sup> and are well documented in the literature on early school leaving.<sup>211</sup>

A number of studies also point to socioeconomic and geographical differences in the type of year 12 or equivalent qualifications attained. A range of studies, including the most recent On Track survey, have shown that participation in VET in Schools is generally higher in non-metropolitan areas.<sup>212</sup> At the same time, there are differences in VET in Schools participation within Melbourne. According to On Track, in 2007, participation in VET in Schools was highest in the Northern Metropolitan Region (33.5%) and lowest in the Eastern Metropolitan Region (22.1%).<sup>213</sup>

Several Australian studies have found that school students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds are more likely to enrol in VET programs.<sup>214</sup> Examining the VET in Schools participation of secondary students across nine Victorian regions, one study found that participation rates tend to drop off as the mean socioeconomic status of the region rises.<sup>215</sup> Analysis using a postcode measure of socioeconomic status showed that while 29.0 per cent of students living in areas with postcodes in the bottom socioeconomic status quartile were enrolled in VET programs, only 16.7 per cent of those living in areas with postcodes in the highest socioeconomic status quartile participated in VET in Schools.<sup>216</sup>

Related to this, most VET in Schools provision is in the government sector. According to data from the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), there were 6,792 year 12 students in the government sector enrolled in VET in Schools in 2006, compared to

<sup>210</sup> For example, Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 10–11; Professor R. Larkins, Chair, Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 21; Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, May 2008, 5; Mr M. Horn, Senior Manager, Research and Policy Centre, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 53.

<sup>211</sup> See, for example, Sue Fullarton and others, *Patterns of Participation in Year 12*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 33 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2003), vii; David D. Curtis and Julie McMillan, *School Non-completers: Profiles and Initial Destinations*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 54 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2008), 2.

<sup>212</sup> Sue Fullarton, *VET in Schools: Participation and Pathways*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 21 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2001), 12; Stephen Lamb and Margaret Vickers, *Variations in VET Provision across Australian Schools and Their Effects on Student Outcomes*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 48 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2006), 18; Sheldon Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria: Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009), 64–65.

<sup>213</sup> Sheldon Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria: Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009), 65.

<sup>214</sup> These are reviewed in John Polesel and others, *VET in Schools: A post-compulsory education perspective* (Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2004), 14.

<sup>215</sup> John Polesel, 'The Development of Vocational Programs in Secondary Schools in Victoria and the European Tradition,' *International Studies in Educational Inequality, Theory and Policy*, vol. 3, *Inequality: Educational Theory and Public Policy*, eds. Richard Teese, Stephen Lamb and Marie Duru-Bellat (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 161.

<sup>216</sup> *ibid.*

1,934 in Catholic schools and 967 in the independent school sector.<sup>217</sup> In 2007, 31.0 per cent of year 12 or equivalent completers in government schools had participated in VET in Schools, compared to 26.7 per cent in Catholic schools and 21.4 per cent in independent schools.<sup>218</sup>

Similarly, a 2007 study found that within Melbourne's government schools, VCAL provision was uneven.<sup>219</sup> In outer urban areas almost all government schools were offering the VCAL by 2006. In the high socioeconomic status inner eastern and southern suburbs, government schools were far less likely to offer the VCAL.<sup>220</sup> Cumulatively, then, research suggests that students in lower socioeconomic status and non-metropolitan areas are more likely to undertake vocationally oriented year 12 or equivalent qualifications.

The recent decline in the VCE completion rate is of some concern to the Committee, especially when considered in combination with the geographical and socioeconomic differences in the type of year 12 or equivalent qualifications that students undertake. The evidence suggests that the decline in VCE completion may be concentrated in particular geographical areas and socioeconomic groups, which may further limit opportunities to progress to higher education for groups with an already lower rate of transition to higher education. While these groups may benefit from the positive outcomes associated with other year 12 qualifications, the implications for their future ability to participate in higher education is of particular interest to this inquiry.

The Committee believes that future policy regarding post-school transitions should be informed by a more detailed understanding of year 12 or equivalent completion rates. This would enable geographic and socioeconomic trends to be analysed more thoroughly in order to identify any trends in year 12 completion that may be disproportionately limiting post-school opportunities for a particular student group. The Committee therefore recommends that the Victorian Government collect and publish year 12 or equivalent completion data that is disaggregated by qualification type (VCE, IB, VCAL or Certificate II and above), as well as by location and socioeconomic status.

---

## Lifting school achievement and completion rates

---

Increasing academic achievement and year 12 or equivalent completion rates are important but ambitious goals. Professor Richard James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, emphasised the enormity of the task:

Getting better equity in higher education in Australia, and in that sense Victoria, is ultimately about improving school achievement levels for the groups that are under-represented, and that is a wretchedly difficult challenge for communities all around the world.<sup>221</sup>

The Committee considered the role of school improvement in underpinning improved achievement and completion, particularly in areas where achievement and completion are currently low. With an emphasis on the VCE, the Committee also considered specific interventions to support increased year 12 completion and academic achievement.

---

<sup>217</sup> John Polesel and Richard Teese, *VET in Schools Pathways: The 2006 Year 12 Cohort* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2007), 4.

<sup>218</sup> Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria; Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009), 66.

<sup>219</sup> Daniel Edwards, 'The vocational fate of government secondary schools,' *People and Place* 15, no. 2 (2007): 8-9.

<sup>220</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 11.

## School improvement strategies

Some inquiry participants argued that lifting the higher education participation rates of under-represented groups requires widespread school improvement in the government school sector. Professor Richard Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, argued that 'regeneration' of the government school system in non-metropolitan and low socioeconomic status areas is fundamental to raising achievement.<sup>222</sup> Professor Teese identified the 'conservation of teaching capital and teaching expertise' and the build-up of resources in 'larger, more comprehensive institutions' as essential strategies for strengthening government schools.<sup>223</sup> Similarly, the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development noted that while larger schools tend to promote better outcomes, low socioeconomic status and rural students are more likely to attend schools that are constrained by their smaller size.<sup>224</sup>

The Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch) argued that government schools should be revitalised through sustained funding for equipment and facilities.<sup>225</sup> It further argued that additional funding is required to improve achievement and retention among low socioeconomic status students and rural students.<sup>226</sup> The union also expressed support for the further development of education precincts that integrate public education, from early childhood through to tertiary education.<sup>227</sup> The Committee also recognises the benefits of education precincts and has recommended that the Victorian Government, in partnership with local governments, universities and other stakeholders consider further opportunities for co-location of school and higher education facilities in areas where participation in higher education is currently low (refer Chapter 4).

### *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development*

In 2008, the Victorian Government developed the Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development, a comprehensive five-year plan that outlines the Victorian Government's vision and goals for Victorian education and early childhood development.<sup>228</sup> A key priority set out in the Education Blueprint is to strengthen public confidence in the education system, with a strong and vibrant school sector at its core.<sup>229</sup> Another key priority is to improve outcomes for disadvantaged young Victorians.<sup>230</sup> Within this, goals are set out for high levels of achievement at age 15, and increases in the number of young people completing year 12 or equivalent.<sup>231</sup> Importantly, the Education Blueprint encompasses government and non-government schools.<sup>232</sup>

The Education Blueprint identifies government school improvement as a key strategy for achieving these goals. The School Accountability and Improvement Framework for government schools will be strengthened, while school performance will be assessed

---

<sup>222</sup> Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 17.

<sup>223</sup> *ibid.*, 16.

<sup>224</sup> Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), Written Submission, May 2008, 13.

<sup>225</sup> Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, May 2008, 8–9.

<sup>226</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> *ibid.*, 9.

<sup>228</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development* (Melbourne: DEECD, 2008).

<sup>229</sup> *ibid.*, 11.

<sup>230</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>232</sup> *ibid.*, 12.

against a new set of measures.<sup>233</sup> Schools where students are not meeting expected standards will receive additional support, which could include mentoring from high-performing schools, additional professional development for staff, or external management of staffing and resources.<sup>234</sup> New standards for provision in government schools will focus on improving access to a high-quality and broad curriculum.<sup>235</sup>

The Victorian Schools Plan will support the implementation of the Education Blueprint through a commitment that will see all of Victoria's government schools rebuilt, renovated or extended by 2017. Funding of \$1.9 billion has been committed for 500 schools over the period 2007 to 2010.<sup>236</sup> The Committee supports the intent of the Education Blueprint, and the associated investment in school infrastructure.

### *Addressing workforce shortages*

The Committee heard that a specific systemic restraint that impacts on both achievement and completion of year 12 or equivalent is teaching workforce difficulties in many regional and other hard-to-staff areas. The Victorian Government's latest *Teacher Supply and Demand Report* shows that 12.4 per cent of teaching vacancies in government secondary schools were difficult to fill in 2007, with almost half (49.6%) of all government secondary schools reporting difficulties in filling vacancies that year.<sup>237</sup> The number of 'difficult to fill' vacancies was highest in Mathematics, followed by Technology and Science.<sup>238</sup> Until recently, LOTE also had some of the highest number of difficult to fill vacancies. However, a lack of qualified LOTE teachers has seen the number of schools offering LOTE decline, thereby reducing the number of difficult to fill LOTE vacancies.<sup>239</sup> The report also showed geographic differences in the number of 'difficult to fill' vacancies, with government schools in the state's far north and west, together with those in the growth corridors on Melbourne's urban fringe, consistently experiencing more difficulty in filling teaching vacancies.<sup>240</sup>

Problems attracting and retaining teachers were widely acknowledged throughout the inquiry.<sup>241</sup> In particular, the Committee heard that many schools are experiencing severe difficulties in attracting and retaining teachers in key VCE subject areas including the sciences, mathematics and LOTE.<sup>242</sup> Ms Mary Pendergast, Principal, Warrnambool College, told the Committee that teacher shortages in some subject areas were 'becoming an endemic problem'.<sup>243</sup> Research has found that teachers in rural schools are more likely to

---

<sup>233</sup> *ibid.*, 26.

<sup>234</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>236</sup> Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), Written Submission, May 2008, 22.

<sup>237</sup> Teacher Supply and Demand Reference Group, *Teacher Supply and Demand Report 2007* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2007), v.

<sup>238</sup> *ibid.*, 16.

<sup>239</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>240</sup> *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>241</sup> For example, Catholic College Wodonga, Written Submission, June 2008, 4; Mr B. Simons, Principal, The Hamilton and Alexandra College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 22; Ms M. Pendergast, Principal, Warrnambool College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 29, 32; Mrs J. Boyle, Principal, Mortlake P-12 College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 32; Ms P. Nunan, Principal, Werrimull P-12 School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 52; Ms H. Thiele, Principal, Murrayville Community College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 50; Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, Written Submission, March 2008, 12; Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, May 2008, 3; Rural Education Forum Australia, Written Submission, April 2008, 2; Victorian Farmers Federation, Written Submission, March 2008, 3; Australian Council for Educational Research, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

<sup>242</sup> The Hon J. Gillard, Australian Government Minister for Education, Written Submission, April 2008, 14; Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, Written Submission, March 2008, 12; Rural Education Forum Australia, Written Submission, April 2008, 4.

<sup>243</sup> Ms M. Pendergast, Principal, Warrnambool College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 32.

be teaching multiple subjects across different year levels, affecting learning outcomes.<sup>244</sup> According to two prominent research centres, smaller schools in rural areas experience these workforce difficulties and are often constrained in their ability to offer a wide range of curriculum and other programs for students.<sup>245</sup> These issues may contribute to lower student engagement and retention in non-metropolitan schools.

Participants in the Committee's inquiry therefore suggested measures to address workforce difficulties in rural and other hard-to-staff schools as a way of lifting higher education participation rates among under-represented groups. Broadly, participants argued that improved prestige, pay and working conditions should be used to increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession, including to high-achieving applicants and graduates.<sup>246</sup> Participants also argued for schemes, including generous scholarships, to attract a share of high quality teachers to rural schools and particular curriculum areas.<sup>247</sup> The Committee notes that to this end, the Victorian Government has in place a number of initiatives including the Teaching Scholarship Scheme, Career Change Program and Rural Retraining Program.<sup>248</sup>

Since quality teaching is the most important school factor determining learning outcomes from schooling, addressing persistent teacher shortages is clearly important. The Committee believes that the Victorian Government should monitor and review the effectiveness of its existing workforce schemes to ensure they adequately address the needs of schools in rural, regional, interface and low socioeconomic status areas. The Committee believes that addressing recruitment difficulties in hard-to-staff schools will contribute to improved achievement and completion rates, thereby laying the foundation for expanded post-school opportunities for students in disadvantaged areas.

### Lifting VCE achievement and completion rates

While system-wide improvement in the school sector is of fundamental importance, increased higher education participation will rest specifically on improved VCE outcomes among students from under-represented groups. Year 12 completion strategies must aim at increasing completions in all year 12 or equivalent qualifications, including the VCE. Furthermore, students from areas and groups that are under-represented in higher education should be specifically encouraged and supported to undertake the VCE.

#### *The need for a multifaceted approach to raising year 12 or equivalent completion*

Strategies for increasing year 12 or equivalent completion will be most successful if they address the multiple causes of early school leaving. The Committee heard that early school leaving is a complex phenomenon, having to do with the motivations of early school leavers, their individual backgrounds, and the contexts in which they live and study. The evidence

---

<sup>244</sup> The Hon J. Gillard, Australian Government Minister for Education, Written Submission, April 2008, 14.

<sup>245</sup> Australian Council for Educational Research, Written Submission, March 2008, 2; Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 17.

<sup>246</sup> Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, May 2008, 9; vicCentral Highlands Area Consultative Committee, Written Submission, March 2008, 9; Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, Written Submission, March 2008, 12; Mr D. Paproth, Deputy Regional Director, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 40.

<sup>247</sup> Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, May 2008, 9; vicCentral Highlands Area Consultative Committee, Written Submission, March 2008, 9; Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, Written Submission, March 2008, 12.

<sup>248</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), 'Teacher Supply and Demand Initiatives,' DEECD, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/careers/teach/demand.htm> (accessed 13 July 2009).

suggests that the motivations of early school leavers can generally be grouped into three categories: positive motivations to work; negative experiences of school; and personal welfare issues.<sup>249</sup> A number of studies have found that a positive attraction or 'pull' towards the workplace is a major influence on decisions, with early school leavers reporting a desire to earn money, or to work in a job or apprenticeship.<sup>250</sup> School related issues and concerns are another common factor in the decision to leave school. These factors include a lack of interest in school work, poor achievement, disengagement, and a general dislike of school or teachers.<sup>251</sup> Personal welfare issues such as ill-health or disability, caring responsibilities, pregnancy, involvement with the juvenile justice system, bullying, homelessness and family conflict can also influence the decision to leave school.<sup>252</sup>

The decision-making of early school leavers is related to their background characteristics and to the contexts in which they live and study. Youth labour market conditions, such as the availability of work, competitiveness of the workforce, and required skill sets, are one set of contextual factors that can influence early school leaving.<sup>253</sup> Year 12 completion rates are also influenced by school factors, such as school quality, teacher quality, curriculum, pedagogical effectiveness, school resources and school organisation.<sup>254</sup>

To date, the Victorian Government's approach to increasing school completion rates has placed heavy emphasis on broadening senior secondary curriculum to include greater vocational options. While broadening curriculum is one important strategy for increasing completion rates, the multiple factors influencing early school leaving highlight the need for multifaceted strategies to support completion. This point was emphasised in a recent report commissioned by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to identify effective strategies for increasing school completion rates:

... what emerged as central to improving school engagement and completion for at risk students was a series of targeted interventions and programs underpinned by a supportive school culture or climate. The elements of school culture central to maximising student engagement and retention included a shared vision across the school community, high expectations of staff and students, flexibility and responsiveness to individual student needs, a commitment to success for all students, and a drive for continuous improvement.<sup>255</sup>

The report noted that schools are most effective in improving completion rates when they combine a range of strategies, develop a whole-of-staff commitment to engaging students, and constantly refine their approach to meet shifting needs.<sup>256</sup>

---

<sup>249</sup> Stephen Lamb and others, *Staying on at school: Improving student retention in Australia*, (Brisbane: Department of Education and the Arts, 2004).

<sup>250</sup> For example, R. Teese, K. Clarke and J. Polesel, *The On Track Survey 2007 Statewide Report: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2007), 68–69; David D. Curtis and Julie McMillan, *School Non-completers: Profiles and Initial Destinations*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 54 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2008), 1.

<sup>251</sup> R. Teese, K. Clarke and J. Polesel, *The On Track Survey 2007 Statewide Report: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2007), 68; David D. Curtis and Julie McMillan, *School Non-completers: Profiles and Initial Destinations*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 54 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2008), 14–15; The Hon J. Gillard, Australian Government Minister for Education, Written Submission, April 2008, 14; Australian Council for Educational Research, Written Submission, March 2008, 2; University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 8.

<sup>252</sup> For example, Hon. J. Gillard, Australian Government Minister for Education, Written Submission, April 2008, 14; Mr M. Horn, Senior Manager, Research and Policy Centre, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 52; Representatives of Southern Grampians Adult Education, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 24–28.

<sup>253</sup> The Hon J. Gillard, Australian Government Minister for Education, Written Submission, April 2008, 13; South West Association of Post Primary Principals, Written Submission, April 2008, 2; Ms M. Pendergast, Principal, Warrnambool College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 28.

<sup>254</sup> The Hon J. Gillard, Australian Government Minister for Education, Written Submission, April 2008, 13.

<sup>255</sup> Stephen Lamb and Suzanne Rice, *Effective Strategies to Increase School Completion Report*, Report to the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Melbourne: DEECD, 2008), 3.

<sup>256</sup> *ibid.*, 4.

The report identified a variety of effective targeted interventions, including: mentoring and tutoring programs; early, intensive career planning; targeted skill development for low achievers; coordination of welfare needs; case management; social skills development support; family outreach; and targeted financial support.<sup>257</sup> To help schools implement such interventions, the report recommended that the Victorian Government provide integrated support to schools to help them address early school leaving, including assistance with training, staff development, planning and evaluation. Finally, it recommended strategic investment in proven strategies targeting the most disadvantaged students and schools.<sup>258</sup>

Similar interventions were suggested by participants throughout the inquiry. The Committee endorses the report's recommendations and calls upon the Victorian Government to continue to provide adequate funding and support for schools to implement broad, holistic interventions and strategies to improve completion rates.

### *Expanding VCE subject choice*

A key concern relating to VCE achievement at some non-metropolitan and small schools was the limited range of subjects typically offered.<sup>259</sup> Students noted that specialised subjects such as LOTE, English literature, physics, chemistry and advanced mathematics subjects are not always available in country schools.<sup>260</sup> In its submission, the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development outlined the potential consequences of limited subject choice at the VCE level:

Limited subject choice in small regional schools does not enable students to select subjects of most interest/relevance to their abilities which reduces their ultimate ENTER score and their access to desired courses. This can also limit student course selection options and decisions.<sup>261</sup>

Mr Axil Lonergan, a student at Ouyen Secondary College in Victoria's Mallee region, described how limited subject choice had meant he had to undertake subjects that were not his preferred options, noting that while the work was interesting, it was 'far removed from the skills I need for my career goals'.<sup>262</sup>

On the other hand, the Committee was also told that non-metropolitan schools often make a particular effort to ensure that students are able to access suitable VCE subjects. Ms Cheryl Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, told the Committee that the school makes a big effort to source advanced mathematics and science teachers 'do or die'.<sup>263</sup> The school also embeds chemistry and physics 'tasters' into the year 9 and year 10 curriculum so as to improve students' ability to make subject choices in senior secondary school.<sup>264</sup> Mr Gary Allen, Chair, Country Education Project, argued that the perception of limited subject choice is 'often illusory', describing how non-metropolitan schools tend to develop the

---

<sup>257</sup> *ibid.*, 3–4.

<sup>258</sup> *ibid.*, 50.

<sup>259</sup> For example, South West LLEN, Written Submission, April 2008, 5; Rural Education Forum Australia, Written Submission, April 2008, 2; Mr L. Parrott, Croydon, Written Submission, March 2008, 1; Continuing Education Centre (Albury-Wodonga), Written Submission, March 2008, 2; Australian Catholic University, Written Submission, March 2008, 2; Victorian Farmers Federation, Written Submission, March 2008, 2; Mr B. Baker, Convenor and Member, South West Regional Youth Affairs Network, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 10.

<sup>260</sup> Ms K. Leadbeater, Second Year Student, RMIT University, Written Submission, April 2008, 2; Mr J. Langdon, Ms C. Barker, Ms S. Wills, Mr S. Dan and Mr A. Lonergan, Year 11 Students, Ouyen Secondary College, various written submissions, April–May 2008.

<sup>261</sup> Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), Written Submission, May 2008, 14.

<sup>262</sup> Mr A. Lonergan, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 1.

<sup>263</sup> Ms C. Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 9.

<sup>264</sup> *ibid.*

timetable and curriculum based on the preferences of the student cohort.<sup>265</sup> Despite schools best efforts, however, it is clear that smaller schools are not able to offer as comprehensive a range of VCE subjects as larger schools.

Consequently, many small schools offer students the opportunity to study VCE subjects by distance education. However, the Committee heard distance education is often perceived as a difficult and unappealing mode of study for secondary students.<sup>266</sup> Ms Hilary Thiele, Principal, Murrayville Community College, described some of these difficulties:

It tends not to work that well at the top level of the school. Whenever we offer a distance ed subject we have kids really struggling—I suppose ostensibly it is with the workload and getting things in on time, but really I think it is more about the relationship they have with their teacher.<sup>267</sup>

A number of students who had experienced VCE study by distance education were also critical of the experience, describing it as 'extremely stressful' and 'achievable but with definite disadvantages'.<sup>268</sup>

Schools may also encounter technological difficulties when offering distance education, both in terms of equipment and staff expertise.<sup>269</sup> Participants suggested that there is room for further development in the full utilisation of information and communications technology (ICT) in rural schools, particularly as access to high-speed internet improves.<sup>270</sup> A representative of the Country Education Project emphasised the importance of 'bringing our people along' by providing opportunities for teachers to develop skills in ICT use.<sup>271</sup> In its previous inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning, the Committee recommended that the use of ICT should be one of the priorities for teacher professional development promoted and facilitated by the Victorian Government and individual schools.<sup>272</sup>

The Committee notes that in the Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development, the Victorian Government states that all students should be able to access programs covering each strand of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, specialist and extracurricular programs, and a range of academic and vocational options in the post-compulsory years.<sup>273</sup> Significantly, new standards for provision in government schools will give guidance on how expanded access may be achieved in rural areas.<sup>274</sup> Strategies may include partnerships between schools or with other providers, and better use of ICT.<sup>275</sup>

---

<sup>265</sup> Mr G. Allen, Chair, Country Education Project, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 31.

<sup>266</sup> Ms J. Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Support Services, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 3; Ms P. Nunan, Principal, Werrimull P-12 School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 52; Mr R. Juratowitch, Principal, Gippsland Education Precinct Campus, Kurnai College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 4; Murrabit Group School Parents and Friends Club, Written Submission, February 2008, 1.

<sup>267</sup> Mrs H. Thiele, Principal, Murrayville Community College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 53.

<sup>268</sup> Ms K. Leadbeater, Second Year Student, RMIT University, Written Submission, April 2008, 2; Ms R. Moore, Student, RMIT University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2009, 4; Mr A. Lonergan, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 1.

<sup>269</sup> Mrs H. Thiele, Principal, Murrayville Community College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 50; Ms C. Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 10.

<sup>270</sup> For example, Mr P. Brown, Executive Officer, Country Education Project, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 32; Mr B. Simons, Principal, The Hamilton and Alexandra College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 20.

<sup>271</sup> Mr G. Allen, Chair, Country Education Project, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 31.

<sup>272</sup> Education and Training Committee, Parliament of Victoria, *Report on the inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning* (Melbourne: Parliament of Victoria, 2009), 88.

<sup>273</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development* (Melbourne: DEECD, 2008), 26.

<sup>274</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>275</sup> *ibid.*



The Committee supports the expansion of programs in non-metropolitan schools, and believes that access to a range of VCE subjects should be a component of efforts to expand the opportunities available to students. Wherever possible, the emphasis should be on face-to-face teaching and learning. Where distance education is used, the Committee sees a need to ensure that these options are high quality, appealing to students, and supported by relevant professional learning for teachers.

### *VCE extension and revision opportunities and the academic atmosphere*

A number of participants highlighted a lack of opportunities for some non-metropolitan students to attend study lectures and to participate in cultural and enrichment activities that stimulate and motivate students. Ms Jan Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Services, Swinburne University of Technology, described the experiences of students from non-metropolitan backgrounds:

Many students mentioned their disadvantage in not being able to access or having limited access to the VCE Support Programs offered to students, due to their only being held in city locations. Among the problems students reported in attempting to access these programs are the costs of travel to the city, and the time taken away from the remainder of their studies, e.g. missing other classes in order to attend.<sup>276</sup>

This issue also attracted substantial comment from past and current secondary students. Ms Megan Freckleton, School Captain, St Brigid's College, Horsham, said in a submission that she suspected her ENTER would suffer partly due to 'limited access to educational resources outside of school', including study days and courses.<sup>277</sup> Other students also highlighted the inability to attend exam preparation workshops and lectures as a disadvantage impacting on the achievement of non-metropolitan students.<sup>278</sup>

Some participants also expressed concern that the growth in vocational curriculum may have a negative impact on the academic atmosphere at some schools, potentially reducing academic achievement. Mr Shane Kelly, Acting Principal, Swan Hill College, argued that the 'pendulum swing' to VET at the college had affected those students who were interested in professional occupations and tertiary study, citing dramatically lowered tertiary application rates as evidence of changed student aspirations.<sup>279</sup> Similarly, Orbost Secondary College noted that increased participation in the VCAL meant 'a dilution of the ethos of academic excellence and lack of peer stimulus and competition in a school cohort that can reduce individual Study Scores and thus ENTERs'.<sup>280</sup> The Committee notes that while only non-metropolitan participants commented on this topic, similar issues may arise in some metropolitan and interface schools with strong vocational provision.

Some former students from non-metropolitan areas highlighted the absence of a competitive academic atmosphere in some rural schools.<sup>281</sup> Ms Rachael Moore, now a student at RMIT University, commented about her experiences at school:

---

<sup>276</sup> Ms J. Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Support Services, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 3.

<sup>277</sup> Ms M. Freckleton, School Captain, St Brigid's College, Written Submission, March 2008, 1.

<sup>278</sup> Year 12 Students, Orbost Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 1; Mr C. Willames, Student, Drouin, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Ms M. Collins, First Year Student, Bachelor of Arts/Science, Monash University, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Ms K. Leadbeater, Second Year Student, RMIT University, Written Submission, April 2008, 2.

<sup>279</sup> Mr S. Kelly, Acting Principal, Swan Hill College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 16.

<sup>280</sup> Orbost Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 1.

<sup>281</sup> Ms M. Collins, First Year Student, Bachelor of Arts/Science, Monash University, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Ms R. Moore, Student, RMIT University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2009, 4–5.

... from prior experience I know that it is very hard to study in a class where half the people there do not actually want to be there and are just basically mucking around and making it difficult for both teachers and the students who really wish to be there.<sup>282</sup>

Ms Moore also noted that in such an environment, teachers tend to be occupied monitoring the more disruptive students, limiting the amount of support they can offer to more ambitious students.<sup>283</sup>

The Committee believes that it is essential to provide increased support for students if they are to excel in their VCE studies. One inquiry participant suggested some ways in which VCE students might be supported, including through the local provision of study lectures, or online access to recorded lectures and lecture notes.<sup>284</sup> The Committee also sees potential for the expansion of accelerated learning programs in schools, or for greater access to university run tertiary extension studies. Alternatively, scholarships might be provided to enable students to participate in extension and revision activities held outside of their local communities. The Committee believes that work should be done to identify avenues to support students in non-metropolitan and other areas to boost their achievement in the VCE, and to promote an academic atmosphere that supports high achievement. There is also a role for universities to contribute to achievement as part of school outreach activities, as discussed in Chapter 4.

---

## Conclusion and recommendations

---

In discussion of the barriers that impede participation in higher education, academic achievement at school and completion of year 12 are sometimes overlooked. However, differences in school achievement and completion are among the most fundamental causes of geographical differences in higher education participation rates.

The Committee's review of research and data on school achievement and completion in Victoria showed that despite strong overall performance, students in low socioeconomic status and in non-metropolitan areas have lower levels of achievement and are less likely to complete year 12. This suggests that success in addressing the under-representation of some groups in higher education will depend in large part on success in increasing school completion and raising academic achievement among these groups. The Committee therefore believes that the Victorian Government should continue to focus on lifting year 12 or equivalent completion rates, particularly in low socioeconomic and non-metropolitan areas, through system-wide school improvement strategies and integrated supports that enable schools to tackle the full range of factors that contribute to early school leaving.

In addition, there are geographical and socioeconomic differences in the type of year 12 qualifications attained. The Committee believes that recent trends in year 12 completion rates should be further investigated. As the VCE is the main pathway into university for school leavers, this work should analyse the causes and implications of any changes in VCE completion rates, compared with other qualifications. Importantly, the Committee believes that in its efforts to lift overall school completion rates, the Victorian Government should have particular regard to ensuring that students from non-metropolitan and low socioeconomic status areas are encouraged and supported to undertake the VCE. Expanded VCE subject choices would allow students to undertake subjects that are of most

---

<sup>282</sup> Ms R. Moore, Student, RMIT University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2009, 5.

<sup>283</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>284</sup> Mr C. Williams, Student, Drouin, Written Submission, April 2008, 1.

interest to them and in which they are most likely to excel. Increased academic support is also essential, including opportunities to participate in a range of extension and revision activities.

## Recommendations

- 3.1 That the Victorian Government continue to focus on lifting year 12 or equivalent completion rates by:
- implementing system-wide school improvement strategies, with particular attention to schools in low socioeconomic and non-metropolitan areas; and
  - providing schools with integrated support that enables them to tackle the full range of factors that contribute to early school leaving.
- 3.2 That the Victorian Government expand the collection and publication of annual data on year 12 completion rates to include analyses of data for different qualifications (VCE, VCAL and VET certificate) between different geographical areas and socioeconomic groups.
- 3.3 That the Victorian Government analyse and report on recent trends in VCE completion rates, including:
- VCE completion rates for Victoria as a whole and for different geographical areas and socioeconomic groups;
  - causes and implications of any changes in VCE completion rates; and
  - strategies to increase VCE completion rates, particularly in low socioeconomic and non-metropolitan areas.
- 3.4 That the Victorian Government support increased completion and higher achievement in the VCE, particularly among under-represented groups, by:
- assisting smaller schools to expand VCE subject choices;
  - developing a scholarship program for VCE students to participate in revision and extension activities;
  - expanding accelerated learning programs;
  - supporting schools to offer access to university-run tertiary extension studies that can contribute to ENTERs; and
  - providing online written and interactive extension and revision materials.



# Aspirations towards higher education

---

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

---

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

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

---

### The nature and formation of aspirations

---

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

---

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

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

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

## The nature of aspirations

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

<sup>290</sup> *ibid.*, 27.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

<sup>299</sup> Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Written Submission, March 2008, 8.

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

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

<sup>302</sup> Western Chances, Written Submission, August 2008, 17.

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

## Forming aspirations

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

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

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

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

## *Socioeconomic status background*

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

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

---

<sup>303</sup> Shire of Melton, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

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

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

<sup>306</sup> *ibid.*, 6–7.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### ***Family cultural background***

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

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

---

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

<sup>318</sup> Victoria University, Written Submission, April 2008, 39.

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

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

<sup>321</sup> Victoria University, Written Submission, April 2008, 30.

<sup>322</sup> *ibid.*, 43.

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

<sup>324</sup> Centre for Multicultural Youth, Written Submission, August 2008, 6.

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

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

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

### *School and community environment*

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

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

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

---

<sup>326</sup> Centre for Multicultural Youth, Written Submission, August 2008, 6.

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

<sup>328</sup> Centre for Multicultural Youth, Written Submission, August 2008, 6.

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

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

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

<sup>332</sup> Lakes Entrance Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 1.

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

<sup>334</sup> Australian Catholic University, Written Submission, March 2008, 2–3.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>343</sup> South East LLEN, Written Submission, May 2008, 3.

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

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

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

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

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

### *Geographical differences in aspirations*

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

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

---

## Raising aspirations towards higher education

---

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

---

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

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

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

## Concerns about raising aspirations towards higher education

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Career education

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Up-skilling career educators*

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

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

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

*The need for more information about higher education*

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

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

---

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

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

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

<sup>363</sup> Australian Catholic University, Written Submission, March 2008, 4.

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

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

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



knowledge of teaching and learning styles,<sup>367</sup> career outcomes<sup>368</sup> or course content.<sup>369</sup> Some young people also suggested that career teachers are not always knowledgeable about the range of university courses<sup>370</sup> and offered little or no advice about what courses students might choose.<sup>371</sup> Several young people advised the Committee that they would have benefited from more advice and guidance when choosing a course. One regional student argued:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *Allowing sufficient time for individualised support*

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>398</sup> Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, Written Submission, May 2008, 3–4;

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

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

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

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

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

### *Engaging parents*

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **University recruitment and outreach**

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

awareness of university life,<sup>416</sup> fostering university aspirations<sup>417</sup> and lifting student achievement.<sup>418</sup>

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

### *Types of outreach activity*

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

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

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

---

<sup>416</sup> Monash University, Written Submission, March 2008, 2; University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

<sup>417</sup> University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

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

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

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

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

<sup>422</sup> *ibid.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>428</sup> Access and Success, Victoria University, Written Submission, August 2008, 8–9.



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

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

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

### *Effectiveness of outreach*

The Committee heard mixed views about the effectiveness of outreach activities. In Canada and Scotland where outreach programs are well established, the Committee heard that research has demonstrated the effectiveness of some programs. Professor Richard James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, also offered a strong endorsement of outreach programs. Professor James pointed to findings from the United Kingdom showing that where academic staff work with students in the early stages of secondary schooling, aspirations for university study and the rate of transition to university can be lifted.<sup>432</sup> Evidence received from Deakin University,<sup>433</sup> Monash University<sup>434</sup> and the University of Ballarat<sup>435</sup> suggested that some outreach schemes have resulted in significant improvements in student participation from target equity groups.

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

---

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

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

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

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

<sup>433</sup> Dr J. Oriol, Head, Student Equity Unit, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 52–53.

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

<sup>435</sup> Supplementary information provided by the University of Ballarat, March 2009.

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

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

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

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

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

### *Engaging younger students*

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

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

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

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

---

<sup>438</sup> *ibid.*

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

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

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

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

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

### *Targeting student achievement*

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

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

---

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

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

<sup>444</sup> Monash University, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

<sup>445</sup> Supplementary information provided by the University of Ballarat, March 2009.

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

*Building effective partnerships with schools*

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>452</sup> *ibid.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *Collaborating across institutional boundaries*

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

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

---

<sup>457</sup> vicCentral Highlands Area Consultative Committee, Written Submission, March 2008, 9.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

<sup>466</sup> Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, May 2008, 8.

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

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

### *Community engagement*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>474</sup> *ibid.*

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

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

### *Resourcing for outreach programs*

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

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

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

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

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

---

<sup>476</sup> *ibid.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

---

### Using an integrated support approach to raise aspirations

---

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Boston Consulting Group analysed the costs and benefits to society of the Pathways to Education Program, concluding that the return on investment is CA\$25 for each dollar invested in the program.<sup>491</sup> The cumulative lifetime benefit to society of a student in Pathways to Education is CA\$400,000 and the net present value to society for every participating student is CA\$50,000.<sup>492</sup> The findings also indicated a dramatic increase in the overall quality of life in Regent Park, including a decrease in teenage pregnancy rates and a significant reduction in violent crime and property crime reports in the community and adjacent neighbourhoods.<sup>493</sup> This suggests that large-scale, integrated programs may be a worthwhile investment not only for improving participation in higher education for under-represented groups, but as well as for the benefit to society.

---

## Conclusion and recommendations

---

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

---

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

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

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

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

<sup>492</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>493</sup> *ibid.*

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

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

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

### Recommendations

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

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

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

# Admission into higher education

---

Just because our suburb and school have a reputation, does that mean nothing good can come from them? ... We constantly get rejected because we come from the Western suburbs and, eventually, we believe it is our fault that we didn't get in, because we live in the Western suburbs. But it is not our fault and we should never accept that as an excuse to fail or give up.<sup>494</sup>

---

Each year, eligible applicants miss out on the offer of a place in higher education. The proportion of applicants selected for admission into a university course varies across different geographical and social groups. Variable success in selection processes therefore helps to explain geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education.

---

## The admission process

---

The process of admission into higher education begins with the application for a place and concludes when the student commences study. Before being considered for selection, students must meet institutional and course eligibility requirements. Institutional eligibility requirements vary across universities, but typically include completion of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) or an equivalent qualification, and a minimum standard of competence in English. Some universities make provision for admitting students who do not meet general eligibility requirements in some special circumstances. As well as meeting institutional eligibility requirements, students must also satisfy any relevant course requirements, such as prerequisite VCE subjects. Students who meet both institutional and course requirements do not gain automatic entry, but are eligible to be considered in selection processes.

Student selection is a crucial stage in the higher education admission process. For most undergraduate courses at Australian universities, the pool of eligible applicants is larger than the number of available places in the course. This surplus of eligible applicants necessitates a selection process by which successful students can be chosen from the total pool.

---

<sup>494</sup> Mr M. Bertolacci, Senior Leader, Kealba College, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

In selecting students for admission, universities are guided by a number of underpinning principles. Merit, assessed by reference to prior academic achievement, is a primary principle that guides student selection. This notion of merit is related to the aim of selecting those students who are most likely to succeed in the higher education course. Recognising that disadvantage may have affected prior academic achievement, universities also take account of equity principles in selecting and admitting students. Finally, universities have a stated commitment to fairness, openness and transparency in selection and admission.

Universities' selection and admission practices are also influenced by the broader context of supply of, and demand for, higher education places. Student demand for university places fluctuates over time, and varies considerably between institutions, courses and campuses. At the same time, to remain financially viable, universities must attract students. Hence, while selection and admission can be viewed as a 'screening-out' process in which the most desirable applicants are chosen from a pool of eligible applicants, competition for students also places pressure on universities to actively recruit.<sup>495</sup> This recruitment pressure can influence selection and admission practices, with universities that struggle to fill places broadening selection criteria and opening access opportunities to a wider range of applicants.

Throughout the inquiry, the Committee received evidence about the range of pathways and processes by which students can enter higher education. For current and recent school leavers, the Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER) is the dominant selection mechanism, although this is often complemented with other selection tools. A number of students also gains entry to higher education through participation in an enabling program, or on the basis of prior Vocational Education and Training (VET) study.

---

## **ENTER-based selection**

---

In Victoria, the main mechanism by which school leavers are selected to receive a university offer is the ENTER. The ENTER is a tertiary entrance rank (TER) system that provides a single measure of performance in an applicant's VCE studies. It is important to note that the ENTER is a ranking rather than a score, and represents an individual's performance relative to other students in their cohort. TER systems are also a main selection mechanism in other Australian states.

The precise way in which the ENTER is used in selection varies across institutions and courses. The director of the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre estimated that approximately half of the courses for which the centre administers applications select students on a non-ENTER basis (e.g. an audition or folio), or use the ENTER in conjunction with such mechanisms. For the other 50 per cent of courses, the ENTER is 'pretty much the sole selection criterion'.<sup>496</sup> In these courses, applicants are ranked according to ENTER, and approximately 80 per cent of places are automatically allocated to the applicants at the top of this ranking. The ENTER above which all applicants receive an offer is referred to as the 'clearly-in' ENTER. Applicants with an ENTER below a certain point are then automatically rejected, leaving a 'middle band' of applicants who are considered for the remaining course places. Depending on the university, middle-band applications may be evaluated against a range of criteria, including performance in prerequisite subjects and

---

<sup>495</sup> Robert Pascoe, Avril McClelland and Barry McGaw, *Perspectives on Selection Methods for Entry into Higher Education in Australia*, Commissioned Report 55 (Canberra: Higher Education Council, 1997), 1.

<sup>496</sup> Ms E. Wenn, Director, Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 3.

consideration of any disadvantage experienced. Middle-band criteria for each course are published in the annual *VTAC Guide*.

### Advantages of ENTER-based selection

The ENTER and other TER systems are an attractive selection mechanism for universities as they are generally seen as a fair measure of prior achievement, as well as a useful predictor of academic success. They are also relatively simple to administer.

#### *Selection based on merit*

Perhaps the most fundamental principle underlying the selection of students is that of merit—the idea that benefits should be directed towards those who display excellence or worth. With regard to higher education, this means that higher education places should be allocated to those who demonstrate academic merit in the form of school grades or other educational achievements.<sup>497</sup>

As a single measure that summarises comparative achievement in year 12 studies, the ENTER facilitates merit-based selection. The ENTER allows universities to use one figure to directly compare students who have completed widely varied combinations of subjects, providing a seemingly objective way of ranking applicants for selection. The Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre has highlighted this point, arguing that without the ENTER, ‘selection would be more complex, less equitable and difficult to administer’.<sup>498</sup> In this way, the ENTER produces selection and admission decisions that are defensible on the grounds of merit—an especially important feature in relation to courses that are in high demand.

#### *Selection of those most likely to succeed*

Closely related to the concept of merit is the central principle of selecting those applicants who appear most likely to succeed in the course. The 2002 Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee publication *Universities and their Students: Principles for the Provision of Education by Australian Universities* states that selection criteria should ‘maintain the university’s academic standards and maximise the likelihood of success’.<sup>499</sup> Most university selection policies and regulations make repeated reference to this principle.

Selecting applicants who appear the most likely to succeed can be justified on a number of grounds. Importantly, it promotes the most efficient use of resources, reducing the wastage that occurs when students commence but do not complete a qualification. Selecting students on this principle might also be seen as the most ethical way of treating applicants who are not well-suited to the academic pathway. This point was highlighted by two representatives of the university sector, who argued that selecting and admitting students who lack the requisite capabilities does them a disservice by setting them up for failure.<sup>500</sup>

The ENTER has been shown to be a reasonably reliable, if imperfect, predictor of success in higher education. Its use is in line with the important selection principle of allocating

---

<sup>497</sup> Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 11–12.

<sup>498</sup> Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre, *ENTER into Tertiary Study: A Guide to the Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank* (Melbourne: VTAC, 2004), 6.

<sup>499</sup> Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, *Universities and their Students: Principles for the Provision of Education by Australian Universities* (Canberra: AVCC, 2002), 3.

<sup>500</sup> Mr M. Gallagher, Executive Director, Group of Eight, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 3; Professor R. Larkins, Chair, Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2009, 23.

places to those most likely to succeed. This argument in favour of the ENTER has been set out by the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre:

The ENTER makes the selection process manageable, and is needed simply on practical grounds. However, for a great many courses, there is another reason for its use. Generally, overall performance in the VCE is a good indicator of future tertiary success, and course selection officers are trying to pick students who are most likely to succeed.<sup>501</sup>

Indeed, a number of studies over many years have found academic performance in year 12 to be a good predictor of success in higher education. Studies specifically examining the usefulness of the ENTER as a predictor of student performance have also tended to show a positive correlation between ENTER and university performance.<sup>502</sup> Looking at students at the University of Western Australia, one study found that students' entry scores were a strong predictor of success, with a one percentage point increase in TER resulting in a one percentage point increase in first year marks.<sup>503</sup> Another study analysed the results of 12,543 domestic, full-time Monash University students in their first year of study (2000 to 2003) to examine the relationships between ENTER, school sector and university performance. In line with the findings from earlier studies, it found a strong linear correlation between university performance and year 12 achievement with ENTERs of 80 and above, although the correlation below this point was negligible.<sup>504</sup> It also found that ENTERs are a better predictor of success in some disciplines than in others. While ENTERs were found to be good for predicting success in the fields of engineering, agriculture and science, they were weaker in the health and education fields.<sup>505</sup>

### Limitations of ENTER-based selection

Despite its strengths, the ENTER has been subject to criticism on equity grounds. This is because the ENTER reflects geographical and socioeconomic differences in academic achievement at school, and therefore reduces access to higher education for prospective students from particular areas and groups. This was acknowledged in the Review of Australian Higher Education, which noted that heavy reliance on the ENTER as a selection mechanism has tended to replicate the existing student profile.<sup>506</sup>

### *Socioeconomic differences in average ENTER*

Research has consistently found that students from higher socioeconomic status backgrounds tend to achieve higher ENTERs. One 2001 study used data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth to investigate the relationships between ENTER and socioeconomic status, examining parental occupational status, parental education, family wealth and a composite socioeconomic status measure. The study found positive correlations between ENTER and socioeconomic status on all four measures.<sup>507</sup>

---

<sup>501</sup> Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre, *ENTER into Tertiary Study: A Guide to the Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank* (Melbourne: VTAC, 2004), 6.

<sup>502</sup> Several of these studies are reviewed in Ian R. Dobson and Eric Skuja, 'Secondary Schooling, Tertiary Entry Ranks and University Performance,' *People and Place* 13, no. 1 (2005) and in Elisa Rose Birch and Paul W. Miller, 'Tertiary Entrance Scores: can we do better?' *Educational Research and Perspectives* 34, no. 2 (2007).

<sup>503</sup> Elisa Rose Birch and Paul W. Miller, 'The Influence of Type of High School Attended on University Performance,' *Australian Economic Papers* 46, no. 1 (2007): 9.

<sup>504</sup> Ian R. Dobson and Eric Skuja, 'Secondary Schooling, Tertiary Entry Ranks and University Performance,' *People and Place* 13, no. 1 (2005): 55–56.

<sup>505</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>506</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 38.

<sup>507</sup> Gary N. Marks and others, *Tertiary Entrance Performance: The Role of Student Background and School Factors*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 22 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2001), 15–18.



Related to socioeconomic status, there are also marked differences in average ENTER across school sectors. A study of Victorian school leavers in 2000 found that the median ENTER for students from independent schools was 84.20, in comparison with 69.95 at Catholic schools and 62.80 for government school students.<sup>508</sup> More recent studies show this disparity continues. Similar differences have also been observed in other Australian states.<sup>509</sup>

On this topic, two participants drew the Committee's attention to recent research that used greater Melbourne as a case study to examine the relationship between competition for and access to university places for disadvantaged students.<sup>510</sup> The research found that between 1996 and 2004, the number of offers made to school leavers declined, while the number of students completing senior secondary school increased. This increase in competition for places led to a rise in entry requirements at universities that had traditionally been more academically accessible, meaning that students with university aspirations who were unable to achieve a high ENTER in 2004 were less likely to gain access than similar students in 1996. The analysis found that this dynamic impacted disproportionately on students from government schools and low socioeconomic status areas.<sup>511</sup>

Investigation of school sector differences in ENTER have also highlighted concerns about the usefulness of the ENTER as a predictor of success. Various studies have found that once admitted, students from government schools do better than would be expected on the basis of ENTER.<sup>512</sup> One study of Monash University undergraduates estimated that students from non-selective government schools performed at a similar level as students from Catholic and independent schools who attained an ENTER five points higher.<sup>513</sup>

These relationships between socioeconomic status, achievement and ENTER were also widely acknowledged by inquiry participants.<sup>514</sup> The lower average ENTER achieved by students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds suggests that access to higher education will be restricted for this group. It also indicates that students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds who gain admission to university will not be as well represented in more prestigious institutions with higher entry thresholds. This was acknowledged by Mr Michael Gallagher, Executive Director, Group of Eight, who remarked on the implications for member universities:

... when you look at school success, educational attainment in school, which correlates pretty much with student readiness which correlates pretty much with parental means, the Group of Eight draws disproportionately from the more affluent families. We are conscious of that.<sup>515</sup>

---

<sup>508</sup> Cited in Ian R. Dobson and Eric Skuja, 'Secondary Schooling, Tertiary Entry Ranks and University Performance,' *People and Place* 13, no. 1 (2005): 53–54.

<sup>509</sup> Gary N. Marks, 'School sector differences in tertiary entrance: Improving the educational outcomes of government schools' *Australian Social Monitor* 7, no. 2 (2004): 43.

<sup>510</sup> Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), Written Submission, May 2008, 12–13; Dr J. Oriel, Head, Student Equity Unit, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 52.

<sup>511</sup> Daniel Edwards, 'What happens when supply lags behind demand? Disadvantaged students and the ever-increasing competition for university places,' *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 30, no. 1 (2008): 3–13.

<sup>512</sup> A number of these studies are reviewed in Ian R. Dobson and Eric Skuja, 'Secondary Schooling, Tertiary Entry Ranks and University Performance,' *People and Place* 13, no. 1 (2005): 56–57.

<sup>513</sup> Ian R. Dobson and Eric Skuja, 'Secondary Schooling, Tertiary Entry Ranks and University Performance,' *People and Place* 13, no. 1 (2005): 59.

<sup>514</sup> For example, Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), Written Submission, May 2008, 12; Mr D. Conley, Youth Services Coordinator, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 5; Mr T. Barton, Careers Coordinator, Orbest Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 40; Mr G. McLean, General Manager, Youth Transitions Division, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 July 2008, 4; Gippsland Education Precinct, Written Submission, May 2008, 3.

<sup>515</sup> Mr M. Gallagher, Executive Director, Group of Eight, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 3.

## *Inquiry into Geographical Differences in Participation in Higher Education in Victoria*

The Committee also heard from one school captain who expressed her frustration and resentment with this situation, comparing herself and her classmates to students from wealthier families and stating 'we want the marks and universities they get'.<sup>516</sup>

### *Geographical differences in average ENTER*

Schools, students, universities, researchers and others who participated in the inquiry also highlighted the lower average ENTERs attained in non-metropolitan Victoria.<sup>517</sup> The Committee also heard that students from the interface municipalities achieve lower ENTERs.<sup>518</sup> Data from the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) confirms these observations, showing substantial differences in average ENTER attained in metropolitan, interface and non-metropolitan areas of Victoria (refer Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: School leaver ENTER distribution, by home location (%) (2007–08)

	<10	10s	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	70s	80s	90s
Metropolitan	2.5	2.6	2.5	7.5	10.1	11.8	13.2	14.4	16.2	19.1
Interface	4.6	4.2	3.7	11.1	13.8	15.3	15.7	12.5	11.3	7.8
Non-metropolitan	2.7	3.0	3.3	10.3	14.3	14.6	15.9	15.0	12.3	8.5
All Victoria	3.0	3.1	2.9	8.9	12.0	13.2	14.4	14.2	14.2	14.1

Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 2007–08 VTAC data, May 2009.

In 2007, year 12 completers from metropolitan areas were over-represented in the highest ENTER bands, with almost one-fifth of the cohort (19.1%) attaining an ENTER in the 90s. The percentage in this band was much lower in both interface (7.8%) and non-metropolitan (8.5%) areas. For non-metropolitan areas, the largest percentage of students fell in the ENTER bands of the 60s (15.9%) and 70s (15.0%), while in the interface areas, the largest percentages achieved ENTERs in the 50s (15.3%) and 60s (15.7%). Larger percentages of students from the non-metropolitan and, particularly, the interface areas received an ENTER of less than 30.

As discussed in Chapter 2, university applicants from interface areas had lower offer rates than university applicants in either metropolitan or non-metropolitan areas. It can be surmised from VTAC data that lower average ENTERs on the part of students from these areas is largely responsible for this low offer rate. Students from interface areas may also be disadvantaged because they are competing for places at the same universities and in the same courses as higher achieving metropolitan applicants. This highlights the point that access to higher education requires both academic and geographical accessibility.<sup>519</sup>

In contrast to interface applicants, university applicants from non-metropolitan Victoria have access to less competitive entry at non-metropolitan campuses, and receive offers at a similar rate to their metropolitan counterparts. Nevertheless, lower average ENTERs among non-metropolitan students will limit access to high-demand courses and institutions.

<sup>516</sup> Ms D. Hamoud, School Captain, Isik College, Written Submission, March 2008, 1.

<sup>517</sup> For example, Ms K. Leadbeater, Second Year Student, RMIT University, Written Submission, April 2008, 2; RMIT University, Written Submission, March 2008, 2; Deakin University, Written Submission, March 2008, 6; Gippsland Education Precinct, Written Submission, May 2008, 4; Mr R. Juratowitch, Campus Principal, Kurnai College, Gippsland Education Precinct, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 4; Ms R. Moore, Student, RMIT University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2009, 4–5; Orbost Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 1, 4; Mr P. Dryden, Written Submission, May 2008, 2; Australian Council for Educational Research, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

<sup>518</sup> Human Services Directors of the Interface Councils, Written Submission, May 2008, 5.

<sup>519</sup> Daniel Edwards, 'Keeping it local: geographical patterns of university attendance,' *Australian Universities Review* 51, no. 1 (2009): 69.

## Improving equity in ENTER-based selection

Underlying the calculation and use of the ENTER is the assumption that VCE students compete on a level playing field.<sup>520</sup> Participants in the Committee's inquiry, however, questioned this assumption, highlighting some of the factors that may make it more difficult for students from under-represented areas and groups to attain high ENTERs. In particular, participants suggested that achievement in the VCE can be affected by the range of subjects offered and the academic environment within a school, opportunities to participate in extension and revision activities, and a range of personal barriers to achievement (refer Chapter 3 for further discussion of these issues).

Most universities have recognised the impact of previous educational disadvantage by incorporating equity considerations into their selection practices. The Committee considered two key approaches taken by universities to improve equity in ENTER-based selection. The first approach is to recognise and compensate for any disadvantage experienced, through modifications to ENTER-based selection. In Victoria, the Special Entry Access Scheme (SEAS) is the main mechanism for re-ranking and the allocation of 'bonus' points. In the second approach, universities complement the use of the ENTER with other selection tools, such as aptitude testing or recommendation-based selection. The Committee considered the potential of each of these approaches to make ENTER-based selection more equitable. A third approach to addressing inequities reflected in the ENTER involves implementing strategies to lift achievement at school, as discussed in Chapter 3.

### *Special Entry Access Scheme*

The Special Entry Access Scheme is an umbrella program, administered by the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre, which enables applicants to apply for a range of special entry and scholarship schemes at participating universities. The Special Entry Access Scheme incorporates two distinct schemes: Equity and Access and Year 11/12 Special Consideration. Equity and Access deals with longer-term educational disadvantage, while Year 11/12 Special Consideration targets applicants who experienced adverse circumstances during year 11 and/or 12 which have impacted on the applicant's ENTER.<sup>521</sup> SEAS applicants provide a written statement and/or documentary evidence demonstrating either long-term educational disadvantage and/or factors that have impacted on year 11 and/or 12 results. This information is examined by the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre, which assesses the level of disadvantage experienced and its impact on the applicant. These VTAC determinations are forwarded to institutions which may take them into consideration in selection decisions.<sup>522</sup>

Typically, information from SEAS applications is used in selection as part of the middle-band process described above.<sup>523</sup> It appears that some universities apply 'bonus' points to the ENTER of SEAS applicants, while others may simply re-rank middle band applicants based on information from the SEAS application. Some universities, including RMIT University, the University of Melbourne and Monash University, publish information for each course in the *VTAC Guide* as to whether SEAS applications are considered for middle-band selection to

---

<sup>520</sup> Daniel Edwards, 'What happens when supply lags behind demand? Disadvantaged students and the ever-increasing competition for university places,' *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 30, no. 1 (2008): 6.

<sup>521</sup> Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre, *Special Entry Access Schemes: SEAS* (Melbourne: VTAC, 2008), 3.

<sup>522</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>523</sup> Dr J. Oriel, Head, Student Equity Unit, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 56.

the course. For some other institutions and courses, it is unclear how SEAS information is used.

Evidence received by the Committee suggests that there is strong awareness of the Special Entry Access Scheme amongst upper secondary school staff and students. This is reflected in the high number of SEAS applications received by the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (refer Table 5.2).

Table 5.2: SEAS applications received by the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (2006–07 and 2007–08)

Component	Category	Number of applications	
		2006–07	2007–08
Year 12 Special Consideration		1,607	1,749
Equity and Access		9,124	10,437
	Mature age	1,068	980
	Non-English Speaking Background	700	873
	Indigenous	63	74
	Family circumstances	1,636	2,051
	Disadvantaged socioeconomic background	1,981	1,976
	Rural/Isolated	3,973	4,650
	Under-represented schools	2,035	3,197
	Women in non-traditional courses	87	102
	Disability/long term medical condition	1,123	1,170

Note: The total number of applications made under the various Equity and Access categories does not match the total for the Equity and Access component of SEAS as applicants can apply under multiple categories.

Source: Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (unpublished).

For the 2007–08 year, there were 10,437 applications made under the Equity and Access component of the scheme. Under this component, categories most often listed by applicants were: Rural/isolated; Under-represented schools; Family circumstances; and Disadvantaged socioeconomic background. A further 1,749 applications were made for Year 12 Special Consideration.<sup>524</sup>

While interest in the Special Entry Access Scheme among university applicants is strong, the Committee found it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the scheme. Published information about how SEAS information will be used in selection and the degree to which it increases the applicant's chances of selection is generally vague. Neither the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre nor participating universities publish the number or proportion of applicants who receive an offer on the basis of their SEAS application.

The Committee sought information about the outcomes of SEAS applications directly from universities, receiving a range of figures that are not directly comparable across universities. Monash University provided the most detailed information about the number of SEAS applicants and the outcomes of their applications over the period 2007 to 2009 (refer Table 5.3).

<sup>524</sup> Note that there will be some overlap between the 'Year 12 Special Consideration' and 'Equity and Access' applicants, as applicants can apply for both categories.

Table 5.3: SEAS applications and outcomes at Monash University (2007 to 2009)

Year	Total SEAS applicants	Received SEAS bonus	Total SEAS applicant offers	SEAS applicant offers due to SEAS	Total SEAS applicants enrolled or deferred
2007	4,469	3,391	1,172	257	240
2008	4,981	3,864	1,406	433	1,084
2009	5,238	3,596	Not yet available	Approx. 400	Not yet available

Source: Supplementary information provided by Monash University, March 2009.

As shown in Table 5.3, a majority of SEAS applicants to Monash University received a bonus due to that application (68.6% in 2009). However, a relatively small percentage received an offer due to their SEAS application that they would not otherwise have received: 5.7 per cent of SEAS applicants in 2007 and 8.7 per cent in 2008. The large majority of SEAS applicants who were offered a place at Monash University would have received their offer even without making a SEAS application. Of all SEAS applicants to Monash University in 2008, a total of 1,084 (approximately 21%) enrolled or deferred a place at the university. Information from the University of Melbourne indicates that approximately 21 per cent of offers for undergraduate Commonwealth supported places were made to SEAS applicants in 2009.<sup>525</sup> However, it is unclear what proportion of these students would have received these offers regardless of their SEAS application.

Also of note is the proportion of offers to SEAS applicants across different campuses of the same institution. At Deakin University, for example, in 2008 and 2009, SEAS offers as a proportion of Commonwealth supported place offers were highest at the Warrnambool campus and lowest at the Burwood campus in Melbourne.<sup>526</sup> This is likely to reflect, at least in part, the characteristics of the population catchments surrounding each campus. For example, students living in and around Warrnambool are eligible to make a SEAS application based on rural location alone. However, this data may also indicate a greater willingness among universities to embrace special entry provisions in areas with lower student demand.

Some participants in the Committee's inquiry suggested a more systematic award of ENTER loading or 'bonus points' for VCE students from non-metropolitan areas. The Gippsland Education Precinct argued that all universities should be required to have special entry schemes whereby students from non-metropolitan locations receive an ENTER bonus.<sup>527</sup> Such a scheme is in place at Charles Sturt University, where applicants from regional Australia receive an automatic 5 point TER bonus.<sup>528</sup> The Committee heard suggestions that such bonus points should be given in recognition of the effects of more limited subject choice and lack of access to extension and revision opportunities in non-metropolitan areas.<sup>529</sup> The Committee also heard the view that students who have completed their VCE in non-metropolitan areas have a greater capacity to succeed than is indicated by their ENTER.<sup>530</sup>

<sup>525</sup> Supplementary information provided by the University of Melbourne, March 2009.

<sup>526</sup> Supplementary information provided by Deakin University, March 2009.

<sup>527</sup> Gippsland Education Precinct, Written Submission, May 2008, 4.

<sup>528</sup> Professor R. Chambers, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic, Charles Sturt University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 48.

<sup>529</sup> Ms S. Wills, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Written Submission, April 2008, 2; Ms T. Wilson-Brown, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 20.

<sup>530</sup> Ms M. Barton, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 28–29; Ms C. Alphey, Deputy President, MONSU Peninsula, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 32.

The Committee believes that the Special Entry Access Scheme is an important modification to ENTER-based selection, providing access to higher education to some disadvantaged applicants who would not otherwise have received offers. The Committee urges the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre and the universities to take a more consistent and transparent approach to implementation of the scheme. This would mean ensuring that any ENTER bonuses awarded by an institution are applied by that institution consistently across all courses and campuses. In the Committee's view, there can be little justification for acknowledging an individual's experience of disadvantage for one course, while disregarding it for another.

Additionally, the Committee believes that where ENTER bonuses are awarded, universities should provide clear and specific information about the magnitude of these bonuses (the maximum number of points, for example) and the point in the selection process at which they are applied. If information from SEAS applications is to be used as part of the middle-band process, applicants should be aware of how it is weighted against other middle-band criteria. Currently, information is vague, such as an indication that such applications 'will' or 'may' be considered as part of the middle-band process.<sup>531</sup> Transparency is an important selection principle for universities, meaning that selection principles and criteria should be stated clearly and openly.<sup>532</sup> By providing more specific information about the use of SEAS applications, universities can improve transparency in the selection process.

While recognising universities' attempts to address educational disadvantage, several school-based participants highlighted the substantial time and effort demanded of career educators, students and parents in applying for the Special Entry Access Scheme and other alternative entry programs.<sup>533</sup> One career educator described the scheme as 'the most time-consuming and unwieldy feature of kids applying for higher education'.<sup>534</sup> The Committee believes that more specific information and greater transparency will help students to make a realistic assessment of their chances of gaining entry to a particular course and the value of making a SEAS application.

## **Complements to ENTER-based selection**

Another way in which universities have sought to make ENTER-based selection more equitable is by complementing it with other mechanisms. Through mechanisms such as recommendation-based selection and aptitude testing, universities consider a wider range of ways in which an applicant might demonstrate the capacity to succeed.

### ***Recommendation-based selection***

In recent years, recommendation-based entry schemes have been developed as an alternative selection process for some school leaver applicants. Recommendation-based entry relies on teacher or principal assessment of the student's capacity to succeed at

---

<sup>531</sup> Based on a review of information contained in Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre, *VTAC Guide 2009: A guide to tertiary courses* (Melbourne: VTAC, 2008).

<sup>532</sup> Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, *Universities and their Students: Principles for the Provision of Education by Australian Universities* (Canberra: AVCC, 2002), 2.

<sup>533</sup> Orbst Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 2; Ms C. Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 5; Mr G. Cameron, Managed Individual Pathways Coordinator, Sunshine College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 6; Ms M. O'Shea, Careers Coordinator, Copperfield College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 7.

<sup>534</sup> Ms C. Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 5.

university. Recommendation-based schemes form part of several Australian universities' access strategies. In Victoria, these include: Schools Access La Trobe (SALT) at La Trobe University; the Regional Education Entry Program at the University of Ballarat; the Portfolio Partnership Program at Victoria University; and the Schools Network Access Program (SNAP) at RMIT University.

Recommendation-based selection schemes generally target students at schools that are selected by universities on the basis of low socioeconomic status area, low rate of transition to higher education, and/or the institution's mission to serve a particular region. Applicants provide a statement detailing their interest in the course, their achievements and extracurricular activities. This is supported by a teacher's or principal's assessment of the applicant's ability to succeed in the course. While such schemes facilitate selection on a non-ENTER basis, generally students must nevertheless satisfactorily complete year 12, meet a minimum ENTER threshold and satisfy any prerequisites or additional requirements. Subject to later meeting these requirements, successful applicants generally receive a provisional offer in November or December.

RMIT University's Schools Network Access Program was mentioned during the inquiry by a number of participants who considered the program to be effective in broadening access to higher education.<sup>535</sup> Orbost Secondary College labelled the program 'an unqualified success in terms of uptake and completion'.<sup>536</sup> Ms Kate Leadbeater, an RMIT University student and former school captain at Yea High School, received her place at university through the program:

The awarding of my SNAP place at RMIT University means I have a place in a course with a required ENTER 13 points higher than the ENTER I achieved. Despite this, I am incredibly pleased with my results that indicate I am achieving at a level as high or higher than the students who achieved the required ENTER score. Across the State there are year 12 students missing out on university places because they haven't achieved the required ENTER. For students from rural and regional schools this can be a result of circumstances beyond their control.<sup>537</sup>

Ms Leadbeater applauded the Schools Network Access Program and suggested that similar schemes be replicated at other under-represented schools.<sup>538</sup> The Victorian Farmers Federation also argued for the expansion of recommendation-based entry programs as a means of expanding access to higher education for rural and regional young people.<sup>539</sup>

The Committee reviewed information about the performance of students admitted through recommendation-based entry programs. A report on the 2004 Schools Network Access Program intake found that on average, the 602 students who were admitted via the program performed at a slightly lower level than their counterparts: 16 per cent of results received by SNAP-entry students were failing grades, compared to 12 per cent of all domestic undergraduate results at the university.<sup>540</sup>

On the other hand, a recent Universities Australia review of access and equity programs included a case study of one particularly successful scheme, which had seen the proportion of low socioeconomic background students at the university increase approximately four per

---

<sup>535</sup> For example, Orbost Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 7; Ms K. Leadbeater, Second Year Student, RMIT University, Written Submission, April 2008, 3, 4; Mr G. Cameron, Managed Individual Pathways Coordinator, Sunshine College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 7.

<sup>536</sup> Orbost Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 7.

<sup>537</sup> Ms K. Leadbeater, Second Year Student, RMIT University, Written Submission, April 2008, 3.

<sup>538</sup> *ibid.*, 4.

<sup>539</sup> Victorian Farmers Federation, Written Submission, March 2008, 5.

<sup>540</sup> RMIT University, *RMIT Schools Network Access Program Report 2003/04* (Melbourne: Academic Registrar, RMIT University, 2004), 5.

cent over a few years. Comparison of students' academic outcomes indicated comparable success rates to those of other students.<sup>541</sup> On the basis of this limited evidence, it is not possible to draw any definitive conclusions about the success of students admitted via recommendation-based programs. However, results from existing programs indicate that they have the potential to select students who do as well, or nearly as well, as other students.

In summary, the Committee believes that recommendation-based entry is a useful alternative to traditional ENTER-based selection for some groups of students. This selection method enables universities to select school leavers who have a capacity to succeed that is not necessarily reflected in their ENTER. By specifically targeting schools with low transition into higher education, recommendation-based schemes can enhance access for students from under-represented groups and areas. Recommendation-based schemes may be particularly beneficial for students seeking entry to popular courses in which high 'clearly-in' ENTERs reflect strong student demand, rather than the difficulty of the course. This is because unlike the Special Entry Access Scheme, recommendation-based entry may result in the selection of students with ENTERs substantially below the 'clearly-in' ENTER. The Committee therefore encourages universities to extend recommendation-based entry schemes for students from under-represented areas and groups.

### *Aptitude testing*

Aptitude testing plays a role in student selection for some courses and some types of applicant at most universities. Aptitude testing can provide useful information for selection decisions where information about prior academic achievement is not available. For example, the Special Tertiary Admissions Test assesses critical thinking, understanding and written communication skills for mature age students who do not have recent educational results or qualifications. Aptitude testing as a complementary selection tool can also allow universities to assess specific skills or qualities relevant to a particular course. For example, the Undergraduate Medical Admissions Test is a cognitive ability test developed to determine aptitude for study in health science, and is used by both Monash University and the University of Melbourne as a component of the selection process. In another example, Deakin University uses a custom admissions test as part of selection to its law degrees.

Aptitude testing may also be used specifically as an equity measure for school leaver applicants. Some Victorian universities have recently begun using results from the General Achievement Test (GAT), a test of general knowledge and skills undertaken during VCE studies, as part of middle-band selection processes.<sup>542</sup> In some cases, consideration of GAT results may be restricted to students who have made a SEAS application.

A representative of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) advised the Committee that complementing traditional selection methods with aptitude testing may help universities to identify 'hidden talent'.<sup>543</sup> For this purpose, ACER has developed and piloted UniTEST, a test which assesses the generic reasoning and thinking skills that underpin

---

<sup>541</sup> Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, for Universities Australia, *Participation and Equity: A review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people* (Melbourne: CSHE, 2008), 63.

<sup>542</sup> For example, Monash University, 'Monash trials use of GAT for middle band selection,' Monash University, <http://www.monash.edu.au/news/newsline/story/1241> (accessed 29 June 2009); La Trobe University, 'General Achievement Test,' La Trobe University, <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/study/apply/undergraduate-study/general-achievement-test> (accessed 29 June 2009).

<sup>543</sup> Dr H. Coates, Principal Research Fellow, Australian Council for Educational Research, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 4.



successful study at the higher education level. UniTEST has been developed as a complement to traditional TER selection methods to facilitate selection of school leavers who otherwise may not have gained a place, potentially including students from groups usually under-represented in higher education.<sup>544</sup> UniTEST is still being trialled, and research is also beginning into the relationship between uniTEST results and first year undergraduate achievement.<sup>545</sup>

While welcoming a broadening of university selection processes, the Committee notes that aptitude testing may have limited usefulness as an equity strategy. GAT scores are known to be positively correlated with socioeconomic status. As reported for On Track, almost half (47.2%) of the highest quartile of GAT achievers are from the highest socioeconomic status group, while just 10.9 per cent of top GAT achievers are from the lowest socioeconomic status group.<sup>546</sup> Similarly, preliminary analysis of uniTEST's validity, based on UK data, indicates that students from more advantaged backgrounds and with higher achievement at school tend to score more highly on the test, although there are students from deprived areas and who are not in the top group of school achievers who attain high uniTEST scores.<sup>547</sup> Experience with aptitude testing in the United States and Canada has also shown that test design and greater access to tutoring has seen high socioeconomic status students more likely to achieve high scores.<sup>548</sup> It therefore appears that, at least in relation to the socioeconomic and geographical backgrounds of selected students, aptitude testing will tend to produce a similar result to ENTER-based selection.

---

### Enabling programs

---

Enabling programs (also referred to as 'foundation', 'preparatory' or 'bridging' courses or programs) are one or two semester courses that help to prepare students for higher education study. At the same time, enabling programs allow prospective students to demonstrate their potential to succeed through their achievement in the course, thereby gaining entry to a degree program.

The following enabling courses are currently offered within Victoria: Foundation for Academic Studies (FAST) program at the University of Ballarat; the University Bridging Program at La Trobe University's Wodonga campus; and the Diploma of Tertiary Studies at Monash University's Gippsland and Berwick campuses. The Committee received a great deal of positive evidence about the Diploma of Tertiary Studies. The Committee also heard about enabling programs run by the University of Newcastle in New South Wales. With its Open Foundation and Newstep courses, the university is Australia's biggest provider of publicly funded enabling programs.<sup>549</sup> These programs are recognised as among the best in the country.<sup>550</sup>

---

<sup>544</sup> Australian Council for Educational Research, 'uniTEST – Four universities take part in a national student aptitude test trial,' ACER, <http://www.acer.edu.au/1/index.php/news-item/unistest> (accessed 9 January 2009).

<sup>545</sup> Australian Council for Educational Research, 'uniTEST: Research,' uniTEST, [http://unistest.acer.edu.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogcategory&id=26&Itemid=51](http://unistest.acer.edu.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=26&Itemid=51) (accessed 22 May 2009).

<sup>546</sup> Sheldon Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria: Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009), 27.

<sup>547</sup> Cambridge Assessment and the Australian Council for Educational Research, *Initial Report on Phase Two of the uniTEST Validity Study* (n.p.: Cambridge Assessment and ACER, 2006), 17–18.

<sup>548</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 38.

<sup>549</sup> University of Newcastle, *Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education* (Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008), 1.

<sup>550</sup> Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 15; Ms G. London, Academic Director, University of Canberra, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 33.

## **Characteristics of enabling programs**

Enabling programs share the common aim of providing alternative entry into higher education while building academic skills. At the same time, the Committee found that eligibility and admissions processes, content and the subsequent pathway into further studies varies between enabling programs.

### *Eligibility and admission*

Eligibility criteria and application and selection processes for enabling programs vary, but are generally grounded in the principle of selecting students who demonstrate a potential to succeed in higher education. In the University of Ballarat's FAST program, this capacity to succeed is assessed at an interview.

While enabling programs are generally designed and viewed as equity measures, membership of a designated equity group is not typically required for eligibility. During the application process, applicants generally have an opportunity to outline any circumstances that have impacted on their prior academic achievement. This information is taken into account in selection decisions.

For most of the programs the Committee examined, year 12 completion is not a prerequisite for entry. In fact, some programs, such as the University Bridging Program at La Trobe University, specifically target students who have not completed year 12. The University of Ballarat and the University of Newcastle both state that applicants should have capabilities approximately equivalent to year 10.

Eligibility requirements for the Diploma of Tertiary Studies are stricter, perhaps reflecting the higher entry standards of Monash University generally. To be eligible, students need to have successfully completed the VCE, achieving a minimum ENTER of 50. In addition, eligible applicants will have achieved a minimum study score of 25 in VCE English, with additional subject prerequisites for some degrees. Prospective students make a direct application for a Diploma of Tertiary Studies pathway into their preferred undergraduate degree, detailing their reasons for applying, their academic interests and career aspirations, as well as any disruptions to their studies. Additionally, applicants supply two references and a report from their school which describes the applicant's characteristics and educational achievements.

### *Content of enabling programs*

Enabling programs are designed to build students' skills in research and information literacy, critical analysis, project development, academic writing and oral presentation. Most enabling programs contain core units of study focused on the development of these skills. These core units are often combined with elective discipline-based units that offer an introduction to specific fields of study. In Monash University's Diploma of Tertiary Studies, these discipline-based units are chosen from standard undergraduate units. More often, units are specific to the enabling program. Some enabling programs, such as Open Foundation at the University of Newcastle, consist entirely of elective units, although the university advises students on the combinations of units considered most helpful for success in different undergraduate degree programs. Figure 5.1 shows the units that comprise the enabling programs that the Committee examined.

Figure 5.1: Units in selected enabling programs

<b>Diploma of Tertiary Studies, Monash University</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding University Learning</li> <li>• Discipline-based electives (x6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge and Context</li> </ul>
<b>Foundation for Academic Studies, University of Ballarat</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to Tertiary Study</li> <li>• Oral Communication and Presentation Skills</li> <li>• Mathematics and Introductory Statistics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research and Information Literacy</li> <li>• Academic Writing</li> <li>• Using Computers and the Internet</li> </ul>
<b>Newstep, University of Newcastle</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English: Literacy and Communication</li> <li>• Discipline-based electives (x6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English: Reading, Writing, Research</li> </ul>
<b>Open Foundation, University of Newcastle</b>	
Electives such as:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foundation Concepts for Chemistry and Life Sciences</li> <li>• Basic Quantitative Methodology</li> <li>• Social Enquiry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aboriginal Studies</li> <li>• Studies in Law</li> <li>• English Literature and Film</li> </ul>
<b>University Bridging Program, La Trobe University</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to Adult Learning</li> <li>• Introduction to Maths</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to Social Science</li> <li>• Introduction to Science</li> </ul>

Source: Compiled by the Education and Training Committee based on analysis of program websites, 16 June 2009.

In addition to specific academic skills, enabling programs support students to develop broader skills and attributes. Graded assessment and study loads are generally similar or equivalent to undergraduate units, encouraging the development of self-discipline and organisational and time management skills. Students have an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the range of courses and services available at the university, and to develop an understanding of expected academic standards in higher education. For those who are unsure of their career and study direction, participation in an enabling program is an opportunity to explore academic options and confirm the decision to undertake university study.

### *Admission to degree programs*

While all enabling programs facilitate entry into an undergraduate degree program, selection and admission processes differ substantially. Students who successfully complete Open Foundation or Newstep programs at the University of Newcastle have a Universities Admission Index (UAI, equivalent to the ENTER) calculated on the basis of their achievement in the course. Open Foundation students can attain a UAI of up to 99, while the highest possible UAI for Newstep graduates is 93. Using this UAI, students can apply for admission to any University of Newcastle undergraduate degree (with the exception of Medicine), as well as courses at most other Australian universities.

As noted, a key feature differentiating Monash University's Diploma of Tertiary Studies from other enabling programs is that students undertake units from the degree at the same time as completing the diploma's academic skills units. After satisfactory completion of the first year of study, the students then move directly into the second year of their degree. A representative of the university told the Committee that this structure means that Diploma of

Tertiary Studies students 'do not feel any different from people who have come in via the normal pathway'.<sup>551</sup>

At the University of Ballarat, students who successfully complete the FAST program are guaranteed entry into one of the university's undergraduate programs. Students make a direct application and receive an offer in the university's early offer round. In 2008, 80 per cent of students successfully completed the program, and 72 per cent were then offered a place in an undergraduate course.<sup>552</sup>

### **Benefits of enabling programs**

As a selection and admission process, enabling programs have particular strengths. Rather than simply facilitating entry, these courses enable students to enhance their skills, confidence and familiarity with the university environment. This is generally thought to increase the likelihood of successful degree completion.

A study of the Diploma of Foundation Studies (the predecessor to the Diploma of Tertiary Studies) examined the outcomes for students admitted over four years from 2000 to 2003.<sup>553</sup> All diploma students had lower ENTERs, and would be considered at risk of non-completion in mainstream entry. For each intake, around 84 per cent of entrants completed the first year of study. For those who enrolled in the degree program after completing the diploma, year-to-year retention rates were quite high. For the 2000 cohort, there was no attrition during the second year of study, all went on to third year, and by 2003 (their fourth year) 84 per cent had either graduated or were continuing. It was argued that the success of diploma students suggests the presence of a 'large and untapped' market of students who, given appropriate support, have the capacity for successful tertiary study.<sup>554</sup>

The Committee also heard anecdotal evidence about the positive outcomes of the Diploma of Tertiary Studies.<sup>555</sup> The principal of Kurnai College at the Gippsland Education Precinct told the Committee that the program was having 'a major impact on the number of our students who have gone on to university', particularly for those who may not otherwise have seen university as an option.<sup>556</sup> In addition to providing an entry pathway into university, Mr Sean Murphy, Education Vice-President, Monash University Gippsland Student Union, told the Committee that most diploma students report that participation in the academic skills units is 'extremely beneficial' throughout the course of their studies.<sup>557</sup>

Professor Richard James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, described the University of Newcastle's enabling courses as among the best in Australia, noting impressive outcomes in terms of the numbers participating in the

---

<sup>551</sup> Professor P. Steele, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Campus Coordination and Academic Director, Berwick and Peninsula Campuses, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 42.

<sup>552</sup> Supplementary information provided by the University of Ballarat, March 2009.

<sup>553</sup> Stuart Levy and Julie Murray, 'Tertiary Entrance Scores Need Not Determine Academic Success: An analysis of student performance in an equity and access program,' *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 27, no. 1 (March 2005): 129-140.

<sup>554</sup> *ibid.*, 139.

<sup>555</sup> Mr R. Juratowitch, Campus Principal, Kurnai College, Gippsland Education Precinct, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 4; Ms T. Johnson, Year 12 Student, Kurnai College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 49; Mr S. Murphy, Education Vice-President, Residential Association, Monash University Gippsland Student Union, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 70.

<sup>556</sup> Mr R. Juratowitch, Campus Principal, Kurnai College, Gippsland Education Precinct, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 4.

<sup>557</sup> Mr S. Murphy, Education Vice-President, Monash University Gippsland Student Union, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 70.

programs and their achievement in higher education and subsequent careers.<sup>558</sup> These successful outcomes were also acknowledged by the Australian Universities Quality Agency in its most recent quality audit of the University of Newcastle.<sup>559</sup>

The Committee believes that there is room for expanded provision of enabling courses for mature age and school leaver applicants. In this regard, it is worth noting that there are no enabling programs currently offered in metropolitan Melbourne. An analysis of university application and offer rates (refer Chapter 2) shows that there are relatively large numbers of prospective students in interface areas and low socioeconomic areas of Melbourne who express an interest in higher education (by applying), but who are failing to gain entry. The success of enabling programs in other, predominantly non-metropolitan, areas suggests that many of these students have the capacity for success in university study, provided they have access to appropriate academic skill building and support. The Committee therefore encourages universities to consider introducing or expanding enabling programs, particularly in interface and metropolitan areas.

---

### Admission into higher education on the basis of VET studies

---

Movement from VET into higher education is an important alternative pathway that attracted a great deal of comment during the inquiry. By undertaking a VET qualification, students who were initially unable to gain entry to university may build their skills and increase their chances of selection. Alternatively, successful participation in VET can prompt some students to seriously consider higher education for the first time. The Committee examined data on the extent and nature of articulation and credit transfer from VET to higher education. In doing so, the Committee gave particular attention to the ways in which pathways from VET may increase participation in higher education by people from under-represented groups and areas. The Committee also considered potential strategies for increasing the pathways from VET into higher education.

#### Articulation and credit transfer

In its most recent National Policy and Guidelines on Credit Arrangements, the Australian Qualifications Framework Council defines articulation as 'a process that enables students to progress from one completed qualification to another with credit in a defined pathway'.<sup>560</sup> However, the term is also used more broadly by commentators to refer to a number of related concepts that have to do with the flow of students between education sectors. Just as TAFE graduates may move into a higher education qualification, university graduates may go on to undertake further study in the VET sector. However, the former type of movement—articulation from VET into higher education—receives greater attention in policy and research. A further type of articulation involves concurrent study towards both a higher education and VET qualification. The existence of a formal articulation pathway does not imply automatic admission into a higher education degree; prospective students are still required to apply for a place and be selected into the course.

---

<sup>558</sup> Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 15.

<sup>559</sup> Australian Universities Quality Agency, *Report of an Audit of the University of Newcastle* (Melbourne: AUQA, 2008), 23.

<sup>560</sup> Australian Qualifications Framework Council, *AQF National Policy and Guidelines on Credit Arrangements: Final Draft* (Adelaide: AQF Council, 2009), 23.

'Credit transfer' refers specifically to the granting of exemption, status or advanced standing in a course on the basis of relevant previous or concurrent formal studies. Such an exemption means that the student is not required to study the relevant unit or units. Importantly, this involves 'establishing and recognising equivalence of learning outcomes' between parts of a VET qualification and a higher education qualification.<sup>561</sup> Credit may be granted in the form of block credit (for a stage of a course), specified credit (for nominated units), or unspecified credit (for nominated credit points applied to different units for different students).<sup>562</sup> Credit transfer arrangements may be individual and unstructured—that is, individual students may negotiate credit on a case-by-case basis with the institution. Alternatively, credit transfer arrangements may be structured, with participating institutions determining agreed amounts of credit between specific VET and higher education qualifications.<sup>563</sup>

### *Extent of articulation and credit transfer*

It is difficult to assess the extent of movement from the VET sector into higher education due to the quality of available data. Self-reporting by students, and different methods of data collection at different universities, mean that the percentage of higher education students with prior TAFE experience is often underestimated.<sup>564</sup> Nevertheless, Australian Government data gives some indication of the extent of movement from VET to higher education.

According to Australian Government data, in 2004, 15.5 per cent (6,130) of commencing students<sup>565</sup> at Victorian universities had a VET qualification as their highest previous qualification.<sup>566</sup> However, the number and proportion of students that are selected and admitted to higher education courses on the basis of these qualifications appears to be lower. Table 5.4 shows the number and proportion of commencing students admitted on the basis of a TAFE award at Victorian institutions in 2006.

---

<sup>561</sup> Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, *Discussion Paper: Determining Credit Transfer Arrangements from VET to Higher Education* (Melbourne: VRQA, 2008), 4.

<sup>562</sup> Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, *Discussion Paper: Determining Credit Transfer Arrangements from VET to Higher Education* (Melbourne: VRQA, 2008), 4; PhillipsKPA for the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, *Giving Credit Where Credit is Due: A National Study to Improve Outcomes in Credit Transfer and Articulation from Vocational and Technical Education to Higher Education: Final Report* (n.p.: PhillipsKPA Pty Ltd, 2006), 32.

<sup>563</sup> PhillipsKPA for the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, *Giving Credit Where Credit is Due: A National Study to Improve Outcomes in Credit Transfer and Articulation from Vocational and Technical Education to Higher Education: Final Report* (n.p.: PhillipsKPA Pty Ltd, 2006), 32.

<sup>564</sup> Leesa Wheelahan, 'What kind of access does VET provide to higher education for low SES students? Not a lot' (paper presented to the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education Launch and Forum, University of South Australia, Adelaide, 25–26 February 2009), 4–5.

<sup>565</sup> Domestic students commencing a higher education course at bachelor level or below.

<sup>566</sup> Tom Karmel, 'Reflections on the tertiary education sector in Australia' (paper presented at the LH Martin Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Management Conference, Melbourne, 27–28 November 2008), 13–14.

Table 5.4: Commencing undergraduate higher education students admitted to Victorian institutions on the basis of a TAFE award (2006)

Institution	No.	%
Deakin University	797	12.4
La Trobe University	799	13.1
Monash University	676	8.1
RMIT University	1,216	21.1
Swinburne University of Technology	724	25.8
The University of Melbourne	89	1.6
University of Ballarat	0	0.0
Victoria University	460	10.0
Other higher education providers	26	3.3
<b>Total Victoria</b>	<b>4,787</b>	<b>11.5</b>

Source: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Selected Higher Education Statistics* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008).

As Table 5.4 shows, 11.5 per cent of commencing higher education students in Victoria were admitted on the basis of previous TAFE study in 2006, with substantial variation across institutions. In general, the rate of admission on the basis of TAFE study was high at dual-sector universities. At Swinburne University of Technology, approximately one-quarter (25.8%) of commencing students gained entry through a TAFE route. According to data provided to the Committee by the university, this figure was even higher in 2008, at 29.1 per cent.<sup>567</sup> The lack of TAFE articulators at the University of Ballarat is puzzling, and may be the result of specific admission and data collection practices. Information provided to the Committee by the University of Ballarat indicates that in 2008, 185 commencing students were admitted through a TAFE pathway.<sup>568</sup>

The level of TAFE-based admission was variable at non-dual sector universities. The percentage was relatively high at La Trobe University (13.1%) and Deakin University (12.4%), both of which have strong partnerships with TAFE institutes. Notably, Monash University admitted 8.1 per cent of commencing students on the basis of prior TAFE study in 2006. This was more than double the average for Australia's Group of Eight research-intensive universities.<sup>569</sup> Excluding the University of Ballarat, the figure was lowest at the University of Melbourne, where only 1.6 per cent of admissions were on the basis of prior TAFE studies.

Not all of the higher education students who have undertaken prior TAFE study, or who have been admitted on this basis, receive credit for their TAFE study towards a higher education qualification. In 2006, approximately 10.1 per cent of commencing undergraduate students nationwide were admitted on the basis of prior TAFE study, but only 3.4 per cent received credit for this study.<sup>570</sup> Research has shown that relatively low levels of credit transfer remained almost unchanged over 1999 to 2004, despite increases in the proportion of students admitted on the basis of TAFE study.<sup>571</sup>

<sup>567</sup> Supplementary information provided by Swinburne University of Technology, March 2009.

<sup>568</sup> Supplementary information provided by the University of Ballarat, March 2009.

<sup>569</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Selected Higher Education Statistics* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008).

<sup>570</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Discussion Paper: June 2008* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 42.

<sup>571</sup> Victorian TAFE Association, *Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education* (Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008), 7.

The Committee notes federal and state government efforts to promote and increase credit transfer. Given the substantial attention to this issue by policymakers over a number of years, the Committee is disappointed to see that credit transfer remains limited. While acknowledging the range of factors that universities consider in granting credit for VET studies, the Committee believes that higher education institutions can do more to ensure that policy changes are translated into benefits for students articulating from VET to higher education.

### *Arrangements supporting articulation and credit transfer*

The Committee received a great deal of evidence about the arrangements that facilitate movement from VET into higher education in Victoria. Swinburne University of Technology has the highest level of articulation from TAFE to higher education of any Australian university.<sup>572</sup> Supporting articulation has been a major institutional strategic direction, with programs being developed in the university's TAFE and higher education divisions.<sup>573</sup> Articulation is facilitated by the Swinburne Pathways Program, which enables students from Swinburne University of Technology's TAFE division and other TAFE institutes with a minimum credit average in their final year of TAFE study to apply for entry into a higher education course.<sup>574</sup> These students may also be eligible for credit transfer, with guidelines on credit transfer between a range of qualifications set out in an online Credit Transfer Database. A representative of Swinburne University of Technology advised the Committee that implementing such arrangements has financial implications and requires strong inter-sectoral collaboration and modifications to course design and teaching. She suggested that reproducing the university's success would not be feasible for all institutions.<sup>575</sup>

Some universities that are not dual-sector institutions have nevertheless put in place strong TAFE articulation pathways. Professor Sally Walker, Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, told the Committee that the university has 'extraordinarily good relationships with TAFE', particularly in its catchment areas.<sup>576</sup> These relationships are supported by a four-way strategic alliance with Box Hill Institute of TAFE, Gordon Institute of TAFE and South West Institute of TAFE. Through this alliance, articulation pathways are in place from a wide range of certificate IV, diploma and advanced diploma courses at partner institutes into undergraduate degrees at Deakin University.<sup>577</sup> Credit transfer is also available, with an indication of available credit for different pathways provided through an Advance Standing (Credit Transfer) database on the Deakin University website.<sup>578</sup> Less extensive arrangements have also been made with other TAFE institutes and VET providers.

Similarly, La Trobe University has a focus on increasing articulation arrangements, part of a broader strategy of greater cooperation with TAFE institutes. This is particularly the case at the university's regional campuses in Mildura, Shepparton and Wodonga, which are co-located with TAFE institutes and which have higher levels of TAFE articulation than the

---

<sup>572</sup> Australian Universities Quality Agency, *Report of an Audit of Swinburne University of Technology* (Melbourne: AUQA, 2008), 17.

<sup>573</sup> Ms J. Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Support Services, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 7.

<sup>574</sup> Swinburne University of Technology, 'Pathways: TAFE to University,' Swinburne University of Technology, <http://www.future.swinburne.edu.au/pathways/programs/> (accessed 25 May 2009).

<sup>575</sup> Ms J. Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Support Services, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 7.

<sup>576</sup> Professor S. Walker, Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 17.

<sup>577</sup> South West Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, April 2008, 7.

<sup>578</sup> Deakin University, 'Advanced Standing (credit transfer) Search,' Deakin University, <http://www.deakin.edu.au/courses/advanced-standing/search.php> (accessed 7 July 2009).



university's metropolitan campus.<sup>579</sup> Mr Kent Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, told the Committee that these arrangements are mutually beneficial for TAFE institutes and the university, feeding students to the university and providing opportunities for TAFE students who want to 'take that extra step'.<sup>580</sup>

The higher rate of articulation at Monash University in comparison to other Group of Eight universities also appears to be related to specific efforts to develop articulation pathways. In its submission, Monash University outlined pathways currently in place from TAFE into nursing, early childhood education and business at the university's non-metropolitan campuses.<sup>581</sup> Once enrolled, TAFE articulators at Monash University are able to apply for credit towards their degree for completed TAFE study. Opportunities for articulation and credit transfer are publicised locally through brochures and information sessions.<sup>582</sup>

### *Outcomes and benefits for students moving from VET study to higher education*

The Committee heard that as an entry pathway into higher education, TAFE study has some important benefits. TAFE study can allow students to rebuild their confidence as learners.<sup>583</sup> At the same time, successful participation in TAFE can prompt the development of higher education aspirations, as illustrated by the story of one inquiry participant:

I took a year doing TAFE. It was a pathway to Monash University. I didn't actually realise until I was there that it was something I always wanted to do: complete a university degree, majoring in accounting and finance. I found that out at TAFE, which was great.<sup>584</sup>

Some inquiry participants pointed out that TAFE pathways into higher education can be less expensive for students who receive credit for their TAFE study, for which fees are lower.

The Committee also heard that students who enter from the VET sector do 'particularly well' in higher education.<sup>585</sup> A review in 2006 of credit transfer and articulation for the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs found that students moving from TAFE to higher education with credit 'perform as well or better than other student cohorts', and indeed, that retention rates for this group of students may be higher.<sup>586</sup> To examine this issue, the Committee sought information from Victorian universities about the academic outcomes of TAFE articulators in comparison to other students. Data on pass rates, average marks and retention provided by Deakin University, Monash University, La Trobe University and Swinburne University of Technology showed that TAFE articulators often perform at a slightly lower level than school leaver entrants, but at a similar or higher level to other students.<sup>587</sup> Hence, it appears that in general, students entering higher education through a VET pathway are well prepared for university study.

---

<sup>579</sup> La Trobe University, Written Submission, March 2008, 9.

<sup>580</sup> Mr K. Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 45.

<sup>581</sup> Monash University, Written Submission, March 2008, 4.

<sup>582</sup> Ms S. Webb, Campus Manager, Peninsula Campus, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 41–42.

<sup>583</sup> Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 17.

<sup>584</sup> Mr M. Keates, President, MONSU Peninsula, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 33.

<sup>585</sup> Ms H. McNamara, Manager, Strategic Planning, Rosebud Campus, Chisholm Institute of TAFE, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 57.

<sup>586</sup> PhillipsKPA for the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, *Giving Credit Where Credit is Due: A National Study to Improve Outcomes in Credit Transfer and Articulation from Vocational and Technical Education to Higher Education; Final Report* (n.p.: PhillipsKPA Pty Ltd, 2006), ii.

<sup>587</sup> Supplementary information provided by Deakin University, Monash University, La Trobe University and Swinburne University of Technology, March 2009.

## Admission on the basis of VET studies as an equity strategy

A number of participants in the Committee's inquiry, including researchers, TAFE institutes, Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) and others, argued that increasing and enhancing movement from VET to higher education may be a useful strategy for increasing access to higher education for students from under-represented groups.

### *Equity in VET participation*

Compared to the higher education sector, the VET sector does well in terms of access and equity,<sup>588</sup> and has made greater improvements over time.<sup>589</sup> Being Indigenous, having a disability, having parents who work in a non-professional or managerial occupation, and having attended a government school do not reduce an individual's likelihood of participation in VET to the same extent as they do in higher education.<sup>590</sup>

At the same time, participation in VET tends to be higher in areas of low socioeconomic status.<sup>591</sup> A 2007 study examined the relationship between socioeconomic status and VET participation by applying ABS Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) to data on students' home addresses. The study found that people from low socioeconomic status areas were over-represented in the VET sector. It also found that people from low socioeconomic status areas tended to undertake lower level qualifications, but that they completed qualifications at an above average rate.<sup>592</sup>

In part related to this, participation in VET is also relatively high in non-metropolitan areas. In Victoria, VET provision is spread relatively widely throughout the state, such that in 2006, the VET participation rate among 15- to 19-year-olds in regional Victoria was approximately 17 per cent, compared to 11 per cent in metropolitan Melbourne.<sup>593</sup>

Because of the higher representation in VET of people from low socioeconomic status backgrounds and non-metropolitan areas, it is often thought that increasing opportunities for articulation from VET into higher education can be a mechanism for increasing the participation of these groups in higher education.<sup>594</sup> This point was made by a number of participants in the Committee's inquiry.<sup>595</sup> Professor Richard James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, told that Committee that articulation from VET is one significant way of tackling the problem of under-representation.<sup>596</sup>

---

<sup>588</sup> Tom Karmel, 'Reflections on the tertiary education sector in Australia' (paper presented at the LH Martin Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Management Conference, Melbourne, 27–28 November 2008), 1.

<sup>589</sup> Gillian Considine, Ian Watson and Richard Hall, *Who's missing out? Access and equity in vocational education and training* (Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2005), 7.

<sup>590</sup> *ibid.*, 22–23.

<sup>591</sup> Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, May 2008, 9.

<sup>592</sup> Paul Foley, *The socio-economic status of vocational education and training students in Australia* (Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2007), 6.

<sup>593</sup> Office of Training and Tertiary Education, *Victoria's Vocational Education and Training Statistics: A Pocket Guide*, 2007 ed. (Melbourne: Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, 2007), 11.

<sup>594</sup> Leesa Wheelahan, 'What kind of access does VET provide to higher education for low SES students? Not a lot' (paper presented to the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education Launch and Forum, University of South Australia, Adelaide, 25–26 February 2009), 3.

<sup>595</sup> For example, Professor R. Larkins, Chair, Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2009, 20; Dr L. Wilkinson, Executive Officer, Gippsland East LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 14; Dr A. Harvey, Acting Executive Director, Bendigo Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 38; Mr G. McLean, General Manager, Youth Transitions Division, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 July 2008, 5.

<sup>596</sup> Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 12.

Nevertheless, some inquiry participants highlighted the relatively small proportion of students that take up this opportunity. Ms Carmel Murphy, Deputy Principal, Office of Admissions, The University of Melbourne, argued against the assumption that TAFE students wish to continue on to higher education, claiming that there is not always demand from students for increased movement between the sectors.<sup>597</sup> Similarly, Professor Elizabeth Harman, Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University, noted that while the university offers a range of articulation pathways, only a small number of these see a lot of movement.<sup>598</sup> The relatively low overall level of student demand for articulation pathways was also highlighted in a recent Australian Government review of credit transfer outcomes, which suggested that this may be due to a lack of understanding of pathways, or limited marketing efforts on the part of universities.<sup>599</sup> The Committee notes that it might also reflect a distinct preference among TAFE students for vocationally oriented learning.

On the other hand, research has found relatively high levels of movement among some VET students. According to the VET Student Outcomes Survey conducted by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, in 2007, 6.3 per cent of all VET graduates at certificate I or above went on to university within a short period.<sup>600</sup> Among diploma and advanced diploma graduates, 17.0 per cent moved into higher education. Both of these figures were substantially higher for students aged 15 to 24. Among this age group 9.9 per cent of VET graduates went on to higher education, including 27.9 per cent of diploma or advanced diploma graduates.<sup>601</sup> This relatively high rate of articulation to higher education among younger VET students may indicate that some school leavers who miss out on a place in higher education instead begin a VET course, with the intention of later moving into university. At Sunshine College in Melbourne's west, the Committee heard from young people who were considering TAFE study as a pathway should they not receive an offer for their preferred university course.<sup>602</sup>

### *Backgrounds of students moving from VET to higher education*

As discussed above, existing data relating to the extent and nature of movement from VET to higher education is limited and problematic. This makes it difficult to examine the characteristics of these students. The limited data and research that is available, however, does not necessarily support the assumption that pathways from VET to higher education function as an equity mechanism. For example, the VET qualifications most likely to provide entry to higher education are at the diploma and advanced diploma level. However, one recent Australia-wide study found that while low socioeconomic status students comprised approximately 29.2 per cent of total VET enrolments, they made up only 19.4 per cent of VET students enrolled in a diploma or advanced diploma.<sup>603</sup>

---

<sup>597</sup> Ms C. Murphy, Deputy Principal, Office of Admissions, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 31.

<sup>598</sup> Professor E. Harman, Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 31.

<sup>599</sup> PhillipsKPA for the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, *Giving Credit Where Credit is Due: A National Study to Improve Outcomes in Credit Transfer and Articulation from Vocational and Technical Education to Higher Education: Final Report* (n.p.: PhillipsKPA Pty Ltd, 2006), 11.

<sup>600</sup> Tom Karmel, 'Reflections on the tertiary education sector in Australia' (paper presented at the LH Martin Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Management Conference, Melbourne, 27–28 November 2008), 15.

<sup>601</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>602</sup> Mr A. Meyers and Ms R. Elliot, Year 11 Students, Sunshine College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 10–11.

<sup>603</sup> Paul Foley, *The socio-economic status of vocational education and training students in Australia* (Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2007), 27.

Another recent study went further by examining the socioeconomic background of commencing undergraduate students admitted on the basis of earlier TAFE study. While data limitations were emphasised, the study found that the proportion of low socioeconomic background students admitted on the basis of TAFE study was similar to the proportion of low socioeconomic background students in the overall commencing student cohort. The researcher concluded that while TAFE study is a pathway into higher education for some students, the socioeconomic profile of VET articulators is very similar to students already in higher education and, therefore, the VET pathway is not, at present, an effective equity mechanism.<sup>604</sup>

The Committee supports moves to improve and increase articulation and credit transfer from TAFE to higher education, providing greater options to students. Nevertheless, the Committee cautions against the assumption that TAFE pathways into higher education are likely to be of particular benefit to students from under-represented groups. For this to occur, attention must also be given to the level of participation by equity groups in advanced VET qualifications, which are the most likely to provide a basis for university study.

The Committee notes that the Victorian Government has outlined its intention to expand training places in the state's VET system, with a focus on encouraging higher level skill development. Under the Victorian Training Guarantee, individuals will have an entitlement to a government subsidised place in a recognised VET course, with this entitlement sustained for any subsequent training towards a higher qualification. For students aged under 20, government subsidised places will be available at any VET qualification level.<sup>605</sup> The Committee supports the general goal of promoting participation in advanced VET qualifications, and believes that particular attention should be paid to supporting students from under-represented groups to progress to higher level TAFE qualifications. For some students, this may provide an entry point into higher education.

### **Barriers to increased articulation from VET to higher education**

The Committee heard that there are a number of impediments to the development of improved pathways from VET to higher education. Even where both parties are willing to cooperate, establishing articulation and credit transfer arrangements between TAFE and higher education can be complex. The Committee notes, however, that a range of recent policy developments are aimed at addressing these difficulties.

#### *Curriculum and assessment*

In the TAFE sector, training and assessment is competency-based, meaning that it focuses on skills and knowledge applied in the work context. While universities assess learning outcomes through graded assessment, TAFE students demonstrate competency in the ability to apply knowledge and skills to successfully complete work activities, including the performance of specific tasks, management of tasks to complete whole activities, dealing with contingencies and wider work environment skills.<sup>606</sup> In its submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education, the Victorian TAFE Association argued that higher education

---

<sup>604</sup> Leesa Wheelahan, 'What kind of access does VET provide to higher education for low SES students? Not a lot' (paper presented to the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education Launch and Forum, University of South Australia, Adelaide, 25–26 February 2009), 4, 13.

<sup>605</sup> Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), *Securing Jobs for Your Future: Skills for Victoria* (Melbourne: DIIRD, 2008), 15.

<sup>606</sup> Victorian TAFE Association, 'What is Competency Based Training and Assessment?' Victorian TAFE Association, [http://www.vta.vic.edu.au/?Name=VET\\_Introduction\\_to\\_the\\_Australian\\_Training\\_System](http://www.vta.vic.edu.au/?Name=VET_Introduction_to_the_Australian_Training_System) (accessed 2 March 2009).

selection officers often lack a deep understanding of competency standards within Training Packages, and may assume that the competency-based approach is a 'lesser learning model'.<sup>607</sup> Furthermore, while Training Packages used in TAFE are nationally accredited, higher education curriculum is developed separately by individual university faculties.

These differences increase the complexity of negotiating articulation and credit transfer arrangements. First, they mean that TAFE institutes must negotiate articulation and/or credit transfer arrangements separately with each university faculty, examining the components and outcomes of each relevant course. TAFE representatives participating in the Committee's inquiry described this process as 'difficult and complex', 'very time consuming', and 'the biggest impediment' to increased articulation and credit transfer.<sup>608</sup> One suggested that TAFE institutes may even need to modify their courses to make them resemble university subjects.<sup>609</sup> To facilitate the formation of new pathway arrangements, Sunraysia Institute of TAFE has created a Pathways Coordinator position. Representatives of the institute contrasted this more strategic approach with that which TAFE institutes have taken in the past, where arrangements have been made on an 'as-needs' basis, and have been the responsibility of individual managers.<sup>610</sup>

Another way in which these issues are being addressed in Victoria is through the development of the Credit Matrix by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority. Development of the Credit Matrix began in 2002 with the aim of providing a common way of describing and comparing learning outcomes across senior secondary, VET and higher education courses and qualifications. Over a number of years, the Credit Matrix has been developed and refined through extensive research, testing and trialling.

The Credit Matrix describes the complexity (or 'level') of learning outcomes and the volume (number of 'points') of learning in the component units of Victorian courses and qualifications.<sup>611</sup> The 'levels' refer to student outcomes of varying complexity, from 'Enabling' (lowest) to level 8. Detailed descriptors of each level of learning describe the type of knowledge and skills, the kinds of issues or problems and ways of addressing them, and the degree of independence typically associated with outcomes at that level.<sup>612</sup> Summary descriptors draw these elements together in a shorter description focused on the main features of the activity or tasks involved at each level.<sup>613</sup> To date, all senior secondary units and more than 27,000 VET units have been assigned levels and points.<sup>614</sup> In late 2009, the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority will launch the Qualifications Navigator, a website which will allow users to view the levels and points of qualifications offered in Victoria.

---

<sup>607</sup> Victorian TAFE Association, *Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education* (Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008), 7.

<sup>608</sup> For example, Mr R. Cadmore, Pathways Coordinator, Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 70–71; Ms H. McNamara, Manager, Strategic Planning, Rosebud Campus, Chisholm Institute of TAFE, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 57; South West Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, April 2008, 7; Dr L. Wilkinson, Executive Officer, Gippsland East LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 15.

<sup>609</sup> Ms H. McNamara, Manager, Strategic Planning, Rosebud Campus, Chisholm Institute of TAFE, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 57.

<sup>610</sup> Mr R. Cadmore, Pathways Coordinator and Ms J. Grigg, Manager, Rural Business, Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 70–71.

<sup>611</sup> Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, 'About the Credit Matrix,' VRQA, <http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/cmatrix/about.htm> (accessed 3 March 2009).

<sup>612</sup> Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, *The Credit Matrix: Building the Bridges* (Melbourne: VRQA, 2008), 3.

<sup>613</sup> *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>614</sup> Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, 'The Credit Matrix newsletter: September 2008,' VRQA, <http://www.vision6.com.au/em/message/email/view.php?id=357233&u=14894> (accessed 7 July 2009).

Two important aims of the Credit Matrix are to provide consistent but flexible university entrance requirements for students without an ENTER, and to improve credit transfer arrangements through the creation of a common, uniform approach to accumulating credit.<sup>615</sup> South West Institute of TAFE and Sunraysia Institute of TAFE expressed cautious optimism about the potential of the credit matrix to enhance opportunities for students to move from TAFE into higher education.<sup>616</sup>

In partnership with three TAFE institutes, Deakin University recently conducted a trial project designed to assess the usefulness of the Credit Matrix as a tool in the development of credit transfer arrangements and concurrent programs. With regard to credit transfer, findings from the trial project were that the Credit Matrix enables a student's learning to be quantified in a clear and fair manner through a more transparent, objective and consistent process.<sup>617</sup> Nevertheless, the project team found that the Credit Matrix did not reduce workload or documentation requirements involved in negotiating credit transfer arrangements.<sup>618</sup> In its submission to the inquiry, South West Institute of TAFE noted that while the Credit Matrix has the potential to increase pathway opportunities, progress nevertheless remains 'at the whim of individual universities'.<sup>619</sup>

The Committee notes that encouraging the development of flexible pathways for students to move between the sectors was also a key objective of the current Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). However, many commentators have argued that in its present form, the AQF is limited in its capacity to support credit transfer arrangements.<sup>620</sup> The AQF differentiates between the qualifications offered by each sector, which are described as recognising 'different types of learning reflecting the distinctive educational responsibilities of each sector'. Consequently, ranking of qualifications or ascribing equivalence to them is explicitly avoided.<sup>621</sup> This lack of equivalence increases the difficulty of negotiating credit transfer arrangements.

Moves to update the AQF may encourage further development of articulation arrangements. The Australian Government has commissioned the Australian Qualifications Framework Council to improve articulation and connectivity between VET and higher education. The Council's recently released consultation paper proposes a number of changes aimed at strengthening the AQF. The proposal suggests modifications to the AQF so that it recognises a hierarchy of qualifications based on explicit reference levels. The modified AQF would also provide measurement of the volume of learning for each qualification type at each level.<sup>622</sup> The Committee supports moves to update the AQF and enhance its ability to support articulation and credit transfer. The Committee believes that the experiences of the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority in developing the Credit Matrix should be of value to the Australian Qualifications Framework Council in its work to strengthen the AQF.

---

<sup>615</sup> Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, 'About the Credit Matrix,' VRQA, <http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/cmatrix/about.htm> (accessed 3 March 2009).

<sup>616</sup> Mr R. Cadmore, Pathways Coordinator, Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 71; South West Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, April 2008, 7.

<sup>617</sup> Deakin University, South West Institute of TAFE, Gordon Institute of TAFE and Box Hill Institute of TAFE, *Credit Matrix Trial Project: Final Report* (Geelong: Deakin University, 2008), 3; Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, *Discussion Paper: Determining Credit Transfer Arrangements from VET to Higher Education* (Melbourne: VRQA, 2008), 11.

<sup>618</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>619</sup> South West Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, April 2008, 7.

<sup>620</sup> Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, *Discussion Paper: Determining Credit Transfer Arrangements from VET to Higher Education* (Melbourne: VRQA, 2008), 5.

<sup>621</sup> Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board, *Australian Qualifications Framework Implementation Handbook*, 4th ed. (Carlton South: AQF Advisory Board, 2007), 2.

<sup>622</sup> Australian Qualifications Framework Council, *Strengthening the AQF: A Proposal: Consultation Paper* (Adelaide: AQF Council, 2009), 4.

*Accreditation, governance and funding*

Articulation and credit transfer arrangements are also affected by sectoral differences in accreditation, governance and funding. Dr Glenn Withers, Chief Executive Officer, Universities Australia described existing circumstances as 'a mess of federal-state fees, policies and jurisdictions'.<sup>623</sup> A recent Australian Government review of credit transfer outcomes similarly identified differences in funding and accountability as 'one of the greatest impediments' to credit transfer. The review described the situation as one in which VET and higher education are 'governed by different policies and decision making processes, have different imperatives, are subject to different drivers, pressures and directions, are seeking different outcomes and are accountable in different ways'.<sup>624</sup> While the VET system is largely controlled and funded by the states, higher education is predominantly funded by the Australian Government. There are also anomalies in funding, student fees and student access to financial assistance.<sup>625</sup> These differences mean that higher education institutions and VET providers, even where they wish to strengthen links, may find that they are speaking a 'different language' due to their differing structures and regulations.<sup>626</sup>

The Committee heard that these sectoral differences create difficulties even within dual-sector institutions. Professor Elizabeth Harman, Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University, noted that different industrial relations systems mean the university cannot employ staff to work across sectors.<sup>627</sup> Similarly, in its submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education, the Victorian TAFE Association noted that TAFE institutes in Victoria that offer higher education courses are inhibited by duplication and regulatory burden at both the state and federal level, ineligibility for Australian Government funding to meet quality reporting requirements, and an inability to access Commonwealth supported places and FEE-HELP.<sup>628</sup>

The complexity within Australia's tertiary education system was also given detailed consideration in the recent Review of Australian Higher Education. The review made a number of recommendations aimed at enhancing links and coherency between the higher education and VET sectors. Key among recommended reforms was the development of a national regulatory and quality assurance agency covering VET and higher education, and that the Australian Government assume responsibility for the whole tertiary education system. In relation to funding and income support, the review recommended the introduction of a tertiary entitlement funding model across both higher education and VET, as well as the introduction of HECS-style income contingent loans for students undertaking VET diplomas and advanced diplomas. The review also recommended the development of a single ministerial council with responsibility for all tertiary education and training in Australia.<sup>629</sup>

---

<sup>623</sup> Dr G. Withers, Chief Executive Officer, Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 14.

<sup>624</sup> PhillipsKPA for the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, *Giving Credit Where Credit is Due: A National Study to Improve Outcomes in Credit Transfer and Articulation from Vocational and Technical Education to Higher Education; Final Report* (n.p.: PhillipsKPA Pty Ltd, 2006), 12.

<sup>625</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Discussion Paper; June 2008* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 42.

<sup>626</sup> Dr K. Ferguson, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Equity and Student Services, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 30.

<sup>627</sup> Professor E. Harman, Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 30.

<sup>628</sup> Victorian TAFE Association, *Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education* (Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008), 6.

<sup>629</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 191.

In responding to the Review of Australian Higher Education, the Australian Government has signalled its intention to work closely with the states and territories to develop cohesive national regulatory arrangements for VET.<sup>630</sup> The Australian Government has also announced that it will form a single ministerial council for tertiary education and training (Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment).<sup>631</sup> The Victorian Government is working with the Australian Government to extend income contingent loans for diploma and advanced diploma VET students.<sup>632</sup> The Committee strongly supports these moves to increase coherency across the higher education and VET sectors.

The Committee also welcomes recent moves to streamline the regulatory framework for dual-sector universities. Under the Australian Government's Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund, Swinburne University of Technology and the University of Ballarat have recently been awarded a grant to fund research into an alternative regulatory model.<sup>633</sup> The research will investigate possibilities for more streamlined regulation that will enhance efficiency. This may include proposals for a single industrial relations regime across universities and TAFE institutes, which could facilitate greater collaboration between staff. These changes have the potential to remove some of the hindrances that currently stand in the way of pathways arrangements.<sup>634</sup>

---

## Conclusion and recommendations

---

While Victorian universities have in place a range of selection processes and entry pathways, the ENTER remains the dominant selection method for school leavers. As a selection mechanism, the ENTER has the advantages of being simple to administer and a comparatively good predictor of success. However, the Committee found that ENTER-based selection can disadvantage young people in non-metropolitan, outer urban and low socioeconomic status areas. The Committee therefore believes that universities should complement ENTER-based selection with other mechanisms, including recommendation-based selection and the development and expansion of alternative entry pathways. This will be essential if participation in higher education among under-represented groups is to be increased.

The Committee heard that entry pathways into higher education that provide opportunities for a student to improve their academic skills, including enabling programs and articulation from TAFE, can be particularly effective in addressing the needs of under-represented groups. These pathways should be supported and further developed. Within this, the Committee sees a need for expanded access to enabling programs for students from under-represented groups.

The Committee believes that, as a priority, the Victorian Government should require and support increased articulation from VET to higher education through further development of the Credit Matrix, and by working with the federal, state and territory governments to set deadlines and targets to address differences in accreditation, governance and funding. To ensure that these arrangements translate into real benefits for students, the Committee

---

<sup>630</sup> Australian Government, *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 43.

<sup>631</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>632</sup> The Hon Brendan O'Connor, Minister for Employment Participation, 'TAFE meets Parliament Skills Innovation 2020 forum,' Speech, 16 September 2008. Ministers' Media Centre, Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio, [http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/OConnor/Media/Speeches/Pages/Article\\_081009\\_091942.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/OConnor/Media/Speeches/Pages/Article_081009_091942.aspx) (accessed 7 July 2009).

<sup>633</sup> Andrew Trounson, 'Dual sector forges ahead,' *The Australian*, 27 May 2009.

<sup>634</sup> *ibid.*



sees a need for strengthened monitoring and reward of universities' performance in this area. In addition, the Victorian Government should actively support TAFE institutes to negotiate and implement articulation and credit transfer arrangements with universities. Finally, improved data collection on articulation and credit transfer would be useful in monitoring overall progress and informing future policy and programs.

### Recommendations

- 5.1 That the Victorian Government work with the Australian Government to provide incentives for universities to increase access to enabling programs for students from under-represented groups.
- 5.2 That the Victorian Government undertake research on the limitations of the ENTER as a selection tool for students from non-metropolitan and low socioeconomic status areas. The research should:
  - clarify the relationships between location, population density and ENTER, identifying any systemic measurement bias;
  - investigate the effects, if any, of VCE subject availability and choice on ENTER attainment; and
  - identify any modifications in the calculation or use of the ENTER required to make it more equitable.
- 5.3 That the Victorian Government require increased articulation and credit transfer from VET to higher education by:
  - prioritising development of the Credit Matrix through the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority as a matter of urgency;
  - setting deadlines and targets to address differences in accreditation, governance and funding between the VET and higher education sectors, through the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment;
  - advocating to the Australian Government that it monitor and reward universities' performance in relation to credit transfer; and
  - funding TAFE institutes to employ pathways coordinators responsible for negotiating and promoting articulation and credit transfer arrangements.
- 5.4 That the Victorian Government develop and implement measures aimed at increasing participation in upper level VET qualifications specifically among students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds.

- 5.5 That the Victorian Government work with the Australian Government to improve and align data collection about articulation from VET to higher education in order to improve knowledge about transitions, including:
- numbers of articulating students;
  - basis of admission for articulating students;
  - geographic, economic, social and cultural characteristics of articulating students;
  - particular pathways taken;
  - credit granted; and
  - academic outcomes of articulating students.

# Provision and accessibility

---

Whilst regional universities and regional campuses do not and cannot solve all the problems with access and participation, they are uniquely placed to give many students an opportunity that would otherwise not be available to them. In doing so they also offer a number of important spin-offs.<sup>635</sup>

---

One of the most obvious differences between metropolitan, outer urban and regional areas with respect to higher education lies in the level of local provision. At the same time as examining the impact of provision on participation, the Committee also sought to gain an understanding of the role of higher education providers within their communities. In investigating each of these themes, the Committee considered ways in which higher education is delivered and accessed, particularly in regional areas. Traditional models of on-campus and distance education are today complemented by other approaches which incorporate elements of both on-campus and off-campus study, and which often rely on collaboration between communities, universities and other education and training providers. Participants in the Committee's inquiry discussed the quality, cost effectiveness and suitability of these various approaches to higher education provision.

---

## University campuses

---

Although there is increasing flexibility and diversity in the ways in which a student can undertake higher education, the traditional experience of on-campus study remains the most common mode of participation. University campuses vary in quality and accessibility, but share some key characteristics. Campuses are physical locations for course delivery and, as one participant suggested, may be defined by the 'ongoing presence of some senior academic leaders ... and associated infrastructure'.<sup>636</sup> Australian Government funding guidelines for regional university campuses specify that to be considered a campus, a site must have regular face-to-face teaching, and that entire courses must be delivered from the location.<sup>637</sup> Research is another defining characteristic of a university, although the breadth and intensity of research activity varies across campuses.

---

<sup>635</sup> Professor R. Chambers, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic, Charles Sturt University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 47.

<sup>636</sup> Mr L. Money, Shelley (Western Australia), Written Submission, August 2008, 2.

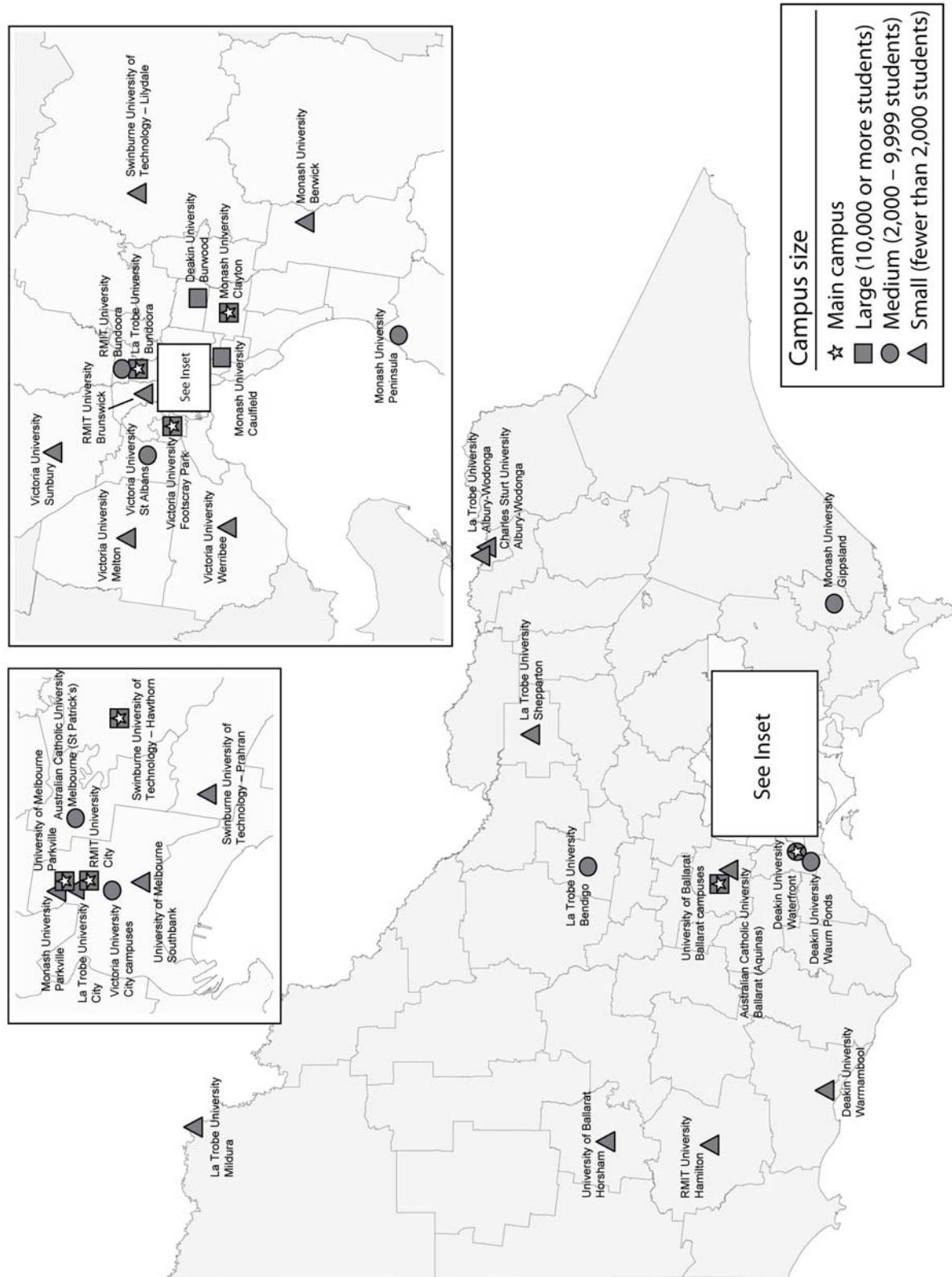
<sup>637</sup> *Commonwealth Grant Scheme Guidelines No. 7*, s. 4.5.1.

While university campuses share some defining characteristics, they can differ substantially. In Victoria, university campuses vary dramatically in size, from fewer than 1,000 students at small campuses, through to many thousands at the largest. Small university campuses offer a narrower range of courses, and may specialise in only one discipline. At the same time, the mode of delivery can differ between campuses, with some smaller regional campuses employing what is termed 'blended learning': a combination of face-to-face and online or distance learning. Within the blended learning category, the balance between face-to-face and online or distance delivery can also vary. Campuses that are very small and that employ blended learning are sometimes designated as 'university centres' (which are discussed later in the chapter). Finally, the nature and scale of facilities and services also differs across campuses. Students enjoy different levels of access to educational facilities such as libraries, computers and learning spaces, and the provision of academic and welfare services and extra-curricular activities varies.

### **Geographical distribution of university campuses in Victoria**

In Victoria, as in other Australian jurisdictions, higher education campuses are concentrated in metropolitan areas. Figure 6.1 shows that of the eight Victorian universities, six have their Vice-Chancellery at a main campus located in Melbourne. In addition, the Australian Catholic University has two campuses in Victoria, with the larger of these located in inner Melbourne.

Figure 6.1: Distribution of university campuses in Victoria, showing campus size (2009)



Note: Campus size based on analysis of student numbers on university websites and current annual reports, July 2009. Student numbers reflect the total head count of students participating in higher education courses delivered wholly at the campus, including domestic, international, full-time and part-time students. TAFE students enrolled at dual-sector campuses are not reflected in the analysis.

Source: Education and Training Committee, July 2009.

Within Melbourne, higher education campuses are largely situated in relatively inner suburbs. At present, higher education institutions have only six campuses located in the growing interface municipalities on Melbourne's outskirts. Each of these is a small or medium-sized campus, and some, such as Monash University's Peninsula campus, are specialised. Victoria University's small outer urban campuses at Melton and Sunbury will cease enrolments from 2010, reducing the number of campuses in interface areas to four.

Campuses are also located in large regional centres with sufficient population to sustain a campus. The major regional cities of Geelong and Ballarat host the main campuses of Deakin University and the University of Ballarat, respectively. Campuses in less populous regional cities typically have fewer students and offer a less extensive range of courses.

With only two regionally-based universities, provision of higher education in regional Victoria most commonly takes the form of subsidiary campuses of Melbourne-based institutions. La Trobe University, based in Bundoora in Melbourne, is a major regional provider with campuses in Bendigo, Wodonga, Mildura and Shepparton. Rural and regional engagement is also a core commitment of Deakin University, which operates a small campus at Warrnambool on Victoria's south-west coast. Monash University has a regional campus at Churchill in Gippsland in addition to its two outer urban campuses, Peninsula and Berwick. The Australian Catholic University also has a small campus in Ballarat, while Charles Sturt University, with a campus in Albury on the New South Wales border, is also a significant provider to students from Victoria's north-east.

### **Regional university campuses and regional development**

Regional universities and campuses are highly valued by their host communities. Despite the substantial challenges these institutions face, they are seen as playing a vital regional development role, as well as promoting participation in higher education by providing local study opportunities.

#### *Economic growth and human capital*

Universities are major contributors to local economies and are an important force in regional development. Regional universities and campuses provide employment and contribute to the local economy in their regions. Australian government figures show that in 2003, regional universities generated \$2,871 million in revenue, provided approximately 22,000 full-time equivalent jobs, and spent \$1,574 million on wages and related costs.<sup>638</sup> A recent study by the Western Research Institute at Charles Sturt University found that Deakin University's Warrnambool campus contributed \$32 million to the regional economy, generating \$13 million in household income (2.5% of total household income for the region) and accounting for 3.6 per cent of gross regional product.<sup>639</sup> Similar research on the economic impact of the University of Ballarat found that when flow-on effects were taken into account, the university generated the equivalent of 11.8 per cent gross regional product and 8.5 per cent of employment in Ballarat.<sup>640</sup>

---

<sup>638</sup> National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Written Submission, March 2008, 3.

<sup>639</sup> Warrnambool City Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 6.

<sup>640</sup> Western Research Institute, *Economic Impact of the University of Ballarat* (Bathurst: Western Research Institute, 2007), 4.

Additionally, in a submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education, the Geraldton University Access Group made interesting observations regarding the economic impact of students leaving their community in order to undertake higher education. It noted that if the current equivalent full-time students studying at the Geraldton Universities Centre were to relocate to Perth, this would represent a direct leakage of around \$2 million annually from the local economy. The impact is even more significant if indirect (multiplier) impacts are considered.<sup>641</sup> Similar observations were made in submissions to the inquiry.<sup>642</sup> The Committee notes these concerns as an argument for sustaining rural and regional university campuses.

As well as these direct economic benefits, by providing education, universities play an important role in the development of human capital in regional areas. The movement of people from regional Victoria to Melbourne to participate in higher education, while positive, contributes to the loss of human capital in regional areas.<sup>643</sup> In contrast, regional universities and campuses offer opportunities for people to develop their skills and knowledge without leaving the local community. Graduates who have been educated at a regional university tend to remain in regional Victoria for work, contributing their valuable skills to regional communities.<sup>644</sup> Research at the University of Ballarat has found that while less than a quarter of regional students who have moved to a metropolitan area for study return, 79 per cent of those who study in a regional area stay in a regional area after graduation.<sup>645</sup> At some regional campuses this figure is even higher. Data from the Graduate Destination Survey shows that in 2007, almost 90 per cent of graduates from the La Trobe University Mildura campus were employed in regional Victoria.<sup>646</sup>

There is also evidence that metropolitan students who have moved to a regional area for study are more likely to remain there upon completion of their studies. Half of those who move from Melbourne to study at the University of Ballarat remain in a regional area for their initial graduate employment.<sup>647</sup> At Charles Sturt University, more graduates from the Bachelor of Pharmacy are employed regionally than were originally from a regional area.<sup>648</sup> Similarly, from the first three graduate cohorts of pharmacy students at La Trobe University's Bendigo campus, all students from regional home postcodes and more than half who had relocated from a metropolitan area sought regional employment.<sup>649</sup> The university attributes these results in part to efforts to shape courses around local needs and to ensure that students are professionally networked during their studies.<sup>650</sup> Warrnambool City Council also noted that employers in Warrnambool prefer to hire local graduates rather than applicants from Melbourne, who are perceived as being less likely to remain over a longer period.<sup>651</sup>

---

<sup>641</sup> Geraldton University Access Group, *Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education* (Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008), 5.

<sup>642</sup> For example, Southern Grampians Youth Network, Written Submission, April 2008, 2; Centre for Regional Development, Swinburne University of Technology, Appendix C to Written Submission, March 2008, 11.

<sup>643</sup> Southern Grampians Youth Network, Written Submission, April 2008, 3.

<sup>644</sup> National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Written Submission, March 2008, 2; Mr A. Paton, Grants/Business Development Officer, City Growth Directorate, Warrnambool City Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 8; Professor W. Brabham, Director, Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 59.

<sup>645</sup> Gannawarra Shire Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 9.

<sup>646</sup> La Trobe University, Written Submission, March 2008, 10–11.

<sup>647</sup> Professor D. Battersby, Vice-Chancellor, University of Ballarat, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 26–27.

<sup>648</sup> National Rural Health Alliance, Written Submission, February 2008, 6.

<sup>649</sup> La Trobe University, Written Submission, March 2008, 11.

<sup>650</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>651</sup> Warrnambool City Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 4.

## *Research*

In addition to their role in educating professionals, regional universities can also contribute to regional development and wider knowledge through research activities. In regional settings, research is often focused on local issues in areas such as public health, environmental management, agriculture and tourism.<sup>652</sup> It is also frequently undertaken in partnership with community organisations, government and industry.<sup>653</sup> Dr Steve McEachern, Representative, National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), contrasted his experiences as a researcher in metropolitan and regional contexts:

It was my experience certainly ... I never went outside the institution, let alone outside into the community in the metropolitan institutions ... In a regional campus, doing similar sorts of research, my engagement with the community at large is almost obligatory. There is an expectation on staff, which is a very enjoyable part of the process.<sup>654</sup>

The research conducted at regional universities and applied to local issues often has additional national and international significance.<sup>655</sup> Warrnambool City Council suggested that there is a need for greater coordination of research focused on growth and development in regional Victoria, and argued that the Victorian Government could play a role by establishing a regional campus heads forum that could explore common issues, share resources, and collaborate in finding solutions to problems.<sup>656</sup> The Committee heard that some collaboration of this nature is already occurring. For example, the University of Ballarat and Deakin University have identified key areas of research considered important to regional Victoria, each contributing to a funding pool for collaborative research projects.<sup>657</sup>

Research is a crucial activity for Australian universities, and current National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes require that universities carry out research in at least three broad fields, and in all broad fields in which PhDs and research masters degrees are offered. Inquiry participants from the higher education sector were generally of the view that some of this research activity should take place at regional campuses. Dr Kerry Ferguson, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Equity and Student Services, La Trobe University, told the Committee:

... everyone would agree that we need research [at regional campuses]. That research does not have to be across the gamut of the research that the organisation provides, but there are unique opportunities in the regional areas for research ... I think that is really important because otherwise we are talking about a location for delivery of a program, and it is not really ... a university; it is not a campus.<sup>658</sup>

At the same time, the Committee heard that universities in both regional and interface areas can experience difficulty in attracting appropriately qualified research staff.<sup>659</sup> Professor Elizabeth Harman, Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University, described how an attempt to set up

---

<sup>652</sup> Warrnambool City Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 4, 6; Mr K. Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 48; Mr L. Money, Shelley (Western Australia), Written Submission, August 2008, 10.

<sup>653</sup> Ms R. May, Industrial Officer, National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 24; Dr K. Ferguson, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Equity and Student Services, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 24.

<sup>654</sup> Dr S. McEachern, Representative, National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 25.

<sup>655</sup> National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Written Submission, March 2008, 3.

<sup>656</sup> Warrnambool City Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 7–8.

<sup>657</sup> Professor D. Battersby, Vice-Chancellor, University of Ballarat, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 24.

<sup>658</sup> Dr K. Ferguson, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Equity and Student Services, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 24.

<sup>659</sup> Professor S. Walker, Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 24–25; Professor K. Lipson, Dean, Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale Campus, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 18; Professor E. Harman, Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 25.



a biomedical research centre at Werribee in Melbourne's outer west failed because researchers had been unwilling to move to the area.<sup>660</sup> Professor Sally Walker, Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, noted that while attracting research staff to regional campuses is 'an issue', once a critical mass of researchers is established it becomes possible to recruit high quality staff nationally and internationally.<sup>661</sup>

The Committee notes that following the 2008 Review of the National Innovation System, the Australian Government has announced reforms to policy and funding for research at public universities. In tandem with increased research funding, the Australian Government will seek to promote further specialisation, networking and collaboration, with the aim of achieving critical mass and excellence in research. As one component of this, a new Collaborative Research Networks Scheme will be established to encourage smaller, regional and less research intensive universities to collaborate with other institutions to increase their research capacity:

Researchers and research teams will be encouraged to organise themselves into hubs and spokes, with resources concentrated in the most appropriate research centres and departments (the hubs), where they can be accessed by scholars around the country (the spokes).<sup>662</sup>

The Committee sees research as a vitally important role of universities wherever they operate, and supports these moves to strengthen research at regional and small universities.

### *Social and cultural development*

As well as being important drivers of economic wellbeing, regional universities and campuses, along with other tertiary institutions, contribute to social and cultural development in their communities.<sup>663</sup> In regional areas, university campuses can provide the community with access to sporting, cultural and information and communications technology (ICT) facilities that they might not otherwise enjoy, such as fitness centres, libraries and videoconferencing equipment.<sup>664</sup> Through their teaching and learning, the presence of a vibrant student population, and their wider activities, regional universities also help to promote a culture of learning.<sup>665</sup> All of these features mean that regional campuses add to the amenity of their communities. Several local government participants in the inquiry argued that a local university presence is an important drawcard that can help regional communities to attract and retain residents.<sup>666</sup>

---

<sup>660</sup> Professor E. Harman, Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 25.

<sup>661</sup> Professor S. Walker, Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 24.

<sup>662</sup> Australian Government, *Powering Ideas: An Innovation Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 34.

<sup>663</sup> National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Written Submission, March 2008, 3; Deakin University, Written Submission, March 2008, 13; Warrnambool City Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 6; South West Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, April 2008, 2.

<sup>664</sup> Centre for Regional Development, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 9; Dr L. Wheeler, Head, Learning Community Partnerships, RMIT University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 48; La Trobe University, Written Submission, March 2008, 13; Warrnambool City Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 7.

<sup>665</sup> South East LLEN, Written Submission, May 2008, 3; Ms R. May, Industrial Officer, National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 24.

<sup>666</sup> For example, Warrnambool City Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 4–5; Bass Coast Shire Council, Appendix to Written Submission, March 2008, 17; Ararat Rural City, Written Submission, March 2008, 3; Central Goldfields Shire Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 10.

## The influence of campus location on participation

An important question that the Committee sought to address is whether, and to what extent, local higher education provision can lift participation rates. Inquiry participants expressed a range of views on this topic, which is also the theme of a body of Australian research.

While support for greater provision of higher education campuses or courses in regional Victoria was a recurrent theme in the inquiry, some researchers and university representatives argued that increased provision would not substantially lift participation rates.<sup>667</sup> Dr Hamish Coates, Principal Research Fellow, Australian Council for Educational Research, summarised the existing research findings:

Access to university for students in regional and remote areas appears to be a mix of socioeconomic status, rurality and proximity to a campus, but we know that for various reasons proximity to a campus may not be a relevant consideration. The campus may not be in an institution the student wants to attend, or it may not offer the course mix that the student is interested in pursuing.<sup>668</sup>

Professor Richard Larkins, Chair, Universities Australia and then Vice-Chancellor, Monash University, told the Committee that regional campuses make a vital contribution to their communities and are very important for some regional students.<sup>669</sup> Nevertheless, in terms of participation rates, Professor Larkins suggested that additional places at metropolitan universities, combined with favourable admissions processes, could 'compensate to a significant extent for moving [university places] out of regional locations'.<sup>670</sup>

### *Attracting local students*

While local delivery of higher education helps to improve human capital in regional areas, regional university campuses and sites can experience difficulty in attracting sufficient students. Because the population catchment at regional campuses is generally small, regional universities operate in thin markets. As well as beginning with a smaller pool of potential students in their catchment areas, regional universities must also compete for local students in a highly competitive market that includes both metropolitan universities and other regional campuses. In this market, regional universities may be disadvantaged by their narrower range of courses and perceptions of lower quality or status.

The Committee heard that while regional and outer urban universities are frequently the largest single provider of higher education to students from the local area, the majority of local students may nevertheless choose to study elsewhere. In 2007, La Trobe University's regional campuses attracted between 40.0 and 51.2 per cent of enrolments from the local area,<sup>671</sup> while Deakin University's campus in Warrnambool enrolled 30 per cent of commencing students from the Western District.<sup>672</sup> Similarly, the Committee heard that Monash University at its Gippsland campus has found that attracting students from the region to study locally has been challenging.<sup>673</sup>

---

<sup>667</sup> Dr H. Coates, Principal Research Fellow, Australian Council for Educational Research, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 3; Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 13–14; Professor R. Larkins, Chair, Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 19–21.

<sup>668</sup> Dr H. Coates, Principal Research Fellow, Australian Council for Educational Research, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 3.

<sup>669</sup> Professor R. Larkins, Chair, Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 25.

<sup>670</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>671</sup> La Trobe University, Written Submission, March 2008, 5.

<sup>672</sup> Warrnambool City Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 2–3.

<sup>673</sup> Associate Professor H. Ballis, Acting Pro Vice-Chancellor, Gippsland Campus, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 26.

Smaller campuses in interface areas are in a similar situation with regard to attracting students. Related to these pressures, in late 2008, Victoria University announced the closure of two of its 11 campuses. With approximately 1,550 higher education and TAFE students, the Sunbury campus offered courses in nursing, business and performance studies. The smaller Melton campus had approximately 850 students, and most were enrolled in education courses. These two small campuses attracted just five per cent of local students going on to higher education. Twenty-five per cent of higher education students attended a different campus of Victoria University, while the remaining 70 per cent enrolled at another higher education institution. Professor Elizabeth Harman, Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University, told the Committee that taking into account projected population growth and an increased participation rate, the campuses 'still look like they will be no larger than a high school' by 2031.<sup>674</sup> Professor Harman advised that resources would be better used on quality teaching, facilities and student support across the university, rather than the maintenance of multiple small campuses.<sup>675</sup>

The Committee agrees that higher education should be planned to ensure that available resources are used efficiently to provide high quality participation opportunities. Nevertheless, the Committee notes that substantial public resources are often invested for the specific purpose of providing educational opportunities in an area. In such circumstances, the Committee sees disinvestment on the part of universities as problematic, and believes that existing infrastructure should remain available for public educational use.

A further challenge for many regional universities is that they operate in areas with a declining youth population. This point was highlighted by the Review of Australian Higher Education, which provided projections suggesting that the population of 15- to 24-year-olds outside of capital cities in Australia (including in Victoria) is likely to decline slightly over the coming decade.<sup>676</sup> A review of La Trobe University's regional provision in 2007 found that of its four regional campuses, only the Bendigo campus was in a catchment likely to experience population growth in target age brackets.<sup>677</sup> It is worth noting here that while there are a number of parallels between regional and small interface campuses, most of the growth in Victoria's urban youth population is occurring at Melbourne's outskirts, meaning that student demand is unlikely to fall in these areas.

Finally, the Committee heard that limited public transport options can also hinder higher education participation in rural and regional Victoria. Many participants from non-metropolitan areas highlighted the lack of public transport connecting regional centres to one another, and to smaller rural communities.<sup>678</sup> The Committee heard that where such services exist, they are often irregular, and may not run each day or at appropriate or peak times.<sup>679</sup> A lack of connecting services can mean that students may need to take a taxi to campus, or that the university itself has to arrange transport services. Inadequate public

---

<sup>674</sup> Professor E. Harman, Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 4.

<sup>675</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>676</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 109.

<sup>677</sup> National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Written Submission, March 2008, 7.

<sup>678</sup> For example, Horsham Rural City Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 2; Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Written Submission, March 2008, 7; Mr J. and Mrs T. Wilson-Brown, Parents, Wulgulmerang, Written Submission, March 2008, 1; Rural City of Wangaratta, Written Submission, May 2008, 2; Mr G. Stone, Interim Executive Officer, Northern Mallee LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 35.

<sup>679</sup> Equity and Access Unit, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 8; Wellington Shire Council, Appendix to Written Submission, March 2008, 6; Mrs K. Hunt, Parent, Geelong West, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Rural City of Wangaratta, Written Submission, May 2008, 2; Cr C. Smith, Mayor, Colac Otway Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 4; Ms L. Toddun, Facilitator, Glenelg Local Community Partnership, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 35.

transport may instead make car ownership a necessity for many non-metropolitan students.<sup>680</sup> During public hearings in Gippsland, the Committee heard that even within the La Trobe Valley, access to the Monash University campus is difficult and time consuming, as the public transport system is instead 'geared around commuting to Melbourne'.<sup>681</sup> The Committee heard that students travelling short distances from Morwell and Traralgon to the Churchill campus face lengthy travel times, and may be unable to reach campus in time for morning classes.<sup>682</sup>

Inquiry participants noted that transport difficulties also often impact on TAFE students and apprentices in non-metropolitan areas.<sup>683</sup> A number of participants therefore argued that the Victorian Government should improve public transport in regional cities with universities, and to regional centres from nearby towns.<sup>684</sup> Others argued that access to education and training institutions should be a priority consideration in public transport planning in non-metropolitan areas.<sup>685</sup> The Committee believes that the Victorian Government should review public transport provision in non-metropolitan Victoria, with a view to improving access to education and training facilities.

### *Spatial patterns of enrolment*

While no university campus, whether metropolitan or non-metropolitan, captures all university students from its catchment area, the Committee found that there is a relationship between where students study and where they live. The Committee's analysis of data from the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) shows that a majority of higher education students from non-metropolitan home locations enrol at a regional university campus.

Table 6.1 shows the proportion of 2007 school leavers enrolling at metropolitan and regional campuses, by home location. A slight majority (51.2%) of non-metropolitan school leavers enrolling in a university course chose a regional university campus, either in their local area or in another regional location. In addition, 2.5 per cent of metropolitan school leavers and 6.3 per cent of those from interface areas enrolled at a regional institution.

Table 6.1: School leaver university enrolments at metropolitan and regional campuses, by home location (%) (2007–08)

Home location	Metropolitan campus enrolments	Regional campus enrolments
Metropolitan	97.5	2.5
Interface	93.7	6.3
Non-metropolitan	48.8	51.2
All Victoria	88.6	11.4

Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 2007–08 VTAC data, May 2009.

<sup>680</sup> Rural City of Wangaratta, Written Submission, May 2008, 2; Mr G. Stone, Interim Executive Officer, Northern Mallee LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 35.

<sup>681</sup> Mr R. Juratowitch, Campus Principal, Kurnai College, Gippsland Education Precinct, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 3.

<sup>682</sup> Ms A. Kilby, Student Advocate and Support Coordinator, Monash University Gippsland Student Union, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 68.

<sup>683</sup> WORKCO Limited, Written Submission, May 2008, 1–2; Ms C. Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 6; Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, March 2008, 2–4; Gordon Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, April 2008, 8.

<sup>684</sup> For example, Committee for Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 1; Wellington Shire Council, Appendix to Written Submission, March 2008, 6; Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Written Submission, April 2008, 23; South West LLEN, Written Submission, April 2008, 10; North Central LLEN, Written Submission, May 2008, 89; Ms M. Kirsopp, Parent, Haven, Written Submission, May 2008, 5; Mr S. Kozlowski, Chief Executive Officer, East Gippsland Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 2.

<sup>685</sup> Mr D. Roche, Executive Officer, South Gippsland and Bass Coast LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 10; Mr J. and Mrs T. Wilson-Brown, Parents, Wulgulmerang, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

Commencing students who were not current school leavers were even more likely to choose a regional study location. Table 6.2 reveals that 62.0 per cent of non-school leaver university students from non-metropolitan Victoria chose a regional campus location, while only 38.0 per cent chose to attend a metropolitan university campus. Interestingly, non-school leaver commencing students from metropolitan and interface home locations were also more likely than school leavers from these areas to enrol at a regional campus. The Committee found the same patterns in 2005–06 and 2006–07.

Table 6.2: Victorian non-school leaver university enrolments at metropolitan and regional campuses, by home location (%) (2007–08)

Home location	Metropolitan campus enrolments	Regional campus enrolments
Metropolitan	96.8	3.2
Interface	93.0	7.0
Non-metropolitan	38.0	62.0
All Victoria	86.1	13.9

Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 2007–08 VTAC data, May 2009.

There is also a relationship between home location and campus choice within metropolitan areas. A recent study examined enrolment patterns in Melbourne and its outer suburbs using VTAC data on government school students who completed year 12 in 2004. The study found that school leavers from areas surrounding major campuses in Melbourne's east, north and west had a strong tendency to enrol at their local campus. Smaller campuses in Melbourne's outer east and south also attracted a larger share of enrolments from their regions, although the effect was less marked. The study concluded that 'there are strong spatial patterns in university attendance within the suburban landscape of Melbourne'.<sup>686</sup>

### *Proximity and location as an influence on campus choice*

Throughout the inquiry, the Committee heard from a number of young people from regional Victoria who were keen to relocate to Melbourne or another large metropolitan area for study. Young people who were eager to move to the city for university spoke about their desire to 'get out of the country' and experience something different.<sup>687</sup> These young people, who had typically already spent time in the larger cities, were attracted to the idea of living independently, experiencing the diversity of the metropolitan setting, and enjoying a city lifestyle.<sup>688</sup> Mr Patrick Haylock, a student from Bairnsdale, argued that therefore, regional universities would not be attractive to all students:

Bringing the university to the country would make the transition more easy, but it would take away a bit of the university glamour that actually gets students to go there in the first place, and I think you would still find that lots of students would go to the cities and have a lot of trouble getting the universities to be attractive here in the first place. For some courses especially.<sup>689</sup>

<sup>686</sup> Daniel Edwards, 'Keeping it local: geographical patterns of university attendance,' *Australian Universities Review* 51, no. 1 (2009): 61.

<sup>687</sup> Ms C. Barker, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Ms H. Barry, School Captain and Year 12 Student, Bairnsdale Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 50.

<sup>688</sup> Ms H. Barry, School Captain and Year 12 Student, Bairnsdale Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 50; Ms E. McKenzie, Year 12 Student, Bairnsdale Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 50; Ms J. Marks, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Written Submission, April 2008, 1.

<sup>689</sup> Mr P. Haylock, Deferred Student, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 50.

The Committee acknowledges that many young people from rural and regional areas want to experience the 'bright lights' of the city and would prefer to relocate, even where local higher education options are available.

At the same time, contributions to the inquiry from students and prospective students in non-metropolitan Victoria indicate that proximity to a local campus, or the preference to study in a regional setting, is an important consideration for many.<sup>690</sup> In 2004 and 2005, the Northern Mallee LLEN surveyed senior secondary students in Victoria's north-west about their preferred study locations. While approximately half of respondents (49%) wanted to move away for university, 33 per cent said they would prefer to stay in the region to study, while a further 18 per cent reported wanting to complete the first year of study locally.<sup>691</sup>

In addition, the Committee heard that some students from rural areas have a preference for relocating to a regional university campus rather than a metropolitan one.<sup>692</sup> This is also clear from the Committee's analysis of VTAC data. Of 2006 school leavers, the Committee found that most university applicants from non-metropolitan areas applied to both metropolitan and non-metropolitan campuses (55.7%), and a substantial proportion (19.8%) applied only for courses at regional campuses.<sup>693</sup>

Analysis of the data at a more local level shows that some regions with high rates of application to regional campuses do not have local higher education options. For example, in the Wimmera region, encompassing the local areas of Hindmarsh, Horsham, Northern Grampians, West Wimmera and Yarriambiack, 34.3 per cent of applicants applied only to regional campuses, with a further 55.3 per cent applying to both metropolitan and regional campuses.<sup>694</sup> This indicates that even when relocation is inevitable, a substantial proportion of students from regional areas has a preference for studying in a regional location.

The Committee heard many reasons why some rural students prefer not to move to a metropolitan location. Factors include the availability of accommodation, lower cost of living, closer access to home, and greater comfort in the regional university environment and culture.<sup>695</sup> Mr Axil Lonergan, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College and Kwong Lee Dow Young Scholar, said in a written submission that the idea of attending university in Melbourne was 'too daunting at this stage'. Instead, Mr Lonergan was considering regional universities that were less distant and where accommodation was more affordable.<sup>696</sup>

Research indicates that the proximity of university campuses is one influence on where students choose to study. One study surveyed a sample of 538 undergraduate university applicants regarding the key influences on their choice of preferred university. The research found that gaining entry to a particular field of study and the particular course offered by the university were the dominant considerations influencing choice of institution. Nevertheless, 53 per cent of school leaver applicants and 57 per cent of mature age applicants reported that ease of access to the university from home was a strong or very strong influence on

---

<sup>690</sup> For example, Ms S. Elliott, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Mr A. Lonergan, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 1–2.

<sup>691</sup> Mid Murray Higher Education Working Party, Appendix to Written Submission, March 2008, 16.

<sup>692</sup> For example, Ms S. Elliott, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Mr A. Lonergan, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 1–2.

<sup>693</sup> Education and Training Committee analysis of 2007–08 VTAC data, May 2009.

<sup>694</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>695</sup> Professor R. Chambers, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic, Charles Sturt University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 44; Mr P. Brown, Executive Officer, Country Education Project, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 26–27.

<sup>696</sup> Mr A. Lonergan, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 1–2.

their choice of university.<sup>697</sup> Investigating a slightly different question, another study used administrative data to identify factors that influence commencing students' decisions to relocate for university. The study found that while it was not the most influential factor, access to institutions did influence the decision to relocate.<sup>698</sup>

For a proportion of prospective students in non-metropolitan areas, proximity to a university campus is a strong influence not only on the choice of where to study, but also on decisions about whether to study at all. In particular, many mature age students have work and family commitments that make it difficult or impossible to move to the city.<sup>699</sup> Mr Col Sharp, Director, Planning and Audit, Charles Sturt University, observed that there appear to be two types of student in the university's catchment areas: mobile students with a strong interest in a specific field of study, and a group that is tied to the local area and instead chooses their preferred course from locally available options. Describing the latter group in relation to a regional New South Wales campus, he remarked:

The other sort of student is someone who I suspect was probably from a lower socioeconomic background but you find they choose a campus ... they will choose multiple courses from the one campus. They were going to go to Wagga anyway, no matter what. As long as Wagga had a course which vaguely fitted their aspirations, then they'd go there.<sup>700</sup>

For a cohort of potential students in non-metropolitan areas then, the existence of opportunities for local study can be a decisive influence on participation.

On Track data on the motivations of school leavers who choose not to participate in further education also supports the argument that for some potential students, local access is a crucial factor. In the 2008 survey of year 12 completers, 17.5 per cent of those who were not in education or training cited the need to leave home as a reason for not studying, while around 20 per cent reported 'preferred course not offered locally' as a reason.<sup>701</sup> A comparison of the responses of regional and metropolitan respondents shows that regional year 12 completers more commonly cited lack of access as a reason for not undertaking further education or training.<sup>702</sup> The Committee notes that it should not be assumed that these respondents would necessarily take up local opportunities were they available. Nevertheless, it does suggest that for some young people from regional areas, a lack of local access to education and training opportunities is a significant deterrent to participation.

### *Course preferences*

In Victoria, regional universities and campuses vary in the number and range of courses offered, with these differences closely related to the population of the catchment area. The University of Ballarat offers a relatively broad range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs at its Ballarat campuses, covering: behavioural and social sciences and humanities; education; human movement and sports sciences; information technology and mathematical sciences; nursing; visual and performing arts; science and engineering; applied sciences; and business. Some smaller campuses offer a limited number of

<sup>697</sup> Richard James, Gabrielle Baldwin and Craig McInnis, *Which University? The factors influencing the choices of prospective undergraduates* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1999), 25, 36.

<sup>698</sup> Ross Blakers and others, *Mobility: Why do University Students Move?* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2003), 5.

<sup>699</sup> Mr L. Money, Shelley (Western Australia), Written Submission, August 2008, 4; Ms E. Lavender, Executive Director, Shepparton Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 32.

<sup>700</sup> Mr C. Sharp, Director, Planning and Audit, Charles Sturt University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 44.

<sup>701</sup> Sheldon Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria: Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009), 56.

<sup>702</sup> Office for Planning, Strategy and Coordination, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), *The On Track Survey 2008: LLEN reports* (Melbourne: State of Victoria, 2008).

programs across different faculties (such as La Trobe University in Mildura, Shepparton and Wodonga), while others are largely focused on speciality areas, such as the health sciences specialisation at Monash University's Peninsula campus.

Although some regional campuses have a reasonably comprehensive range of courses, the narrow choice of courses in comparison to metropolitan areas was highlighted by many participants.<sup>703</sup> Universities are less likely to offer expensive or specialised courses, such as law, engineering or science, in regional areas.<sup>704</sup> Furthermore, the courses most commonly available in regional areas—nursing and teacher education—are less likely to attract male students,<sup>705</sup> which is of particular concern given the very low participation rates of males in regional areas. Therefore, for many students who live in a regional community with a university, it is still necessary to relocate to access an appropriate course.<sup>706</sup> For prospective students who are not able or willing to relocate, decisions about participation can hinge on whether there is local access to the desired course.

Professor Ross Chambers, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic, Charles Sturt University, argued that success in regional provision and raising participation rates in regional areas rests heavily on the programs offered. Professor Chambers attributed much of the university's success in attracting a large proportion of students from the catchment areas to its appealing course profile, which includes a comprehensive range of health science courses, other professional programs, and environmental sciences programs tied to local needs.<sup>707</sup> Courses that match areas of workforce need also help to attract students who want to make realistic vocational choices about their area of study. Professor Chambers argued that rather than offering what is 'cheap and easy', regional universities must offer programs that interest students:

They want to come and study something worthwhile and I think the secret of our success in attracting and retaining students in the region, and increasing participation, has been to invest in that broad course profile I spoke about with the high end professional courses. So it's not enough to put up your shingle and offer something; you've got to have something that people really want to do.<sup>708</sup>

Professor Richard Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, also emphasised the importance of providing courses that are attractive to students in the area, rather than what the university can offer easily 'because it has staff that are surplus to needs in department X or department Y'.<sup>709</sup> He argued that Australian Government funding for regional provision should be allocated in such a way as to encourage universities to provide an appropriate range of courses.

---

<sup>703</sup> For example, Mallee Family Care, Written Submission, March 2008, 11; Ms K. Conabere, Parent, Traralgon, Written Submission, February 2008, 1; Ms A. Heywood, Executive Manager, Social Planning, Rural City of Wangaratta, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 16; Mr V. Callaghan, Member, South West LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 15; Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), Written Submission, May 2008, 14; Girton Grammar School, Written Submission, March 2008, 1.

<sup>704</sup> National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Written Submission, March 2008, 2; Professor K. Lipson, Dean, Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale Campus, Swinburne University of Technology, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 18; Mr S. Ilsley, Year 11 Coordinator and College Council Representative, Robinvale Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 40–41.

<sup>705</sup> Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 19.

<sup>706</sup> Ms K. Conabere, Parent, Traralgon, Written Submission, February 2008, 1; Mrs T. Baker, Parent, Bunyip, Written Submission, May 2008, 1; Mrs R. Sutton, Written Submission, March 2008, 3; Australian Council for Educational Research, Written Submission, March 2008, 2; South West LLEN, Written Submission, April 2008, 3; Warrnambool City Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 2–3.

<sup>707</sup> Professor R. Chambers, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic, Charles Sturt University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 42–43.

<sup>708</sup> *ibid.*, 43.

<sup>709</sup> Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 19.



The Committee recognises that there are limitations on the breadth of courses that can be offered at smaller campuses, either in regional or outer urban locations. It is clear that there will always be a proportion of students who cannot access their desired course at the local university. Equally clear is that balancing considerations of student demand, workforce need, and the cost and practicality of delivery is a challenging task for universities. Nevertheless, the Committee believes that universities will be most effective in providing opportunities and raising participation in regional and interface areas where courses are based on considerations of local student demand and workforce need. The Committee therefore seeks adjustments to higher education funding models to ensure they accurately reflect the higher costs of regional delivery, while also providing sufficient incentives for universities to offer courses linked to local employment opportunities.

The Victorian Government may have a role in supporting this outcome through the provision of detailed information about local skills needs. Several university representatives highlighted the inadequacy of existing data in this area.<sup>710</sup> The Committee notes that mapping of skills shortages in Australia largely occurs at a national level, with lists of 'skills in demand' compiled by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Private sector surveys also offer some information on skills shortages, and a range of sources publish data on skill needs in specific occupations. Dr Lin Crase, Director, Albury-Wodonga Campus, La Trobe University, noted that while universities have access to 'bits and pieces' of skills information, there is no central repository of reliable data to use for planning purposes.<sup>711</sup> The Committee heard that this may mean that regional campuses are unable to back a powerful argument for new courses, as described by Dr Andrew Harvey, Acting Executive Director, Bendigo Campus, La Trobe University:

Regional needs are quite difficult to identify ... sometimes you can receive employer feedback, evaluations, or you can receive evidence from various sources that there might be a regional need, but we have to justify establishing a new course for three or four years with a cohort of at least 30 or 40 students every other year, and it's not an easy thing to do.<sup>712</sup>

Some participants argued that regular provision of reliable, disaggregated data on current and projected skills need would assist universities in planning courses for regional campuses.<sup>713</sup> A representative of Deakin University suggested that the Victorian Government should produce an annual audit of skills shortages across rural and regional areas.<sup>714</sup>

### *Perceptions of quality and status*

The Committee heard that regional and small outer urban universities often suffer from perceptions that their courses are less prestigious, and possibly of lower quality, than those at metropolitan campuses. Due to lower student demand, the minimum Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Ranks (ENTER) required to access courses at regional campuses are generally lower than those at metropolitan universities. For example, the median ENTER of

---

<sup>710</sup> Dr L. Crase, Director, Albury-Wodonga Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 37; Dr A. Harvey, Acting Executive Director, Bendigo Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 37; Dr J. Oriel, Head, Student Equity Unit, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 54.

<sup>711</sup> Dr L. Crase, Director, Albury-Wodonga Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 37.

<sup>712</sup> Dr A. Harvey, Acting Executive Director, Bendigo Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 37.

<sup>713</sup> Dr J. Oriel, Head, Student Equity Unit, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 54; Dr L. Crase, Director, Albury-Wodonga Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 37.

<sup>714</sup> Dr J. Oriel, Head, Student Equity Unit, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 54.

La Trobe University students varies considerably across its metropolitan and regional campuses. At the Bundoora campus in Melbourne, median ENTERs over 2005 to 2007 hovered around the high 70s. At Bendigo (the second largest campus) students had an average ENTER of around 70, while averages at Albury-Wodonga, Mildura and Shepparton ranged from the low to mid 60s.<sup>715</sup> The Committee heard that the lower ENTER requirements at regional campuses contribute to the lower prestige and status of regional courses. Smaller outer urban campuses can face the same problem, as explained by Professor Kay Lipson, Dean, Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale Campus, Swinburne University of Technology:

Students, teachers and parents continue to choose and evaluate the quality of an educational provider by the ENTER score of the other students who go there, and do not do it on the basis of the quality of the education that they provide. That is a battle that universities have faced from time immemorial and will continue to face, but you have to go to the university that you can get into. So a lot of very able students drive past us and go to another university that provides the same program, because they got in.<sup>716</sup>

The Committee found that other factors potentially adding to perceptions of lower status include: difficulties attracting highly qualified staff; fewer resources; the use of blended learning; and the mix of courses at regional campuses.

Research has found that perceptions of quality exert an influence on student choices about course and university. One study of the influences on undergraduate university choices found that applicants to research universities, most of which are located in metropolitan areas, tend to be strongly influenced by a university's research reputation, prestige, and social and cultural life. At the same time, the study found that many students use information about required entry scores as a proxy measure of quality.<sup>717</sup>

Evidence suggests that these considerations of status and quality tend to exert a stronger influence on high-achieving school leavers. Research in 2003 on the factors associated with relocating for study found that non-metropolitan school leavers in the top achievement deciles were more likely to relocate to attend a metropolitan university than their lower-achieving counterparts.<sup>718</sup> This can mean that regional universities have particular difficulty in attracting the highest achievers to study locally.

Dr Andrew Harvey, Acting Executive Director, Bendigo Campus, La Trobe University, argued that offering and publicising high-status courses can improve the capacity of regional universities to attract high-achieving students:

Part of the challenge of Bendigo which might be a little different from some of our other campuses is not only to raise the education aspirations for students but to also become university of choice for the high-achieving, for the real high-achieving students. We need to emphasise and advertise that we do have dentistry, pharmacy and civil engineering, visual arts. We have some courses at Bendigo that are not provided at Bundoora.<sup>719</sup>

The Committee heard that Monash University has taken a similar approach with its Peninsula campus, offering prestigious health science courses, some of which are not

---

<sup>715</sup> La Trobe University, Written Submission, March 2008, 7.

<sup>716</sup> Professor K. Lipson, Dean, Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale Campus, Swinburne University of Technology, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 18.

<sup>717</sup> Richard James, Gabrielle Baldwin and Craig McInnis, *Which University? The factors influencing the choices of prospective undergraduates* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1999), ix.

<sup>718</sup> Ross Blakers and others, *Mobility: Why do University Students Move?* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2003), 21–22.

<sup>719</sup> Dr A. Harvey, Acting Executive Director, Bendigo Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 33.

offered at metropolitan campuses. Professor Richard Larkins, then Vice-Chancellor, Monash University, also argued that having a campus of an internationally recognised research university in a regional area is a good model because 'it becomes more attractive for students to get a Monash degree than to get a Gippsland university degree, for example'.<sup>720</sup>

### *Student populations at regional universities*

The different ways in which proximity, course preferences and perceived quality and prestige influence study choices mean that students at regional campuses have different characteristics to urban students. Most regional universities teach a higher proportion of mature age and part-time students. Additionally, students at regional universities are more likely to belong to one or more designated student equity groups.

Figures provided to the Committee by the National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division) show that low socioeconomic background students comprise 19.5 per cent of students at regional campuses, compared to only 11.1 per cent of students at metropolitan campuses.<sup>721</sup> Similarly, 1.5 per cent of enrolments at regional universities and just 0.9 per cent of enrolments at metropolitan universities are Indigenous students.<sup>722</sup> The University of Ballarat reported that in 2006, 78.2 per cent of students at the university were members of one or more designated equity groups. More than one-fifth (21.5%) were from a low socioeconomic status background, while 72 per cent were from a rural or isolated area.<sup>723</sup> At La Trobe University's regional campuses, between 23.5 per cent (Bendigo) and 65.7 per cent (Shepparton) of students are from a low socioeconomic status background.<sup>724</sup> Thus, in addition to educating more than half of all higher education students from regional areas, regional universities as a whole also teach a disproportionately high number of low socioeconomic status and Indigenous students.

The Committee believes that this is an important point. The Australian Government has highlighted equity as a central concern in higher education, and has set ambitious targets for the participation of people from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. The Committee believes that regional universities, which currently fulfil an important role in providing higher education to students from under-represented groups, will be critical to reaching the Australian Government's participation targets. The Committee therefore encourages governments to support provision of higher education in regional areas as one component of their efforts to increase participation for under-represented groups.

### **Sustaining strong and effective regional university campuses**

The higher cost of regional higher education provision is well documented, and was widely acknowledged by inquiry participants.<sup>725</sup> The Committee heard that regional campuses experience diseconomies of scale, meaning that higher staff-student ratios are needed to

---

<sup>720</sup> Professor R. Larkins, Chair, Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 24.

<sup>721</sup> National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Written Submission, March 2008, 5.

<sup>722</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>723</sup> University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 14.

<sup>724</sup> La Trobe University, Written Submission, March 2008, 10.

<sup>725</sup> For example, La Trobe University, Written Submission, March 2008, 4–5; Warrnambool City Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 7; South West LLEN, Written Submission, April 2008, 10; Ms S. Cole, State President, Victorian Branch, National Union of Students, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 21; Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), Written Submission, May 2008, 27; Mr L. Money, Shelley (Western Australia), Written Submission, August 2008, 3.

sustain student support services and an adequate range of courses.<sup>726</sup> Delivery to a dispersed student catchment, and to a larger proportion of part-time, mature age and first-generation students, can be more costly.<sup>727</sup> According to the National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), universities also tend to experience greater difficulties in attracting outside sources of revenue, and are consequently more reliant on government funding.<sup>728</sup> Some participants from the higher education and government sectors argued that regional universities have more difficulty recruiting international and other fee-paying students,<sup>729</sup> while smaller economies in regional areas mean that universities are less able to attract business and industry funding.<sup>730</sup> La Trobe University provided figures showing that provision at its four regional campuses costs between 25 and 100 per cent more than at the university's metropolitan campus. These costs increase if student load targets are not met.<sup>731</sup>

In recognition of the higher cost of regional provision, the Australian Government introduced a regional loading in 2004, ranging from 2.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent depending on the size of campus and its distance from a mainland capital city (or 30% for university campuses located in the Northern Territory).<sup>732</sup> In 2008, regional universities and campuses received a total of \$30.5 million in regional loading, of which \$3.5 million was allocated to Victorian institutions.<sup>733</sup> University sector representatives told the Committee that current regional loading amounts are insufficient, falling far short of meeting the higher costs of regional provision. Furthermore, the Committee heard that there are anomalies in the regional loading amounts allocated to different universities and campuses, which often bear little relation to the costs of delivery or the needs of students.<sup>734</sup> Other participants agreed that the regional loading should be increased.<sup>735</sup>

Participants from the higher education sector told the Committee that the higher cost of regional delivery, together with insufficient regional loading, means that most regional campuses are cross-subsidised by metropolitan campuses, or receive additional support from alternative sources. For example, while Deakin University reports that its Warrnambool campus is cross-subsidised by \$10 million annually, the university receives only \$600,000 per year in regional loading.<sup>736</sup> The University of Ballarat, which receives funding from the Victorian Government in addition to \$1.3 million in regional loading, argued that insufficient loading does little to assist the university to take proactive steps to redress low participation

---

<sup>726</sup> Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 13; Professor R. Larkins, Chair, Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 24; University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 4.

<sup>727</sup> Mr K. Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 45; University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 4.

<sup>728</sup> National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Written Submission, March 2008, 4.

<sup>729</sup> La Trobe University, Written Submission, March 2008, 13; National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Written Submission, March 2008, 4; University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 3; Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), Written Submission, May 2008, 27.

<sup>730</sup> National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Written Submission, March 2008, 4; University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 3; Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), Written Submission, May 2008, 4.

<sup>731</sup> La Trobe University, Written Submission, March 2008, 4 – 5.

<sup>732</sup> Australian Government, 'Support for higher education institutions,' Backing Australia's Future, [http://www.backingaustraliasfuture.gov.au/policy\\_paper/2.htm#2\\_4](http://www.backingaustraliasfuture.gov.au/policy_paper/2.htm#2_4) (accessed 8 July 2009).

<sup>733</sup> Meeting with representatives of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra, 17 June 2008.

<sup>734</sup> For example, National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Written Submission, March 2008, 4; University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 4–5; Deakin University, Written Submission, March 2008, 13; Meeting with representatives of Curtin University of Technology, Edith Cowan University and University of Western Australia, Perth, 30 April 2009.

<sup>735</sup> For example, Ararat Rural City, Appendix to Written Submission, March 2008, 1; South West LLEN, Written Submission, April 2008, 10; Warrnambool City Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 7; Bendigo Senior Secondary College, Written Submission, March 2008, 5.

<sup>736</sup> Dr J. Oriol, Head, Student Equity Unit, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 54.

rates in regional areas.<sup>737</sup> Additionally, it should be noted that higher education campuses in interface areas, although they often face similar challenges to regional universities, do not attract any regional loading.<sup>738</sup>

Regional loading was a key issue addressed by the Review of Australian Higher Education. The review found that the regional loading is not sufficiently targeted to those campuses that have major problems achieving and maintaining viable student numbers due to their location:

... the panel could discern little relationship in a number of cases to the existence of a loading and the location of a campus. Even more mysterious was the underlying logic of the weightings. But its greatest concern is that this loading for provision in regional and remote areas provides no clear incentive to any institution or provider to set up new programs in areas of need nor to work collaboratively with others to address the real problems of provision in localities where there are not enough people to support a viable campus.<sup>739</sup>

The review concluded that the regional loading should be abolished and new arrangements implemented. Specifically, the review recommended an additional \$80 million per year from 2012 for 'sustainable regional higher education provision' to replace current regional loading arrangements. While recommending increased funding for regional delivery, however, the review indicates a preference for 'innovative, collaborative, local solutions' to provision, suggesting that some 'rationalisation' of traditional regional campuses might be necessary.<sup>740</sup>

While inquiry participants spoke about the higher operating costs of regional universities and the inadequacy of regional loading, the Committee notes the absence of detailed costings for regional delivery. The Committee therefore sees a need for the Australian Government to undertake further analysis of delivery costs in regional areas. Given significant dissatisfaction with current arrangements, the Committee believes that changes to the level and distribution of funding for regional provision are required. It supports proposals for increased overall funding levels, as well as the Review of Australian Higher Education's call for collaborative local solutions to higher education provision in smaller regional communities. The Committee does not believe, however, that this aim is incompatible with sustaining and strengthening existing campuses in rural and regional Victoria. The Committee believes that despite their higher costs, these campuses have a vital and continuing role in the economic and social health of regional communities. Therefore, the Committee would be concerned about the impact of any rationalisation of campuses on regional communities and levels of participation in higher education.

The Committee supports the view of the National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division) that provision of long-term, dedicated funding would enable greater stability for staff and students at regional campuses, thereby increasing their long-term viability and expansion.<sup>741</sup> The Committee believes that funding models should be revised to ensure there are sufficient incentives for universities to deliver a diversity of high quality higher education courses into regional areas, closely linked to labour market needs. Courses should not be restricted to nursing and teaching, but could also include a range of

<sup>737</sup> University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 3–4.

<sup>738</sup> Professor K. Lipson, Dean, Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale Campus, Swinburne University of Technology, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 18.

<sup>739</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 110.

<sup>740</sup> *ibid.*, xiv, 113.

<sup>741</sup> Ms R. May, Industrial Officer, National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 26.

professional qualifications such as engineering, sciences and high-end business degrees. Revised funding models should take into account the need for increased collaborative models of delivery for such courses, as well as the need to raise aspirations and demand around courses relevant to local economic growth and employment opportunities. The Committee notes that there may be some opportunities for the Victorian Government to provide specific project funding in this area, closely targeted towards priority student groups, geographic regions and/or specific skills needs.

A further recommendation put forward in the Review of Australian Higher Education was that the Australian Government commission a feasibility study to examine the potential for development of a national university for regional areas, created through a merger and, possibly, the consolidation of existing regional campuses. The review outlined the possible role for this university:

This new, consolidated university would be charged with a mission to offer accessible, high quality education in the regions. Internationally-recognised expertise in delivery of education to regional areas and isolated communities could be concentrated in such a university and it could be given a charter to address regional provision nationally.<sup>742</sup>

The Committee heard much opposition from the university sector within Victoria and in Western Australia to the proposed national regional university. Professor David Battersby, Vice-Chancellor, University of Ballarat, argued that such an arrangement would not serve the interests of communities in regional Victoria.<sup>743</sup> Similarly, Professor Jeanette Hacket, Vice-Chancellor, Curtin University of Technology, argued that universities operating in regional areas need to engage comprehensively with local communities, and that this cannot be done from 'somewhere else'.<sup>744</sup> Dr Lin Crase, Director, Albury-Wodonga Campus, La Trobe University, argued that there are significant theoretical and moral reasons to object to a national regional university and the concept of a separate education for students in regional areas.<sup>745</sup>

The Committee notes that the proposed national university for regional Australia has not yet been described in detail. Full consideration of the potential advantages and disadvantages of the model is therefore not possible at this stage. The Committee believes that irrespective of which universities operate in regional areas, universities and campuses need to have strong ties to their host communities, allowing adaptation to the unique needs and contexts of different regions.

---

## Off-campus study

---

While on-campus study remains the primary way in which students participate in higher education, a substantial and growing number of students study off campus. As universities move increasingly towards greater flexibility in higher education provision, the distinction between on-campus and off-campus study (also referred to as 'external study' or 'distance education') has become less clear.<sup>746</sup> For example, most universities now incorporate

---

<sup>742</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 113

<sup>743</sup> Professor D. Battersby, Vice-Chancellor, University of Ballarat, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 32–33.

<sup>744</sup> Professor J. Hacket, Vice-Chancellor, Curtin University of Technology, Meeting with representatives of Curtin University of Technology, Edith Cowan University and University of Western Australia, Perth, 30 April 2009.

<sup>745</sup> Dr L. Crase, Director, Albury-Wodonga Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 35.

<sup>746</sup> Dr D. Woodhouse, Executive Director, Australian Universities Quality Agency, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 July 2008, 13.

elements of online delivery in most of their courses. Similarly, off-campus students may have opportunities for greater interaction with peers and teachers through online conferencing, local study groups or short, intensive on-campus study blocks. Nevertheless, the Committee believes that a useful distinction can still be drawn between students who regularly attend classes on campus or at another delivery site, and those who study largely or wholly in their own locations and/or in their own time.

### Provision of off-campus study

The major Victorian providers of off-campus study are Deakin University and Monash University. Approximately 35 per cent of Deakin University's domestic students study off campus.<sup>747</sup> In addition, all students commencing undergraduate degrees since 2004 are required to complete at least one unit wholly online. Deakin University students are not restricted to a single mode of study but may choose a combination of on-campus and off-campus units.<sup>748</sup> Monash University offers approximately 150 courses in off-campus mode, and as at Deakin University, both on- and off-campus students can choose to complete individual units in either mode.<sup>749</sup> In 2007, approximately 14 per cent of Monash University's domestic undergraduate students were enrolled off-campus or in multi-modal study, as were 46 per cent of domestic postgraduate students.<sup>750</sup> Other Victorian universities offer a limited number of courses off campus, largely at the postgraduate level. Victorian students can also enrol in off-campus study with interstate universities.

Open Universities Australia is a national higher education provider that offers access to off-campus higher education. Open Universities Australia is owned by a consortium of seven universities that, through Open Universities Australia, deliver a substantial range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in arts, humanities and social sciences, business, education, health, law, information technology and science. Most units are delivered through a combination of print and online materials. There are no prerequisites or entry requirements for most courses, and study is highly flexible. Students pay the full costs of tuition, but are able to defer payment through FEE-HELP. In 2007, there were 7,434 Victorian students enrolled through Open Universities Australia, of whom 1,277 (17.8%) were from regional Victoria.<sup>751</sup>

### Geographical distribution of off-campus students

While the nature of off-campus study might suggest that it is particularly appropriate for rural and regional students without access to a local campus, evidence received by the Committee indicates that the majority of Victoria's off-campus students in fact live in metropolitan areas. The Committee heard that when compared to population reference values, Melbourne-based students are over-represented among Open Universities Australia's Victorian cohort, while students from remote areas are under-represented.<sup>752</sup> In 2008, 2,160 (34%) Victorian domestic off-campus students at Deakin University were from outside of Melbourne.<sup>753</sup> Interestingly, almost half of these non-metropolitan students

<sup>747</sup> Supplementary information provided by Deakin University, March 2009.

<sup>748</sup> Deakin University, 'Information about online and off-campus study,' Deakin University, <http://www.deakin.edu.au/future-students/online-offcampus-studies/index.php> (accessed 5 June 2008).

<sup>749</sup> Monash University, 'Off-campus learning,' Monash University, <http://www.monash.edu.au/offcampus/> (accessed 14 January 2009).

<sup>750</sup> Supplementary information provided by Monash University, March 2009.

<sup>751</sup> Open Universities Australia, Written Submission, March 2008, 8.

<sup>752</sup> Supplementary information provided by Open Universities Australia, July 2008.

<sup>753</sup> Supplementary information provided by Deakin University, March 2009.

resided in the Barwon region, in which Deakin University has a strong physical presence. In 2008, approximately 23 per cent of off-campus student enrolments at Monash University were from a rural or isolated home location,<sup>754</sup> while the bulk of students resided in Melbourne.<sup>755</sup>

That the majority of off-campus students live in metropolitan areas highlights the point that lack of proximity to a university campus is only one reason for choosing off-campus study. The Committee heard that off-campus students tend to be older, and choose off-campus study because work and family commitments make it inconvenient to attend campus at set times.<sup>756</sup>

While it is clear that off-campus study is not, in itself, the solution to increasing higher education participation in regional areas, the Committee heard calls for increased provision of off-campus higher education. Some inquiry participants argued that the range of courses that can be studied off campus should increase, or that more universities should allow students to complete individual units in this mode.<sup>757</sup> The Committee received two submissions from regional Victorians who wished to study off campus for postgraduate qualifications, but had been unable to find an appropriate course.<sup>758</sup> Both noted that while interstate universities offer the desired courses in off-campus mode, required attendance at on-campus intensive study blocks makes this option expensive and impractical. Expanded off-campus provision on the part of Victorian universities was therefore a preferred option.

### **Effectiveness and suitability of off-campus study**

The Committee heard from universities that off-campus study can be convenient and effective, but that it is not suitable for all learners. A representative of Swinburne University of Technology told the Committee that the pedagogies used in off-campus study are extremely effective, particularly for postgraduate students.<sup>759</sup> Dr David Woodhouse, Executive Director, Australian Universities Quality Agency, told the Committee that off-campus provision is generally of a high standard, although problems can arise around students' access to appropriate computer and internet facilities, electronic provision of library resources, access to academic support and feedback, and capacity to fully engage in the university experience.<sup>760</sup>

While universities tended to emphasise the effectiveness of off-campus teaching and learning, the perceived lack of support available to students studying off campus was of concern for a number of participants. The requirement that students manage their own learning to a greater extent than on-campus students can make this mode of studying more

---

<sup>754</sup> Supplementary information provided by Monash University, March 2009.

<sup>755</sup> Associate Professor H. Ballis, Acting Pro Vice-Chancellor, Gippsland Campus, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 29–30.

<sup>756</sup> Mr S. Hamilton, Chief Executive Officer, Open Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 July 2008, 18; Professor K. Lipson, Dean, Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale Campus, Swinburne University of Technology, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 24.

<sup>757</sup> Gippsland Local Government Network, Written Submission, April 2008, 5; Mr J. Hicks, Chief Executive Officer, Hindmarsh Shire Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 2; Mr G. and Mrs L. Code, Parents, Aberfeldy, Written Submission, May 2008, 1; Ms J. Matthews, Project Officer, South Gippsland Bass Coast LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 52; Ms S. Elliott, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Written Submission, April 2008, 1.

<sup>758</sup> Dr K. Brothie, General Practitioner, Mount Beauty, Written Submission, February 2008, 1; Ms B. Medhurst, Parent, Nyora, Written Submission, April 2008, 1.

<sup>759</sup> Professor K. Lipson, Dean, Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale Campus, Swinburne University of Technology, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 24.

<sup>760</sup> Dr D. Woodhouse, Executive Director, Australian Universities Quality Agency, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 July 2008, 13–14.



difficult.<sup>761</sup> In one submission, a mature age student from regional Victoria described her experiences of both on- and off-campus study. After studying at La Trobe University's Shepparton campus she realised that her interest lay in another subject area and switched to off-campus study at Monash University:

I did very well at La Trobe... [But] studying by correspondence was very different. I missed the contact with lecturers and fellow students. I felt unsupported by Monash and often felt that I just didn't know what was expected of me. I dropped out of university altogether after just a couple of months ...<sup>762</sup>

Findings from the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement also reveal lower scores for off-campus students on a scale measuring the level and nature of interactions with teaching staff.<sup>763</sup>

Off-campus students may also miss out on some of the broader experiences that support learning in higher education, particularly for younger students and those who are new to tertiary study. Ms Margie Barton, a parent from Bairnsdale in East Gippsland, described the other dimensions of the university experience that are not available to off-campus students:

I think there is more to university life and tertiary study than the actual subject you are studying. For instance my daughter is doing a visual arts degree, and there are all the galleries and there are things happening in Melbourne—apart from just growing up and your life. Becoming an adult, I think, is very important, and you cannot do it online.<sup>764</sup>

Again, Australasian Survey of Student Engagement respondents who were studying off campus scored lower than their on-campus peers on scales measuring active learning and participation in broader educational activities.<sup>765</sup> For these reasons, an enriching on-campus university education remains a preferred mode of teaching and learning for universities and for most students.<sup>766</sup>

According to data provided to the Committee by Deakin University and Monash University, success and retention rates and average marks are lower for off-campus students, particularly at the undergraduate level.<sup>767</sup> Similarly, Mr Stuart Hamilton, Chief Executive Officer, Open Universities Australia, told the Committee that most students study only between three and five units, and that approximately half of all students are retained from year to year.<sup>768</sup> While some of these students may transfer to on-campus study, or may never have intended to study a full degree program, these figures indicate that few students complete a degree qualification in an off-campus mode through Open Universities Australia.

---

<sup>761</sup> Ms J. Matthews, Project Officer, South Gippsland Bass Coast LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 56–57; Ms L. Toddun, Facilitator, Glenelg Local Community Partnership, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 34; Mr S. McEachern, Representative, National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 27.

<sup>762</sup> Ms W. Opresnik, Student and Parent, Shepparton, Written Submission, August 2008, 1.

<sup>763</sup> Australian Council for Educational Research, *Attracting, Engaging and Retaining: New Conversations About Learning: Australasian Student Engagement Report, Australasian Survey of Student Engagement* (Camberwell: ACER, 2008), 15.

<sup>764</sup> Ms M. Barton, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 28.

<sup>765</sup> Australian Council for Educational Research, *Attracting, Engaging and Retaining: New Conversations About Learning: Australasian Student Engagement Report, Australasian Survey of Student Engagement* (Camberwell: ACER, 2008), ix, 14–15, 18.

<sup>766</sup> For example, Professor K. Lipson, Dean, Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale Campus, Swinburne University of Technology, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 24; Professor P. Steele, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Campus Coordination and Academic Director, Berwick and Peninsula Campuses, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 44.

<sup>767</sup> Supplementary information provided by Deakin University and Monash University, March 2009.

<sup>768</sup> Mr S. Hamilton, Chief Executive Officer, Open Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 July 2008, 22.

## Supporting off-campus students through study centres

Study centres are one mechanism that may support off-campus students to be successful in their higher education studies. Study centres can be stand alone university operations, co-located with other education and training providers, or even run by a non-university organisation. At their most basic, study centres are not staffed, but offer access to ICT facilities and study spaces. Some centres also employ general staff who provide administrative and/or study skills support, and may have teaching spaces for classes with visiting academic staff. Unlike university campuses and centres, study centres do not have permanent academic staff and are not sites for ongoing course delivery. However, study centres may help to overcome some of the difficulties that can be associated with off-campus study, such as social isolation and lack of access to appropriate ICT.

While the Committee is not aware of any study centres currently operating in regional Victoria, they are well developed in some other Australian states. In Western Australia, a small and highly dispersed rural population is served by a network of more than 100 'telecentres'. These community owned and operated study centres provide off-campus students and other community members with access to computers and internet, printing and photocopying services, teaching facilities and videoconferencing.<sup>769</sup> Similar arrangements exist in Queensland, where Learning Network Queensland, part of the Brisbane North Institute of TAFE, operates 34 Learning Centres across the state. As with Western Australia's telecentres, the remit of the Learning Centres is broader than higher education, but off-campus higher education students are able to access quiet study spaces, computers, and videoconferencing and teleconferencing facilities. Local tutorial rooms are available for use by visiting academics and students can undertake university enabling programs at the centres.<sup>770</sup>

In New South Wales, the University of New England has developed its own network of ten regional Access Centres, which support the university's substantial cohort of off-campus students. Access Centres are co-located with TAFE campuses and give students access to computer, internet, printing, telephone and videoconferencing facilities. They also have spaces for group study, and study skills and exam preparation workshops are held in all centres. Two of the Access Centres are staffed and offer course advice and other university information.<sup>771</sup>

Several inquiry participants suggested that similar types of facilities should be set up in regional Victoria in order to provide additional support to off-campus students.<sup>772</sup> Stakeholders from the Mornington Peninsula region argued that 'learning hubs' could be established, making use of the existing education infrastructure in regional areas, including TAFE institutes, public libraries and school facilities.<sup>773</sup> These 'hubs' could be made available to off-campus students from the region, providing an opportunity for these students to meet and interact. The Committee also heard the suggestion that higher education

---

<sup>769</sup> Department of Local Government and Regional Development (Western Australia), 'WA Telecentre Network,' DLGRD, <http://www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au/RegionDev/Telecentres.asp> (accessed 4 May 2009).

<sup>770</sup> Learning Network Queensland, 'Services and Facilities,' LNQ, <http://www.lnq.net.au/servicesFacilities.aspx> (accessed 6 July 2009).

<sup>771</sup> Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), Written Submission, February 2008, 4; University of New England, 'Regional Access Centres,' UNE, <http://www.une.edu.au/ac/othercentres/> (accessed 15 January 2009).

<sup>772</sup> For example, Frankston Learning City Stakeholder Network, Written Submission, March 2008, 3, 5; Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN, Written Submission, March 2008, 5; Chisholm Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, March 2008, 6; Mr M. Brewer, Parent, Warragul, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Rural City of Wangaratta, Written Submission, May 2008, 4.

<sup>773</sup> Frankston Learning City Stakeholder Network, Written Submission, March 2008, 3, 5; Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN, Written Submission, March 2008, 5.

institutions that already have a presence in a regional or outer urban area could 'host' off-campus students from other institutions, providing them with access to ICT, study groups and other assistance.<sup>774</sup> Similarly, one submission from Western Australia argued that Australian Government funding should be allocated to existing regional education and training providers for the support of off-campus students (of any university) in the region.<sup>775</sup>

On the other hand, Mr Stuart Hamilton, Chief Executive Officer, Open Universities Australia, told the Committee that while centres for the support of off-campus students are initially appealing, they may not suit the requirements of off-campus students:

The experience is they do not make much difference to access to our kinds of courses because of the nature of our kinds of students. When I first got into this job and looked at Learning Network Queensland it seemed to me on the face of it to provide a great model across Australia. It does have the best network by far ... There is nothing really like that in Victoria, and I thought that would be a problem but it does not prove so. Our rural numbers in Victoria are better than any other state, so it is not really an issue.<sup>776</sup>

Mr Hamilton noted that students who participate in higher education through Open Universities Australia are typically time-poor working adults who often lack the time or inclination to visit a learning centre.<sup>777</sup>

The Committee notes that Victoria is much smaller than either Western Australia or Queensland and has a less dispersed population, with relatively good coverage by university and TAFE campuses. The Committee therefore believes that there would be little justification for the establishment of new off-campus study centres in Victoria, particularly given uncertainties about the level of student demand for such facilities. However, there may be further scope for existing education and training providers, and other interested entities such as local government, to provide support to off-campus students in regional areas. The Committee encourages providers of off-campus education to work with institutions and organisations in regional areas to enhance students' access to existing educational infrastructure.

---

### University centres

---

Throughout the inquiry, the Committee heard about a range of models for higher education delivery through university 'centres' and their various benefits and drawbacks. There is no single model for a university centre, and existing centres differ in terms of their size, functions, staffing arrangements and location. They are smaller in size and more limited in scope than most university campuses, and operate in smaller regional communities that are not large enough to support a campus. Only a few courses are offered at these centres, typically through a combination of face-to-face teaching and online or distance delivery. In addition to teaching, some centres also support higher degree research students, or have other linkages with research activities. University centres may be stand alone facilities or co-located with other organisations such as TAFE institutes.

The Committee notes that approaches such as the university centre model were favoured in the Review of Australian Higher Education's discussion of regional higher education provision. The review endorsed innovative and flexible delivery arrangements rather than

---

<sup>774</sup> South East LLEN, Written Submission, May 2008, 5.

<sup>775</sup> Mr L. Money, Shelley (Western Australia), Written Submission, August 2008, 7.

<sup>776</sup> Mr S. Hamilton, Chief Executive Officer, Open Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 July 2008, 19.

<sup>777</sup> *ibid.*

the expansion of traditional campuses, noting that such approaches 'allow existing providers to make use of a variety of teaching arrangements such as distance education, collaboration and sharing of infrastructure with local Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers, videoconferencing and fly-in, fly-out academic staff'.<sup>778</sup> These forms of higher education delivery were of central interest to the Committee in its deliberations, which focused particularly on the quality and cost effectiveness of such models.

## University centre models

In Victoria, the main university centre model examined by the Committee was RMIT University's learning and research centre in Hamilton. The centre offers a Bachelor of Nursing and a small number of graduate diplomas and certificates. In addition, the centre supports some higher degree research students and is also a resource for off-campus students studying with Open Universities Australia. Dr Leone Wheeler, Head, Learning Community Partnerships, RMIT University, told the Committee that research is also an important focus for the centre, which has a 'local global' research program and a regional development research program. The centre also has a number of staff involved in community engagement and partnerships, and works with a community advisory board made up of community members and business, local government and health representatives.<sup>779</sup>

The Committee also became aware of a well-developed university centre model in Geraldton, approximately 400 kilometres north of Perth on Western Australia's coast. The model was of particular interest to the Committee as it had been described as having several unique features, including: strong community input and ownership through the Geraldton Universities Access Group; the involvement of multiple university partners, together with a TAFE institute; and the construction of a purpose-built facility following initial use of existing infrastructure. In April 2009, the Committee travelled to Geraldton and Perth to investigate the model, meeting with Geraldton Universities Centre board members, staff and students, as well as representatives of the centre's three university partners, University of Western Australia, Curtin University of Technology and Edith Cowan University.

The Committee heard that there has been interest in replicating a similar university centre model in Victoria's north-west. Inspired in part by the Geraldton Universities Centre, the Mid Murray Higher Education Working Party has put significant effort into developing a proposal for a 'Central Murray Universities Centre'.<sup>780</sup> The proposed centre was to be a site for the flexible provision of a range of degree courses, perhaps limited to the first year of the course. Courses would be delivered online by a partner university, with tutorial support from trained local tutors. Courses might also include community-based practicums and intensive on-campus study blocks. A facilitator would manage the centre, monitoring student demand in the local region and working with community and industry to stimulate this demand, mirroring the strong community input that is a feature of the Geraldton Universities Centre.<sup>781</sup> Unlike the Geraldton Universities Centre, however, the proposed Mid Murray Universities Centre was to be based at existing sites, rather than requiring a purpose-built

---

<sup>778</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 111.

<sup>779</sup> Dr L. Wheeler, Head, Learning Community Partnerships, RMIT University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 49–50.

<sup>780</sup> Details of the proposed centre are provided in Mid Murray Higher Education Working Party, Appendix to Written Submission, March 2008.

<sup>781</sup> Mr G. Stewart, Executive Officer, Murray Mallee LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 11–12.

facility.<sup>782</sup> In June 2009, the Committee was advised that Swan Hill has been selected as the first site for the new Deakin at your Doorstep initiative (see below).

## **Blended learning**

A major topic of discussion throughout the inquiry was the use of what is often termed blended learning. Blended learning typically involves a substantial component of online learning, supported by a face-to-face component. The face-to-face component may involve onsite tutorials or laboratory classes, visiting staff, or intensive study blocks at the main university campus. There may also be an extended industry placement as part of the course. Blended learning is commonly used at university centres and smaller campuses, but is increasingly used at larger metropolitan campuses as well.

Blended learning is the primary mode of learning for students at the Geraldton Universities Centre, where most students study online, but also participate in either a tutorial or study group each week. The Committee heard that for students studying education at the centre, most tutors are practicing teachers from the local community.<sup>783</sup> Similarly, RMIT University also employs what it terms a 'flexible delivery mode' at its Hamilton learning and research centre. Learning and teaching is 'predominantly online' but with onsite tutorials and laboratory classes taught by academic staff based in Hamilton.<sup>784</sup> The Committee also heard that La Trobe University's new regional strategy signals an increased focus on blended learning at its regional campuses, where some courses are already delivered in this manner.<sup>785</sup>

### ***Advantages of blended learning***

Blended learning is seen as having some key advantages as a delivery mode in regional areas. Blended learning can help to overcome the problems of scale that make regional delivery more expensive. Thus, it would appear that blended learning may increase opportunities to access a wider range of courses. Universities also argue that by allowing the involvement of highly qualified metropolitan-based academic staff, blended learning enhances the quality of regional provision.<sup>786</sup> In discussions with the university partners of Geraldton Universities Centre, the Committee heard that it is difficult to attract quality academic staff to teach in regional areas. One university representative argued that there is 'a quality issue' where face-to-face teaching is provided by local practitioners, rather than by tutors with outside expertise.<sup>787</sup> A similar point was made by Mr Kent Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, who noted that in some courses at regional campuses the university 'beams in' lecturers who are able to deliver the best teaching and maintain quality.<sup>788</sup>

---

<sup>782</sup> Mid Murray Higher Education Working Party, Written Submission, March 2008, 17.

<sup>783</sup> Meetings with representatives of the Geraldton Universities Centre and Geraldton University Access Group, Geraldton, 28–29 April 2009.

<sup>784</sup> RMIT University, 'Hamilton: Bachelor of Nursing,' RMIT University, <http://www.rmit.edu.au/hamilton/nursing> (accessed 18 January 2009).

<sup>785</sup> Dr A. Harvey, Acting Executive Director, Bendigo Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 37.

<sup>786</sup> Professor R. Quin, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education, Curtin University of Technology, Meeting with representatives of Curtin University of Technology, Edith Cowan University and University of Western Australia, Perth, 30 April 2009; Mr K. Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 49.

<sup>787</sup> Professor R. Quin, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education, Curtin University of Technology, Meeting with representatives of Curtin University of Technology, Edith Cowan University and University of Western Australia, Perth, 30 April 2009.

<sup>788</sup> Mr K. Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 49.

### *Quality considerations*

On the other hand, evidence indicates some differences between the views of universities and other stakeholders regarding what constitutes 'quality' in regional higher education provision. Among student, school and community representatives in regional Victoria, there is a relatively widespread perception that blended learning is an inferior pedagogy that is disengaging, unsupportive and unappealing to most prospective students.<sup>789</sup> Some university participants recognised these concerns, and acknowledged that the increasing reliance on blended learning has the potential to reduce the attractiveness of local study for prospective students, particularly school leavers.<sup>790</sup> Mr Farrell therefore argued that universities need to develop blended learning methods that balance competing demands and appeal to students:

The blended delivery model is a good example of why we have not used the technology as much as perhaps one might consider we should use it ... what we are hearing is people do not want that. It is no good providing a product that people do not necessarily want. What we need to do is try and find a balance between the use of technology and the use of traditional university face-to-face tutorials, lectures and so forth.<sup>791</sup>

Most importantly, inquiry participants consistently stressed the importance of retaining substantial face-to-face teaching, group interaction and support if blended learning is to be an attractive and high quality option for regional students.<sup>792</sup> At RMIT University's Hamilton learning and research centre, lectures are recorded and delivered via videoconferencing, while tutorials and laboratory classes are conducted with local academic staff. A representative of the centre told the Committee that students' comments indicate that the strong support from local staff more than offsets the absence of services and facilities that are offered on larger campuses.<sup>793</sup>

The role of face-to-face teaching as a component of blended learning was also a central theme in discussions at the Geraldton Universities Centre. The Committee heard that a guiding principle for the establishment of the centre had been 'high tech-high touch': in other words, delivery was to make full use of new technologies while retaining face-to-face contact and interaction.<sup>794</sup> The Geraldton University Access Group argued that this approach, combined with strong community input, had led to strong student demand, and meant that the quality of provision at the Centre was comparable to that at metropolitan campuses.<sup>795</sup>

---

<sup>789</sup> For example, Ms C. Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 6–7; Ms S. Cole, State President, Victorian Branch, National Union of Students, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 20; Gannawarra Shire Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 10.

<sup>790</sup> For example, Dr L. Crase, Director, Albury-Wodonga Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 37; Mr K. Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 44.

<sup>791</sup> Mr K. Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 44.

<sup>792</sup> For example, Professor B. Adam, Acting Head, School of Rural Health, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2009, 9; Gannawarra Shire Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 9; Dr S. McEachern and Ms R. May, Representatives, National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 27, 29; Ms S. Cole, State President, Victorian Branch, National Union of Students, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 20.

<sup>793</sup> Dr L. Wheeler, Head, Learning Community Partnerships, RMIT University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 49.

<sup>794</sup> Meetings with representatives of the Geraldton Universities Centre and Geraldton University Access Group, Geraldton, 28–29 April 2009.

<sup>795</sup> Meeting with representatives of Geraldton University Access Group, Geraldton, 28 April 2009.

More recently, the university partners involved in the Geraldton Universities Centre have shifted to a greater reliance on online learning. They argue that this approach meets budgetary requirements, while also maintaining the quality of provision. However, stakeholders have expressed dismay at this development. While acknowledging that online delivery of lectures can be beneficial, the community is passionate in its belief that face-to-face content tutorials (not simply 'study groups') are a vital component of a higher education degree.<sup>796</sup> In discussions with the Committee, several students, in particular, were scathing in their criticism of the lack of face-to-face interaction and teaching in their courses, as well as the cancellation of some practicums. Education students noted that when studying to enter a profession focused on relationships and interactions, face-to-face opportunities are particularly important. One student described the two hours per week of face-to-face time as 'token' and insufficient to constitute genuine 'blended' learning.<sup>797</sup>

The Committee also heard that for blended learning to be effective and high quality, academic staff must be appropriately trained in how to design and deliver units in this mode. Professor Bill Adam, Acting Head, School of Rural Health, The University of Melbourne, noted that teaching via videoconferencing uses specific teaching techniques and therefore requires special training.<sup>798</sup> Delivery using blended learning may also necessitate time-consuming adaptations to unit designs and the development of new learning materials.<sup>799</sup> A Curtin University of Technology academic who delivers units online told the Committee that adapting the curriculum can be problematic, and that time for this activity must be built into planning and delivery. He also noted that academics can develop good blended learning programs once they have developed the appropriate skills, but that they are sometimes left to develop these skills independently through trial and error.<sup>800</sup>

Finally, blended learning must be supported by appropriate technological capabilities, in terms of both equipment and bandwidth. Some participants commented on how attempts by universities to utilise ICT more heavily have often been hampered by technological problems.<sup>801</sup> Ms Robyn May, Industrial Officer, National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), made the point that these problems mean that there can be a wide gulf between descriptions of blended learning and students' experiences of it:

Often it can look like it is going to be great. You get the podcast and the this and the that, but the reality is that the student rolls up, the machinery breaks down, there is no-one to help you out.<sup>802</sup>

Similarly, three principals from regional schools noted that videoconferencing technology can be unreliable, making it unattractive for both students and teachers.<sup>803</sup> However, as technologies continue to develop and if access to high speed broadband improves, the

---

<sup>796</sup> Meetings with representatives of the Geraldton Universities Centre and Geraldton University Access Group, Geraldton, 28–29 April 2009.

<sup>797</sup> Meetings with students of the Geraldton Universities Centre, Geraldton, 29 April 2009.

<sup>798</sup> Professor B. Adam, Acting Head, School of Rural Health, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2009, 9.

<sup>799</sup> Dr S. McEachern, Representative, National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 27; South West Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, April 2008, 3.

<sup>800</sup> Dr M. Harslett, Academic Course Coordinator, Curtin Centre for Regional Education, Geraldton Universities Centre, Meeting with representatives of Geraldton Universities Centre, Geraldton, 28 April 2009.

<sup>801</sup> Professor B. Adam, Acting Head, School of Rural Health, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 23 March 2009, 9; Associate Professor H. Ballis, Acting Pro Vice-Chancellor, Gippsland Campus, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 30.

<sup>802</sup> Ms R. May, Industrial Officer, National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 29.

<sup>803</sup> Mrs H. Thiele, Principal, Murrayville Community College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 50; Mr R. Boucher, Principal, Swifts Creek Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 33; Mr K. Lee, Principal, Robinvale Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 34.

Committee expects that these problems will diminish, enhancing the effectiveness of online technologies in teaching and learning. At the same time, the Committee believes that the prevalence of technological difficulties highlights the need for universities using blended learning to make sufficient investments in ICT equipment, connectivity and technical support.

In essence, the Committee believes that it is of great importance that higher education students who are studying at university centres, or through other flexible delivery arrangements, receive a high quality education. As they pay the same course costs, they deserve quality and services comparable to those received by students studying in the major cities. The Committee therefore believes that higher education accreditation and quality assurance processes should examine each specific mode and site of delivery to ensure that all students, regardless of location or study mode, are receiving a high quality education. Where blended learning is used, quality assurance procedures should ensure appropriate pedagogies and ICT capabilities are employed, and that the face-to-face component is sufficient in the context of each specific course. The Committee notes that the Australian Government's establishment of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency presents a timely opportunity for course accreditation, standards and quality assurance mechanisms to be strengthened.

### **Blended learning and the student experience**

The nature of the student experience was another quality issue that attracted comment throughout the inquiry. Some participants, particularly from the higher education sector, argued that students at university centres and small campuses do not benefit from the broader experiences, facilities and services available at large campuses. Professor Elizabeth Harman, Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University, argued that students at the university's small Sunbury and Melton campuses were not benefiting from what she termed a 'genuine university experience'.<sup>804</sup> Professor Sally Walker, Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, made a similar point in arguing against the Review of Australian Higher Education's emphasis on non-campus approaches to regional higher education delivery:

My personal view is that Professor Bradley does not have an answer in relation to regional provision, that she is searching and that some of the things that she has currently come up with are absolutely undesirable.

For example, she spoke at the Universities Australia conference of fly-in, fly-out tertiary provision. If a group of nurses at Wonthaggi wanted to upskill, you would go in on one day a week and upskill them. That is not a tertiary experience; it is something different. It is not regional provision. It makes a mockery of what is true regional provision ... There may be a case for providing opportunities for the nurses at Warragul or wherever they may be, but to equate it with an authentic regional campus is an insult.<sup>805</sup>

During meetings in Perth, Professor Alan Robson, Vice-Chancellor, University of Western Australia, argued that because the student experience in regional areas is of lower quality, financial support for relocation is a much better approach.<sup>806</sup>

---

<sup>804</sup> Professor E. Harman, Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 4.

<sup>805</sup> Professor S. Walker, Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 24–25.

<sup>806</sup> Professor A. Robson, Vice-Chancellor, University of Western Australia, Meeting with representatives of Curtin University of Technology, Edith Cowan University and the University of Western Australia, Perth, 30 April 2009.



The differences between the student experience on a metropolitan or large campus, and at a university centre, were acknowledged by a range of stakeholders throughout the inquiry. In Geraldton, the Committee heard that the Geraldton Universities Centre does not aim to recreate what exists in the city, or to pretend that the student experience is equivalent. At the same time, the director of the centre emphasised that what is provided for students is a study environment where students feel comfortable and supported.<sup>807</sup> Students themselves indicated that the opportunity to study in a comfortable non-metropolitan environment, to maintain existing social support networks, and to experience more personal assistance from academic and support staff was of greater importance to them than the opportunity to experience campus life at a large university.<sup>808</sup> One student at the Geraldton Universities Centre told the Committee that she had begun her studies in Perth, but ‘hated it’, and has enjoyed her experience at the Geraldton Universities Centre much more.

Clearly, there are substantial differences between the student experience at large campuses and university centres. Nonetheless, just as off-campus study enhances access for a specific cohort of students, university centres can also be important in filling gaps in higher education provision. The Committee therefore believes that where university centres and similar facilities exist, it is important that the features, benefits and drawbacks of study at that location are made explicit to prospective students. This point was emphasised by Dr Kerry Ferguson, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Equity and Student Services, La Trobe University:

... you are back at looking at what do we expect and what would a student expect to experience on a campus. That is a question that we have to answer. Otherwise we have to be quite clear about what we are marketing and what we are delivering. If it is a location, we have to really say that all you are going to get here is the delivery and that we will support you as best we can, but there will not be a whole range of things that make up the student experience at university.<sup>809</sup>

Such an approach should enable students to choose the option that best suits them.

The Committee does not believe that a ‘different’ student experience is necessarily a lower quality experience. While universities tend to be concerned with the broader student experience, this is a luxury that is not open to many regional people (particularly mature age people) who will not experience higher education unless it is available locally. While it is obviously important that students at university centres receive a high quality education, experiencing the extra-curricular trappings of a large campus is not necessarily a priority consideration for these students.

### Cost effectiveness of blended learning

The Committee did not receive any definitive evidence about the costs of higher education delivery at university centres, or the costs of blended delivery in comparison to traditional on-campus delivery. The Committee was advised that RMIT University’s research and learning centre in Hamilton runs at a loss,<sup>810</sup> but heard conflicting views about the cost of provision at the Geraldton Universities Centre. One inquiry participant noted that while there have been several attempts to identify course costs in Australia, clear estimates have been ‘elusive’.<sup>811</sup> In the absence of this data, the Committee cautions against any *prima facie*

---

<sup>807</sup> Ms M. Wills, Director, Geraldton Universities Centre, Meeting with representatives of the Geraldton Universities Centre, Geraldton, 28 April 2009.

<sup>808</sup> Meeting with students of the Geraldton Universities Centre, Geraldton, 29 April 2009.

<sup>809</sup> Dr K. Ferguson, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Equity and Student Services, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 24.

<sup>810</sup> Dr L. Wheeler, Head, Learning Community Partnerships, RMIT University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 52.

<sup>811</sup> Mr L. Money, Shelley (Western Australia), Written Submission, August 2008, 3.

assumptions that delivery at university centres rather than campuses, even where blended learning is used, is likely to be a more cost effective way of delivering higher education in regional areas. This point was emphasised by a representative of the National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), who argued that the resources for infrastructure, curriculum development and IT support may mean that high quality blended learning may in fact be more expensive than traditional delivery modes.<sup>812</sup> The Committee believes that developing a clearer understanding of the costs of different models for regional higher education provision should be an important component of Australian Government policy and planning for regional delivery.

---

## **TAFE delivery of higher education**

---

Another flexible approach to regional higher education provision is the delivery of courses by TAFE institutes on behalf of a partner university. As with university centres, this approach to regional provision appears to be more suited to smaller regional communities that are at a distance from larger providers. In such arrangements, the university designs and accredits the higher education program, which is delivered by TAFE staff at TAFE facilities.

### **Current TAFE delivery of higher education**

TAFE delivery of higher education programs has a long history. In Victoria's north-west, for example, the Sunraysia Institute of TAFE began delivering higher education courses in the 1980s in partnership with former Colleges of Advanced Education, and later, as a partner of La Trobe University.<sup>813</sup> Today, the Institute shares facilities and works closely with La Trobe University's Mildura campus.

While some metropolitan TAFE institutes offer a small number of degree level courses in their own right, the Committee is aware of only one Victorian university currently offering higher education degrees through a TAFE partnership. RMIT University, itself a dual-sector institution, offers a Bachelor of Commerce in Bairnsdale and a Bachelor of Nursing in Sale, delivered by the East Gippsland Institute of TAFE. The Bachelor of Commerce is delivered through face-to-face classes supported with online resources. The degree also includes compulsory work integrated learning units, supported by a local business mentor.<sup>814</sup> Nursing students at Sale participate in flexible learning that includes online, face-to-face, videoconferencing and laboratory experiences.<sup>815</sup>

In addition to the TAFE delivery of higher education programs already occurring, additional collaborations between universities and TAFE institutes are emerging. In recent years, Deakin University has been considering ways to further extend higher education provision to rural and regional areas.<sup>816</sup> In 2008, the university was awarded \$8.21 million from the Australian Government's Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund for the innovative project, Deakin at your Doorstep. Through Deakin at your Doorstep, the university's

---

<sup>812</sup> Ms R. May, Industrial Officer, National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 26–27.

<sup>813</sup> Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, March 2008, 4.

<sup>814</sup> East Gippsland Institute of TAFE, 'Bachelor of Commerce – RMIT,' East Gippsland Institute of TAFE, <http://www.egtafe.vic.edu.au/apps/coursenavigator/course.asp?courseid=472> (accessed 14 January 2009); RMIT University, 'Commerce – Bachelor of Commerce,' RMIT University, <http://rmit.org.au/browse:ID=BP181> (accessed 18 January 2009).

<sup>815</sup> RMIT University, 'Nursing – Bachelor of Nursing,' RMIT University, <http://www.rmit.edu.au/programs/bp032> (accessed 18 January 2009).

<sup>816</sup> Dr J. Henry, Board Member, Smart Geelong Region LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 17, 20.

Warrnambool campus is developing a two-year associate degree program for students in regional and remote areas. The associate degree will be delivered using leading edge technology, and in partnership with TAFE institutes.<sup>817</sup>

As noted, Swan Hill has been selected as the first site for Deakin at your Doorstep. The initiative will give students in the region the opportunity to undertake two-year associate degrees in accounting, community work and children's services, delivered in a blended learning mode. Courses will be delivered in conjunction with Sunraysia Institute of TAFE. On completion, graduates will have attained both the associate degree and a TAFE diploma, with the opportunity to complete the remainder of a full bachelor degree at Deakin University.<sup>818</sup>

The Committee also heard that TAFE institutes in Western Australia have historically had an important role delivering higher education through partnerships under the 'country contracting' model.<sup>819</sup> In this model, TAFE institutes were encouraged to 'contract' with universities to deliver higher education programs, with modest financial and organisational support provided by the Western Australian Government. In Geraldton, the Committee heard that Central West TAFE had a strong role in higher education delivery in the community prior to the establishment of the Geraldton Universities Centre. Today, Central West TAFE continues to deliver a Bachelor of Nursing in partnership with Edith Cowan University.

### Quality and cost effectiveness of TAFE delivery of higher education

The Committee heard that TAFE delivery of higher education programs can be an effective model for smaller regional communities. The East Gippsland Institute of TAFE noted that the benefits of its partnership with RMIT University include the opportunity for students to stay in the local area while obtaining a degree from a world-recognised university. The qualifications are portable and have 'instant recognition and credibility', while graduates also develop an appreciation of the rural business environment.<sup>820</sup> These models can be attractive to TAFE institutes because they may add to the prestige of the institution, as well as providing impetus for the development of articulation pathways from their VET programs.<sup>821</sup> Finally, because TAFE delivery of higher education utilises existing facilities and staff skills, it can mean that resources are used more efficiently, reducing the costs of regional provision.<sup>822</sup> It can also mean that higher education students have access to better learning resources. For example, one student at the Geraldton Universities Centre noted that computer facilities at the TAFE campus were better than those that the centre was able to provide.<sup>823</sup>

Echoing some of the concerns about the quality of provision at university centres, the East Gippsland Institute of TAFE claimed that one drawback in TAFE delivery of higher education programs is the lack of access to support services from the partner university, contributing to a lack of understanding of student needs and a lack of connection between students and

---

<sup>817</sup> Deakin University, 'Deakin at your Doorstep – new Associate Degree program: Major Boost for Deakin's Warrnambool Campus,' Media Release, 12 December 2008; Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund: 2008 Funding Round* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 2.

<sup>818</sup> Elise Snashall-Woodhams, 'Record Tertiary Access,' *The Guardian* (Swan Hill), 3 June 2009, 3.

<sup>819</sup> Mr L. Money, Shelley (Western Australia), Written Submission, August 2008, 9.

<sup>820</sup> East Gippsland Institute of TAFE, Supplementary Submission, March 2008, 2.

<sup>821</sup> Mr L. Money, Shelley (Western Australia), Written Submission, August 2008, 9.

<sup>822</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>823</sup> Ms C. Lynch, Undergraduate Student, Bachelor of Creative Industries, Edith Cowan University, Meeting with students of the Geraldton Universities Centre, Geraldton, 29 April 2009.

the university. It argued that improved provision would incorporate more visits from university staff.<sup>824</sup>

On the other hand, Wellington Shire Council provided the Committee with the story of one graduate who had completed the RMIT University Bachelor of Nursing delivered via a TAFE partnership in Sale, and who had a very positive experience.<sup>825</sup> Despite initial doubts about the quality of the course, the student found that it was well organised, and that tutor-student ratios were favourable, meaning that students were actively coached and nurtured throughout their studies. Students in the course enjoyed organised study groups, individual coaching, and access to remedial assistance in mathematics and biology from local schoolteachers. There were also opportunities for voluntary work, additional practicums and field trips.<sup>826</sup> This anecdote illustrates that while higher education courses delivered by TAFE institutes are likely to suffer from perceptions of lower status and quality, they may in fact provide students with advantages, such as small class sizes, that are of great educational benefit.

### **Increasing collaboration in regional delivery of higher education**

The Committee also heard that there may be potential for greater collaboration between sectors in the delivery of higher education in regional areas. In particular, participants argued that TAFE skills and infrastructure could be used more extensively for the delivery of higher education programs in rural and regional areas.<sup>827</sup> The Committee agrees that there is scope for collaborative models to expand the provision of higher education throughout Victoria.

Whilst in Scotland, the Committee learned about the UHI Millennium Institute, a particularly developed example of a delivery partnership involving both vocational and higher education.<sup>828</sup> The UHI Millennium Institute is a partnership of colleges and learning and research centres working together to provide university level education to people throughout the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, and beyond. The UHI Millennium Institute's mission is:

To be a distinctive and innovative regional university of national and international significance; a university with a pivotal role in the education, economic, social, cultural and environmental infrastructure of its region and which reaches out to the people of the Highlands and Islands and the rest of the world through its research and teaching.<sup>829</sup>

The Institute has thirteen partners, including further education colleges, specialist colleges and research institutions. Each academic partner has its own character and contributes to the distinctive organisation that is the UHI Millennium Institute. Some are relatively large colleges in urban centres, while others are smaller institutions, including some whose primary focus is on research. The partnership allows even tiny colleges to offer all levels of the qualifications framework, from access courses through to PhD studies. Since August 2008, the UHI Millennium Institute has been able to award its own taught degrees, a major step in the path towards gaining full university status. Some degrees will continue to be

---

<sup>824</sup> East Gippsland Institute of TAFE, Supplementary Submission, March 2008, 2.

<sup>825</sup> Wellington Shire Council, Appendix to Written Submission, March 2008, 7–9.

<sup>826</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>827</sup> Ms M. Kirsopp, Parent, Haven, Written Submission, May 2008, 3; Mr B. Graham, Director, Strategic Development, Wellington Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 3; Chisholm Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, March 2008, 6.

<sup>828</sup> Meeting with Professor R. J. Cormack, Principal, UHI Millennium Institute, Edinburgh, 28 August 2008.

<sup>829</sup> Presentation by Professor R. J. Cormack, Principal, UHI Millennium Institute, Edinburgh, 28 August 2008.

awarded by the University of Aberdeen, University of Strathclyde, the Open University and others.<sup>830</sup>

The Committee recognises that establishing and maintaining effective delivery partnerships can be time consuming and complex. In Australia, this process is complicated by regulatory complexity in the VET and higher education sectors. However, the Committee expects that government moves to improve articulation and connectivity across the tertiary education system may enhance opportunities for collaboration in regional higher education provision. The Committee believes that the UHI Millennium Institute is an excellent example of the benefits of effective collaboration between education and training providers and researchers in non-metropolitan areas.

---

## Conclusion and recommendations

---

The assumption is sometimes made that geographical differences in participation in higher education stem almost entirely from varying provision in different areas. While such an assumption is simplistic, the Committee found that provision and access are indeed important. The provision of higher education in regional locations, while not appealing to all prospective students, creates participation opportunities. Many of those studying regionally come from low socioeconomic status backgrounds or other designated equity groups. A proportion would never attend university without access to local opportunities. The Committee therefore believes that regional provision forms part of the foundation for meeting participation targets for under-represented groups. Regional provision should involve a combination of delivery models, matched to the particular contexts within metropolitan, outer urban, regional and rural communities.

The Committee believes that sustaining and strengthening existing regional campuses in Victoria should be a priority. The Committee believes that, supported with appropriate Australian Government funding, these campuses have the capacity to continue to provide educational opportunities while making an important contribution to economic and social wellbeing in regional communities. The Committee also sees a role for the Victorian Government to boost universities' contributions to regional development, particularly through the provision of detailed information on local skills needs.

The Committee believes that university centres can be an effective model for regional higher education provision, where they are carefully planned, appropriately funded, and where quality oversight is in place. Also essential is active support from the host communities and a strong, ongoing commitment from providers. Where communities have a strong interest in university centre models, there should be mechanisms to work with the Australian Government to examine the feasibility of establishing a centre locally. While such centres should not be expected to offer the same experience of student life as larger campuses, the Committee believes that they have the capacity to offer a high quality education. When blended learning is employed, this should be of high quality and include an adequate amount of face-to-face interaction.

The Committee also believes that TAFE delivery of higher education courses has a number of advantages as a model of higher education provision in Victoria's smaller rural communities. In particular, the use of TAFE staff and facilities may be a more efficient use of resources than the creation of new facilities. The Committee therefore believes that the

---

<sup>830</sup> Meeting with Professor R. J. Cormack, Principal, UHI Millennium Institute, Edinburgh, 28 August 2008.

Victorian and Australian governments should work together to support universities and TAFE institutes to partner in the delivery of higher education courses.

Quality and resources are important and related themes, irrespective of the specific approach to provision. Delivery of higher education in regional areas will often cost more than metropolitan delivery. Nevertheless, the Committee believes it is important that regional provision is adequately funded. The Committee therefore recognises a need for clearer information about the actual costs of different approaches to regional delivery.

The Committee strongly believes that higher education must be both accessible and of high quality. To ensure that quality is maintained, higher education accreditation and quality assurance needs to pay specific attention to different delivery modes and locations, particularly where new approaches are being implemented. Related to this, the Committee sees the need for a major review of the provision of blended learning by the higher education sector. This review should benchmark best practice, and set mandatory guidelines for future delivery in this mode.

## **Recommendations**

**6.1 That the Victorian Government advocate for Australian Government funding for regional higher education provision that:**

- is based on the actual cost of provision in different rural and regional locations;
- is directed in large part at maintaining and strengthening existing regional campuses;
- supports expansion of collaborative regional delivery arrangements between universities for high quality higher education courses and increased research capacity;
- utilises existing facilities and resources (including TAFE institutes) in rural and regional areas, where appropriate;
- provides incentives for universities to offer high value courses that balance student demand and workforce need; and
- is sufficient to ensure a high quality face-to-face component in undergraduate courses delivered through blended learning.

**6.2 That the Victorian Government advocate to the Australian Government that it ensure that accreditation and quality assurance of higher education courses address each mode and site of delivery.**

- 6.3 That the Victorian Government advocate through the new Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment for a major review by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency of the provision of blended learning by the higher education sector, to benchmark best practice and set mandatory quality guidelines for future delivery in this mode.
- 6.4 That Skills Victoria work with regional universities and campuses to provide annual detailed advice on local skill shortages in regional Victoria.
- 6.5 That as part of the Victorian Government’s ongoing commitment to improving public transport, it review public transport services to education and training institutions in non-metropolitan areas. This review should include consideration of public transport linkages within and between non-metropolitan localities.
- 6.6 That the Victorian Government support TAFE institutes to collaborate and partner with universities in the delivery of higher education courses in regional Victoria.





# Financial considerations

---

Getting into uni should not be about whether or not you can afford to live. It should be about what you have achieved throughout year 12 and whether you have qualified for the course you have selected.<sup>831</sup>

---

Over a working lifetime, the earnings of a university graduate have been estimated to exceed those of other year 12 graduates by more than \$1.5 million.<sup>832</sup> While the long-term financial rewards may be considerable, the costs of participation in higher education are also high. The challenge of meeting these costs was an overriding concern of many participants in the inquiry.

A major task for the Committee was to understand how financial considerations impact on participation in higher education. Research suggests that financial considerations can impact on every stage of the higher education participation process, from the initial application to the completion of a university course. The Canada Millennium Scholarships Foundation, which has undertaken extensive research in this area, reports that financial considerations influence both access to university for potential students and their persistence once they enrol.<sup>833</sup> In the course of the inquiry, the Committee heard many accounts of students who had found access to higher education limited by its costs, or who had failed to complete a university course due to financial difficulties.

The Committee also found evidence of significant geographical differences in the impact of costs on participation in higher education. First, people in disadvantaged socioeconomic circumstances are less likely to be able to meet these costs, and participation may therefore be affected in geographic areas with high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage. In addition, travel and relocation impose additional costs on students who live away from home to study. The Committee heard that this is a particular concern for people in rural and regional Victoria. There is a widespread view that reducing the financial barriers would therefore be a significant step towards addressing geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education.

---

<sup>831</sup> Ms C. Johns, Year 12 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen 3 June 2008, 16.

<sup>832</sup> Alicia Payne and Richard Percival, *What price the clever country? The costs of tertiary education in Australia*, AMP.NATSEM Income and Wealth Report 21 (Sydney: AMP Limited, 2008), 1.

<sup>833</sup> Joseph Berger, *The Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada*, 3rd ed. (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2007), 33.

## The costs of participation

The Committee heard evidence about three types of cost associated with participation in higher education: the direct costs of study; the costs of living as a student; and the opportunity cost of foregone income while studying. The level of these costs, and their impact, will differ depending on a students' individual background and circumstances. While some participants discussed the impact of study materials and tuition fees, difficulty meeting the cost of living was a theme that recurred most strongly in contributions to the inquiry, especially for students who relocate for study.

### Study costs

Undertaking university study imposes direct costs for students in the form of both tuition fees and the purchase of course materials. Relative to comparable countries, Australian students pay a high proportion of the costs of university education. The Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch) noted that tuition fees in Australian public universities are the third-highest among OECD countries, after the United States and Japan.<sup>834</sup> Tuition fees are generally deferred and repaid as an income contingent loan.

The majority of Australian undergraduate students are in a Commonwealth supported place. This means that they pay only part of the costs of their course, referred to as a 'student contribution'. Student contributions range from \$4,162 to \$8,677 for the equivalent of one year of full-time study (refer Table 7.1), although those who pay all or part of this amount up front receive a 20 per cent discount. The average total student contribution for someone graduating with a bachelor pass degree in 2007 was \$20,579.<sup>835</sup>

Table 7.1: Maximum student contribution to tuition fees in a Commonwealth supported place (2009)

Student contribution band	Maximum student contribution for one year of full-time study
<b>Band 3</b> Law, dentistry, medicine, veterinary science, accounting, administration, economics, commerce	\$8,677
<b>Band 2</b> Computing, built environment, health, engineering, surveying, agriculture	\$7,412
<b>Band 1</b> Humanities, behavioural science, social studies, foreign languages, visual and performing arts	\$5,201
<b>National priorities</b> Education, nursing, mathematics, statistics and science	\$4,162

Source: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Information for Commonwealth Supported Students 2009* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2008), 28.

A small number of domestic undergraduate students pay the full costs of tuition. Fees for these students are set by individual institutions and are generally substantially higher than student contribution amounts. From 2009, these full fee paying places are being phased out in undergraduate courses at public universities, but will remain for postgraduate courses and for full fee undergraduates who commenced or deferred their studies before 2009.

<sup>834</sup> Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, May 2008, 7.

<sup>835</sup> Alicia Payne and Richard Percival, *What price the clever country? The costs of tertiary education in Australia*, AMP.NATSEM Income and Wealth Report 21 (Sydney: AMP Limited, 2008), 19.

## Living costs

Although the direct costs of study are substantial, living expenses generally comprise an equal or greater proportion of the cost of completing a higher education course. One estimate of the combined cost of tuition and living expenses, referred to by several participants, is provided by the Australian Scholarship Group's University Costs Calculator. This online tool produces estimates of the costs of higher education based on area of study, state of residence, living situation and commencing year.<sup>836</sup> Table 7.2 shows three of these estimates, varying by living situation, for a Victorian student over the duration of a standard three-year bachelor degree.

Table 7.2: Estimated costs for a Victorian journalism student commencing study in 2009, by living situation

Costs		At home	Shared rental	On campus
Study costs	Tuition	\$16,309	\$16,309	\$16,309
	Course materials	\$3,154	\$3,154	\$3,154
	Computer & internet	\$2,292	\$2,292	\$0
Living costs	Establishment costs	\$0	\$3,544	\$3,097
	Accommodation	\$0	\$17,297	\$57,214
	Groceries & food	\$5,638	\$16,398	\$5,638
	Utilities	\$0	\$4,029	\$0
	Public transport	\$5,960	\$5,960	\$3,221
	Entertainment/other	\$5,638	\$5,638	\$5,638
	Ancillary	\$7,248	\$7,248	\$7,248
<b>Total (three years)</b>		<b>\$46,239</b>	<b>\$82,382</b>	<b>\$101,519</b>

Source: Australian Scholarships Group, 'ASG University Costs Calculator,' ASG, [http://www.asg.com.au/uni\\_calc.asp](http://www.asg.com.au/uni_calc.asp) (accessed 28 April 2009) (adapted).

The amounts in Table 7.2 are estimates only. The actual costs of participation will vary considerably between students according to the length of degree, course-specific costs, location and lifestyle. Nevertheless, Table 7.2 offers a reasonably accurate representation of the living and study expenses of Victorian students.

Table 7.2 also makes clear that the cost of participation in higher education is dramatically higher for students who live away from the family home. Based on Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) survey data, one recent study estimated the average expenditure of full-time tertiary students living away from home in shared accommodation to be \$542 per week.<sup>837</sup> Numerous inquiry participants estimated that each year, the cost of living away from home to study is approximately \$15,000 to \$20,000,<sup>838</sup> although some participants

<sup>836</sup> Australian Scholarships Group, 'ASG University Costs Calculator,' ASG, [http://www.asg.com.au/uni\\_calc.asp](http://www.asg.com.au/uni_calc.asp) (accessed 24 November 2008).

<sup>837</sup> Alicia Payne and Richard Percival, *What price the clever country? The costs of tertiary education in Australia*, AMP.NATSEM Income and Wealth Report 21 (Sydney: AMP Limited, 2008), 15.

<sup>838</sup> For example, Girton Grammar School, Written Submission, March 2008, 1; Gippsland Local Government Network, Written Submission, April 2008, 3; Ms M. Kirsopp, Parent, Written Submission, May 2008, 2; National Rural Health Alliance, Written Submission, February 2008, 3; Mr B. Simons, Principal, The Hamilton and Alexandra College, Written Submission, February 2008, 1; Ms D. Howcroft, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 62; Mr D. McLean, Parent, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Ms J. Devereaux, Executive Officer, Wimmera Southern Mallee LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 5.

cited figures even higher.<sup>839</sup> Some recent studies and university publications have presented similar estimates.<sup>840</sup>

The Committee notes that unlike the deferred cost of tuition fees, living expenses are immediate, ongoing costs that can wear away at a student's persistence over the course of their studies. Many schools, students, student unions, local governments and parents spoke about young people from their communities who had enrolled in university but subsequently left, largely due to financial pressures. Similarly, the 2006 Universities Australia Student Finances Survey found that 4 per cent of full-time undergraduate students said that financial circumstances would probably lead them to discontinue their studies, while an additional 14.1 per cent reported plans to defer or take a leave of absence.<sup>841</sup>

The additional expense for students who must leave home and relocate for study was the subject of a great deal of evidence to the inquiry. The Southern Grampians Youth Network argued that while discussion about the costs of higher education is 'too often focused on HECS', the cost of living away from home is far more problematic for regional students and families.<sup>842</sup>

### ***Accommodation***

Accommodation in university halls of residence or colleges is often the preferred option for students who relocate to study. As well as a convenient location, halls of residence offer a bridge between home and independent living, providing meals and other amenities. They also offer opportunities for social interaction to support the transition to university life.

However, on-campus accommodation is also usually the most expensive choice. Within Melbourne, most on-campus accommodation costs between \$8,000 to \$10,000 for the academic year, although charges can be as high as almost \$19,000.<sup>843</sup> At campuses on Melbourne's fringe, university accommodation is slightly less expensive, and in regional areas, residential colleges are often cheaper again. Nevertheless, university accommodation generally remains more expensive than shared rental accommodation, especially when added fees, levies and charges are considered.

The manager of on-campus accommodation at the Monash University Gippsland campus told the Committee that universities struggle to provide a high level of service and pastoral care at a price that is competitive with the private rental market, even where the university subsidises costs.<sup>844</sup> This may mean living in halls of residence is out of reach for many of the students who would benefit most from the additional support available through on-campus residential services.

Shared rental accommodation is generally a less costly option, but was still considered prohibitively expensive by many inquiry participants. In its submission, the University of Melbourne commented that the 'crisis' in Melbourne's private rental market has serious

---

<sup>839</sup> Ms S. Cole, State President, Victorian Branch, National Union of Students, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 18; Ms D. Howcroft, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 62.

<sup>840</sup> For example, Naomi Godden, *Regional Young People and Youth Allowance: Access to Tertiary Education* (Wagga Wagga: Centre for Rural Social Research, 2007), 10; Deakin University, *Can my wallet afford it? A guide to the cost of studying at university 2007* (Geelong: Deakin University, 2007), 14.

<sup>841</sup> Richard James and others, *Australian University Student Finances 2006: Final report of a national survey of students in public universities* (Canberra: Universities Australia, 2007), 52.

<sup>842</sup> Southern Grampians Youth Network, Written Submission, April 2008, 3.

<sup>843</sup> Based on analysis of rates for 2009 on Victorian university websites, 16 June 2009.

<sup>844</sup> Mr W. Awan, Manager, On-Campus Accommodation, Monash Residential Services, Gippsland, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 61.

implications for students, particularly those from rural areas.<sup>845</sup> As vacancy rates have dropped dramatically in inner Melbourne, competition for housing has led to an increase in rental prices. The Committee heard that vacancy rates are also low in less central areas with a university presence, including around the Clayton campus of Monash University.<sup>846</sup>

High demand also means that simply securing rental accommodation can be time consuming and costly. Students may be required to inspect several properties before finding a suitable home, involving frequent travel to Melbourne for rural and regional students.<sup>847</sup> Once secured, rental accommodation entails high set-up costs, including bond, advance rent, utility connection fees, and the purchase of furniture and household items. There may be additional costs associated with private rental as a student may move several times over a three to four year period.

Furthermore, students living in private rental accommodation must cover the costs of day-to-day living expenses, such as grocery items and utilities, which are typically included in the total cost of accommodation in halls of residence. Table 7.2 demonstrates the substantial differences in food and utilities costs between private accommodation, and living at home or in halls of residence. While the total costs of living in private accommodation are still lower than living on campus, they may nevertheless be prohibitive for many students.

### *Transport*

The Committee heard that the costs of transport, both public and private, are also significant. As may be expected, the effects of transport costs vary according to geographic location. Students living in interface areas who commute to university may face high transport costs, as well as logistical challenges. Similarly, the Committee heard that universities and other education and training institutions in regional areas often have large student catchment areas, with a substantial proportion of students commuting long distances to attend classes.<sup>848</sup> The Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE reported that 15 per cent of students travelled 100km or more to class.<sup>849</sup> Since public transport in and around regional centres can be irregular or unavailable, private transport may be a student's only option. Combined with high petrol costs outside of metropolitan areas, this can make participation prohibitively costly, creating a barrier to participation.<sup>850</sup>

Students who are living away from home also face high travel costs to visit home, especially if they have relocated from a remote area.<sup>851</sup> The Committee heard that even where public transport is available to students, it is costly,<sup>852</sup> especially for interstate students who are not

---

<sup>845</sup> The University of Melbourne, Written Submission, March 2008, 3.

<sup>846</sup> Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

<sup>847</sup> Mr D. Rose, Chairperson, Heywood Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 42; Ms K. Leadbeater, Second Year Student, RMIT University, Written Submission, April 2008, 2.

<sup>848</sup> Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce, Written Submission, March 2008, 8; Monash Residential Services, Written Submission, May 2008, 5; South West Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, April 2008, 3; Gordon Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, April 2008, 8; WORKCO Limited, Written Submission, May 2008, 1; Mr B. Corbett, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Written Submission, April 2008, 1.

<sup>849</sup> Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

<sup>850</sup> Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce, Written Submission, March 2008, 8; Ms T. Wilson-Brown, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 25; Mrs H. Thiele, Principal, Murrayville Community College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 49.

<sup>851</sup> Ms W. Slorach, Teacher and Parent, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Mr N. and Mrs W. O'Brien, Parents, Wodonga, Written Submission, April 2008, 4; Southern Grampians Youth Network, Written Submission, April 2008, 2.

<sup>852</sup> Mr A. Paton, Grants/Business Development Officer, City Growth Directorate, Warrnambool City Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 8; Professor K. Lipson, Dean, Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale Campus, Swinburne University of Technology, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 19; Ms K. Steckyj, Year 12 Student, Copperfield College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 19.

eligible for concession fares within Victoria.<sup>853</sup> A number of participants suggested that the Victorian Government should therefore take measures to reduce the costs of transport for outer metropolitan, regional and relocated students, by reducing or waiving public transport fares, or providing passes or petrol vouchers.<sup>854</sup>

## Opportunity costs

A less obvious expense associated with undertaking higher education is the opportunity cost of forgone income.<sup>855</sup> Several participants pointed out that for many young people, university is not considered in isolation, but compared with other education, training and work opportunities. Often, the uncertain and delayed economic benefits, combined with the high upfront costs of higher education, compare unfavourably with work and apprenticeship opportunities.<sup>856</sup>

Participants presented mixed views regarding young people's choices to start earning immediately rather than undertake further study. Mr Mark Wilson, Chair, Ouyen Inc, suggested that the appeal of immediate income can be strong for some young people:

It seems that, when considering their future, young adults have many choices to consider—'Do I get a traineeship or an apprenticeship? How can I start earning money? Do I go to university and then wait four years or more to start earning money? Look at so-and-so. He started an apprenticeship 18 months ago, and he has now got a cool car. He has his mates, his cool house and a plasma TV', which is very important.<sup>857</sup>

Another participant suggested that the decision to start earning may be a 'reasonable choice supported by economic good sense', especially in areas with strong employment opportunities and effective apprenticeship programs.<sup>858</sup>

The Committee heard that young people from low socioeconomic status backgrounds are more likely to have a preference for direct entry to the workforce.<sup>859</sup> Ms Helen Worladge, Executive Director, Western Chances, told the Committee that when parents are struggling financially, young people often look to 'short-term economic gain', even where this means leaving school early for relatively low-paid employment.<sup>860</sup> In such situations, earning an income can also be an opportunity to help out the family.<sup>861</sup> Some young people told the Committee that there are often many opportunities to find employment or to begin an

---

<sup>853</sup> Ms K. Ottrey, Representative, Australian National University Students' Association, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 2 June 2008, 29; Ms M. Firth, Vice-President, Australian National University Students' Association, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 2 June 2008, 29; Ms S. Sly, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 57; Ms D. Monaghan, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 62.

<sup>854</sup> Victorian Council of Social Service, Written Submission, April 2008, 9–10; Melbourne's North and West Area Consultative Committee and Western Youth Futures, Written Submission, April 2008, 14; Mrs H. Thiele, Principal, Murrayville Community College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 49; Ms D. Monaghan, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 62.

<sup>855</sup> Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 14.

<sup>856</sup> Ms M. Pendergast, Principal, Warrnambool College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 29; Mr M. Goldsworthy, Acting Principal, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 2; Australian Catholic University, Written Submission, March 2008, 2; Mr M. Hill, Principal, Upper Yarra Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 43; Mr K. Lee, Principal, Robinvale Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 39.

<sup>857</sup> Mr M. Wilson, Chair, Ouyen Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 58.

<sup>858</sup> Ms M. Kirsopp, Parent, Written Submission, May 2008, 1–2.

<sup>859</sup> For example, Mr M. Horn, Senior Manager, Research and Policy Centre, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 53; Dr G. Withers, Chief Executive Officer, Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 13.

<sup>860</sup> Ms H. Worladge, Executive Director, Western Chances, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 53.

<sup>861</sup> Mr M. Hill, Principal, Upper Yarra Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 43.

apprenticeship with family or other contacts, making it easier to begin work rather than face the expense of studying.<sup>862</sup>

---

## Sources of income

---

The Committee received a great deal of evidence about the sources of income that university students draw on in order to meet the costs of participating in higher education. These include government income support, scholarships, earnings from paid employment and support from family. The Committee heard that a substantial proportion of students struggle to gather sufficient income to meet the costs of participation. This is not surprising given OECD estimates that Australia ranks 23<sup>rd</sup> among 31 OECD countries in terms of students' ability to finance their education costs, as measured by the ratio of tuition and living costs to available individual funding.<sup>863</sup> Various improvements to financial support mechanisms were suggested throughout the inquiry, particularly in the context of supporting participation in higher education for under-represented groups.

### Government income support

Government income support payments are a major source of income for many higher education students. The Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations develops policy on student income support programs, which are then delivered by Centrelink. The three student income support programs are Youth Allowance, Austudy (for students aged over 25) and ABSTUDY (for Indigenous students). Additional benefits such as Rent Assistance are also available to some recipients.

Of the three student income support programs, Youth Allowance was of most relevance to the majority of inquiry participants. Youth Allowance is payable to various categories of young people aged 16 to 24, including those studying full-time in an approved education or training course. According to the Universities Australia Student Finances Survey, in 2006, 30.4 per cent of full-time Australian undergraduate students were in receipt of Youth Allowance, while an additional 4.8 per cent received Austudy.<sup>864</sup> The total percentage of full-time undergraduates receiving either of these payments had declined from 42.4 per cent in 2000 to 35.2 per cent in 2006, attributable to a drop in the proportion of students receiving Austudy.<sup>865</sup>

#### *Eligibility for Youth Allowance*

At the time of the Committee's inquiry, young people aged under 25 participating in full-time study or training were eligible for Youth Allowance payments if they were classified as 'independent' from their parents. Students could demonstrate independence in several ways. Of most relevance to the inquiry, a young person was considered independent where they had been out of school for at least 18 months and, since leaving school, had earned at least 75 per cent of the maximum Wage Level A of the Australian Pay and Classification Scale (equivalent to \$19,532 in 2009). A young person was also classified as independent if they had worked at least 30 hours per week for at least 18 months of the previous two

---

<sup>862</sup> Mr M. Bertolacci, Senior Leader, Kealba College, Written Submission, 2; Ms S. Holcombe, Year 12 Student, Kurnai College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 47.

<sup>863</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 57.

<sup>864</sup> Richard James and others, *Australian University Student Finances 2006: Final report of a national survey of students in public universities* (Canberra: Universities Australia, 2007), 12.

<sup>865</sup> *ibid.*

years, or at least 15 hours per week for at least two years since leaving school. Young people who could not live at home due to extreme family breakdown or threats to their health or wellbeing were also considered independent.<sup>866</sup>

For young people not classified as 'independent', Youth Allowance is subject to an annual Parental Means Test, consisting of a Family Assets Test and a Parental Income Test.<sup>867</sup> In order to qualify for Youth Allowance as a dependent in 2009, family assets (excluding the family home and 75 per cent of the value of a farm or business) could not exceed \$547,000. A young person could receive the full rate of Youth Allowance where parents' combined taxable income did not exceed \$32,800 per annum. This threshold was increased somewhat for families with additional dependent children. Above the threshold, payments were reduced by \$1 for every \$4 of parental income over the threshold, ceasing altogether where parental income reached approximately \$68,460.<sup>868</sup>

The Committee found that there is much angst in the community about the eligibility criteria for Youth Allowance. Many participants from across stakeholder groups considered that the age of independence is too high and should be lowered. This view was supported by the Review of Australian Higher Education, which reported that at 25, the age of independence is very high by international standards.<sup>869</sup> However, the review recognised that the cost of lowering the age of independence to 18 would be prohibitive (refer Table 7.3) and recommended that the age be lowered from 25 years to 22 years.<sup>870</sup>

Table 7.3: Estimated cost of reducing the age of independence

New age of independence	New Youth Allowance recipients (No.)	Cost per year (\$m)
24 years	3,000	16.3
23 years	8,000	37.5
22 years	19,000	87.5
21 years	54,000	262.5
18 years	404,000	1,850.0

Source: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 62.

Several submissions and witnesses raised concerns that Youth Allowance was too easily available to students from relatively wealthy families where students had qualified through the workforce participation criteria for independence. However, many more argued that Youth Allowance was not available to those most in need. In particular, the Committee heard significant concerns about the ability of those in rural, regional and interface areas to access sufficient income support, especially if they are required to relocate in order to undertake their studies. The Committee also heard the view that eligibility for Youth

<sup>866</sup> Centrelink, 'Independence test for Youth Allowance,' Centrelink, [http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/ya\\_independent.htm](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/ya_independent.htm) (accessed 8 July 2009).

<sup>867</sup> In addition to the means tests that are applied to all Youth Allowance recipients not classified as independent, a Family Actual Means Test is also applied to selected families. This test measures what is spent and saved over a period of time.

<sup>868</sup> Centrelink, 'Income and assets tests for Youth Allowance,' Centrelink, [http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/ya\\_iat.htm#assets](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/ya_iat.htm#assets) (accessed 16 July 2009); Centrelink, 'Parental income test,' Centrelink, [http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/parent\\_income\\_iat.htm](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/parent_income_iat.htm) (accessed 16 July 2009).

<sup>869</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 62.

<sup>870</sup> *ibid.*



Allowance is inequitable for farmers and business owners because their assets (including land) provide an income and cannot be liquidated.<sup>871</sup>

Participants in the inquiry made a range of recommendations relating to eligibility for the Youth Allowance. Some participants argued that the Parental Income Test and/or Family Assets Test thresholds should be raised.<sup>872</sup> Many more suggested that young people who must relocate for study should be automatically eligible to receive Youth Allowance.<sup>873</sup> Less ambitiously, some participants argued that young people qualifying as independent by earning \$19,532 should become eligible for income support after 12 months, rather than 18 months, after finishing school.<sup>874</sup> At the time of the inquiry, students who chose this route to independence were not eligible for Youth Allowance until late in their first semester of study. This was seen as particularly problematic for students who are relocating and facing establishment costs.<sup>875</sup>

The recent Review of Australian Higher Education considered similar evidence about eligibility for Youth Allowance. It found that 49 per cent of students receiving Youth Allowance lived at home in households with incomes above \$80,000 and 36 per cent above \$100,000.<sup>876</sup> The review therefore argued for reform to the current system of student income support, which it described as 'ineffective and not sufficiently targeted'.<sup>877</sup> In addition to lowering the age of independence to 22, the review suggested further changes to student income support, including increasing the Parental Income Test to align with the Family Tax Benefit A income test. More controversially, it recommended removal of two of the workforce participation criteria for independence, leaving the option of working for at least 30 hours per week for a minimum of 18 months during a two-year period.<sup>878</sup>

In May 2009, the Australian Government announced a package of changes to student income support in response to the Review of Australian Higher Education. Subject to the passage of legislation, from 2010, there will be an increase to the parental income test threshold for access to the maximum rate of Youth Allowance or ABSTUDY (currently \$32,800) to align with the Family Tax Benefit A income test (currently \$42,559). Indexation and taper rate arrangements will also be aligned with those applying under the Family Tax Benefit. These changes will enable additional students to access Youth Allowance without the need to demonstrate independent status. The Australian Government has indicated that

---

<sup>871</sup> University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 5; Bendigo Senior Secondary College, Written Submission, March 2008, 5; Mr M. Goldsworthy, Acting Principal, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 3; East Gippsland Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, March 2008, 1.

<sup>872</sup> Mr T. Barton, Careers Coordinator, Orbost Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 41; East Gippsland Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, March 2008, 1; Mr I. Lewis, TAFE Student, RMIT University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 38.

<sup>873</sup> For example, National Rural Health Alliance, Written Submission, February 2008, 7; Warrnambool City Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 8; Australian Catholic University, Written Submission, March 2008, 3; Ms H. Rawlings, Bairnsdale, Written Submission, March 2008, 2; Central Goldfields Shire Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 3; Mr B. Baker, Convener and Member, South West Regional Youth Affairs Network, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 11; Ms A. Walpole, Grandparent, Whorouly South, Written Submission, March 2008, 2; Bendigo Senior Secondary College, Written Submission, March 2008, 5.

<sup>874</sup> For example, Warrnambool City Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 8; Mr G. Fryatt, Chairman, Education Committee, Victorian Farmers Federation, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 33; Mr B. Baker, Convener and Member, South West Regional Youth Affairs Network, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 10.

<sup>875</sup> Mr G. Fryatt, Chairman, Education Committee, Victorian Farmers Federation, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 33; Mr B. Baker, Convener and Member, South West Regional Youth Affairs Network, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 10; Ms H. Barry, School Captain and Year 12 Student, Bairnsdale Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 48.

<sup>876</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 53.

<sup>877</sup> *ibid.*, 66.

<sup>878</sup> *ibid.*, 61–62.

this change is likely to benefit around 102,000 students.<sup>879</sup> Additionally, the age of independence will be lowered to 22 years, with the reduction phased in over the period 2010 to 2012.

The Committee welcomes the above announcements as basic measures to improve the level of financial support available to many higher education students. However, the Committee does not believe that these changes will significantly improve access to higher education for those who must live away from home to study.

Furthermore, the Committee views with concern the Australian Government's announcement that from 2010 it is tightening the workforce participation criteria so that only those young people who have worked for a minimum of 30 hours per week for 18 months will be eligible for Youth Allowance under the criteria for independence. While acknowledging that some students from relatively wealthy families have been accessing Youth Allowance via the existing workforce participation routes, the Committee believes that the removal of the main workforce participation route will have a disastrous effect on young people in rural and regional areas.

The Committee believes that due to the nature of employment markets in regional Victoria, many young people will find it extremely difficult to qualify for Youth Allowance under the remaining workforce participation criteria. The Committee is also concerned that even if students can obtain suitable employment, the new arrangements provide additional disincentives to participation in higher education. These include the potential loss of scholarships if deferring studies, and the potential loss of study motivation due to the extended disruption to study plans. These issues are discussed later in this chapter.

The Committee also notes that the removal of the main workforce participation route to independence will have a detrimental impact on many students who deferred their studies during 2009 in order to work and earn sufficient money to be eligible for Youth Allowance. While some of these students may qualify for Youth Allowance under the revised parental income thresholds, the Australian Government has estimated that around 30,700 prospective claimants will no longer qualify for Youth Allowance in 2010, and that 3,600 existing recipients will not qualify for a higher payment as independent recipients.<sup>880</sup>

The Committee notes that the Australian Government states that 'the reforms are roughly cost neutral over the forward estimates'.<sup>881</sup> Therefore it would appear that the Australian Government is not, through these changes, adding any additional funding for student income support. The Committee acknowledges that means testing of income support is an appropriate mechanism for ensuring that limited government resources are allocated to those who most require assistance. At the same time, the Committee holds a strong view that a fair system of student income support must give consideration to the substantially different circumstances of those who have little or no option but to relocate in order to participate in higher education.

---

<sup>879</sup> Australian Government, 'Student Income Support—Age of Independence,' *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheet 16 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 1.

<sup>880</sup> Australian Government, 'Student Income Support—Workforce Participation Criterion,' *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheet 22 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 1.

<sup>881</sup> Australian Government, 'Changes to Student Income Support in Response to the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education,' *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheet 14 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 1.

The Committee believes that the inequities are greatest between metropolitan and non-metropolitan young people, with rural students who move away from home often paying double the costs of metropolitan students over the duration of their course.<sup>882</sup> However, the Committee also notes that some young people in metropolitan and interface areas face a similar requirement to relocate to participate in higher education, particularly if they wish to complete a specialist degree only offered at certain campuses, or if their preferred offer is for study at a rural or regional campus. The Committee therefore recommends that the Victorian Government advocate to the Australian Government that all young people who are required to relocate for their studies be eligible to receive Youth Allowance. The Committee acknowledges that this policy may see some relatively wealthy students eligible to receive income support, however, believes that the overall benefits of the policy far outweigh any potential disadvantages.

### *Adequacy of Youth Allowance payments*

For students in receipt of Youth Allowance, the adequacy of payments was an issue raised throughout the inquiry. Table 7.4 summarises the maximum fortnightly payment amounts, Rent Assistance and additional benefits for a single young person aged over 18 receiving Youth Allowance in 2008. Payment rates under Austudy and ABSTUDY are similar. Note that while these figures describe maximum payment rates, fortnightly payment amounts vary according to several criteria, including personal income, the number of dependants, and whether the eligible young person lives with their parents or away from the family home.

Table 7.4: Maximum fortnightly Youth Allowance payments for single recipients with no dependants, by living situation (2009)

Living situation	Basic rate	Rent Assistance	Additional benefits
At home	Up to \$244.40	Not eligible	Low Income Health Care Card
Away from home	Up to \$371.40	Up to \$111.20	Fares Allowance for two return trips to the family home per year

Source: Centrelink, *Youth Payment Rates 20 March–30 June 2009* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2009).

One way of assessing the adequacy of student income support payments is against the Henderson Poverty Line, a relative measure of poverty based on an index of per capita household income. For the March 2009 quarter, the maximum weekly payment (including Rent Assistance) for a single student living away from home was \$241.30, a substantial \$150.55 (38%) below the relevant Henderson Poverty Line of \$391.85.<sup>883</sup> While this measure is not universally accepted, it is commonly referred to in discussions of Youth Allowance and other income support payments,<sup>884</sup> including by some participants in this inquiry.<sup>885</sup> In comparison to the Youth Allowance, the Newstart Allowance pays a single

<sup>882</sup> Mr P. Dryden, Written Submission, May 2008, 4.

<sup>883</sup> Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, *Poverty Lines: Australia: March Quarter 2009* (Melbourne: MIAESR, 2009), 3.

<sup>884</sup> For example, the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee, *Student Income Support* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2005), 29–30; Naomi Godden, *Regional Young People and Youth Allowance: Access to Tertiary Education* (Wagga Wagga: Centre for Rural Social Research, 2007), 20.

<sup>885</sup> For example, Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, May 2008, 7; Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), Written Submission, May 2008, 14; National Rural Health Alliance, Written Submission, February 2008, 3; University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 5; Ms M. Firth, Vice-President, Australian National University Students' Association, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 28.

person without dependants up to \$453.30 per fortnight,<sup>886</sup> while the single Age Pension pays \$569.80 per fortnight.<sup>887</sup>

Another method of evaluating the adequacy of Youth Allowance payments is to compare it to students' actual living costs. There was widespread agreement among participants that Youth Allowance payments have not kept pace with rising expenses, and are too low to meet the costs of living, particularly in capital cities. Some participants commented that Youth Allowance covers accommodation costs, but leaves little or no money for other living and study expenses.<sup>888</sup>

The Committee heard that inadequate income can be detrimental to a student's wellbeing and academic success, with some participants noting that the potential consequences of a low income include missing meals, delaying or avoiding health care and possible student homelessness.<sup>889</sup> Many stakeholders commented that these difficulties may be exacerbated for students from non-metropolitan areas.

The Committee notes that the real value of government income support has been decreasing over recent years. The Review of Australian Higher Education found that the average Youth Allowance benefit paid to full-time undergraduate students has declined by more than five per cent in real terms over the last five years. Expressed in 2000 dollar values, the average Youth Allowance benefit in 2006 bought just below 73 per cent of what the corresponding benefit purchased in 2000.<sup>890</sup> Interestingly, the review also reported that the decrease in purchasing power was not as marked for other income support benefits.<sup>891</sup>

The Review of Australian Higher Education also noted that there has been an adverse effect on the purchasing power of income support, attributable in large part to rent increases, perhaps by as much as 10 per cent over the period 1998 to 2008.<sup>892</sup> The review cited research which suggests that the impact of rental increases on purchasing power has been greatest in geographical areas that have seen relatively rapid rent increases.

Inquiry participants made a range of recommendations for reform to student income support. There was consensus among many inquiry participants that Youth Allowance payments should be increased to meet the costs of living, or at least to match the level of the Henderson Poverty Line, particularly for students who must live away from home. The Review of Australian Higher Education similarly noted the need to at least restore the real value of income support payments to their 2001 levels. However, given that two other reviews were considering social security benefits, the Review of Australian Higher Education did not make specific recommendations regarding a suitable level for future income support payments.<sup>893</sup>

---

<sup>886</sup> Centrelink, 'Newstart Allowance: Payment rates,' Centrelink, [http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/newstart\\_rates.htm](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/newstart_rates.htm) (accessed 23 June 2009).

<sup>887</sup> Centrelink, 'Payment rates for Age Pension,' Centrelink, [http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/age\\_rates.htm](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/age_rates.htm) (accessed 23 June 2009).

<sup>888</sup> Mr J. Ireland, Coordinator, School Focused Youth Service, Gippsland Lakes Community Health, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 18; Mr S. Robertson, Former Student, Warrnambool College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 30; Ms J. McGinness-Whyte, Parent, Portarlington, Written Submission, May 2008, 1.

<sup>889</sup> Ms S. Cole, State President, Victorian Branch, National Union of Students, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 18; Ms H. Webster, Parent, Barnawartha, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Mr S. Reid, Principal, Mooroolbark College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 43; South West LLEN, Written Submission, April 2008, 6.

<sup>890</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 54–55.

<sup>891</sup> *ibid.*, 55.

<sup>892</sup> *ibid.*, 56.

<sup>893</sup> *ibid.*, 60.

The Committee agrees that an adequate student income support system is fundamental to ensuring that interested and capable individuals have the opportunity to benefit from higher education. It therefore believes that increasing the level of support should be a priority consideration in any further reform of Australian student income support arrangements.

### *Commonwealth Scholarships*

The Australian Government has announced that subject to the passage of legislation, all university students receiving income support will be entitled to an annual Student Start-up Scholarship of \$2,254 from January 2010 (indexed thereafter). The Student Start-up Scholarship is aimed at helping university students to meet upfront study costs such as textbooks and study materials. Significantly, the scholarship will be paid at the full value to student income support recipients, regardless of whether they receive full or part income support payments.<sup>894</sup> The Student Start-up Scholarship will replace the current Commonwealth Education Costs Scholarships (valued at \$2,207 in 2009). According to the Australian Government, the scholarship will benefit an estimated 146,600 students in 2010 and 172,600 students by 2013.<sup>895</sup>

Additionally, university students receiving Youth Allowance or ABSTUDY who have to live away from the family home for study may be eligible to receive a Relocation Scholarship. The Relocation Scholarship will provide \$4,000 for students in their first year at university and \$1,000 (indexed) in each year thereafter. The Australian Government estimates that 14,200 students will benefit from this measure in 2010, increasing to 28,700 students by 2013.<sup>896</sup>

The Committee welcomes the expansion of Commonwealth Scholarships to cover a greater number of students. It is concerned, however, that the amount available under the Relocation Scholarship is substantially less than the amount available under the existing Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarship. The Committee believes that the amount of \$4,324 available annually under the existing scheme is a far more realistic response to the additional costs faced by students who are required to relocate in order to participate in higher education. The Committee therefore urges the Victorian Government to advocate to the Australian Government for an increased amount to be paid under the Relocation Scholarship.

### **Paid employment**

Paid employment is an increasingly important source of income for Australian higher education students. Dr Glen Withers, Chief Executive Officer, Universities Australia, told the Committee that Australian students have the highest workforce participation rates of any comparable country.<sup>897</sup> The organisation's Student Finances survey found that in 2006, 85.1 per cent of full-time undergraduate students were undertaking paid work at some point during the year, an increase from 78.1 per cent in 2000.<sup>898</sup> While these students worked an average of 14.8 hours per week, one in six was working more than 20 hours per week

---

<sup>894</sup> Australian Government, 'Student Income Support—The Student Start-up Scholarship,' *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheet 17 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 1.

<sup>895</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>896</sup> Australian Government, 'Student Income Support—Relocation Scholarship,' *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheet 18 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 1.

<sup>897</sup> Dr G. Withers, Chief Executive Officer, Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2009, 13.

<sup>898</sup> Richard James and others, *Australian University Student Finances 2006: Final report of a national survey of students in public universities* (Canberra: Universities Australia, 2007), 38.

during semester.<sup>899</sup> The majority of employed undergraduate students are in casual employment, but evidence to the inquiry also suggested high levels of seasonal employment. While most undergraduate students have only one employer, a significant minority work in more than one job.<sup>900</sup>

### *Finding and maintaining employment*

The Committee heard that paid work is regarded as essential for most students who are living away from home. However, it can be difficult to obtain and maintain.<sup>901</sup> For students attending a regional university, there are often fewer casual and part-time work opportunities, while limited public transport can also make work less accessible.

Regional students relocating to Melbourne face another set of challenges finding paid employment. The Committee notes that they are less likely, initially at least, to have local contacts who can assist with finding casual work. Several participants described the initial struggles of regional students to find employment in the city. One student commented on the differences between the rural and metropolitan work environment:

Looking for work has also appeared to be quite difficult ... In comparison to the country, too, the workforce here seems to be a lot more competitive. I have applied for maybe around fifteen jobs, and only heard back from four, to be told that they didn't have a place for me.<sup>902</sup>

In research in north-west Victoria, La Trobe University found that non-metropolitan students are often concerned that their rural work skills would not be transferable to the metropolitan setting, and that their inability to apply for jobs before the commencement of the academic year would disadvantage them.<sup>903</sup> Further, students from very small communities with few part-time positions available may have difficulty obtaining work due to lack of experience.<sup>904</sup>

Once students find a job, maintaining employment can be difficult. For example, students may be required to negotiate hours of work that will not impact on Youth Allowance payments, or course requirements. This may be especially difficult for regional students who already require time off to visit home, or who must vacate university on-campus accommodation outside of semester. Students who commute long distances to university may also struggle to meet employers' requirements for hours of work.

### *Earnings and the interaction with income support*

Many working students also receive government income support. For these students, income support payments are subject to an ongoing Personal Income Test. Under the Personal Income Test, gross fortnightly earnings of up to \$236 constitute an 'income-free area' and do not affect income support payments. Several participants noted that this 'cap' on earnings has not been indexed since 1993, despite significant increases in the cost of living over the past 15 years.<sup>905</sup> Earnings above \$236 per fortnight cause income support payments to be reduced by between 50 and 60 cents in the dollar, stopping altogether

---

<sup>899</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>900</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>901</sup> Professor E. Smith, Dean of Graduate Studies and Professor of Education, University of Ballarat, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Mr B. Baker, Convener and Member, South West Regional Youth Affairs Network, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 12.

<sup>902</sup> Quoted in South West Regional Youth Affairs Network, Written Submission, April 2008, 3–4.

<sup>903</sup> Equity and Access Unit, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 7.

<sup>904</sup> Ms P. Nunan, Principal, Werrimull P–12 School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 49.

<sup>905</sup> For example, South Grampians Youth Network, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Ms J. Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Support Services, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 6; Ms D. Howcroft, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2009, 63; South West LLEN, Written Submission, April 2008, 7.

where fortnightly earnings reach \$573.50.<sup>906</sup> For each fortnight in which earnings are below the threshold, the remaining 'income free area' is accumulated in a Student Income Bank, up to a limit of \$6,000. The accumulated amount in the Student Income Bank can be used at a later time to offset any earnings which exceed the fortnightly threshold. This means that students are able to work in short, intensive blocks without affecting payments provided they have previously accumulated a sufficient amount in the Student Income Bank.<sup>907</sup>

A number of participants argued that the Personal Income Test earning threshold is too low, thereby 'punishing' students for working, and making it difficult to avoid poverty.<sup>908</sup> Ms Sarah Cole, State President, Victorian Branch, National Union of Students, told the Committee that many students accept that the Youth Allowance will not meet all their expenses, but feel that their situations would be improved were they permitted to earn more supplementary income.<sup>909</sup> Some inquiry participants also argued that students from rural areas who frequently work in short, intensive blocks are disadvantaged by the Personal Income Test, often losing the Low Income Health Care Card after vacation work.<sup>910</sup>

In May 2009, the Australian Government announced that subject to the passage of legislation, the Personal Income Test threshold will increase from 2011, so that students receiving Youth Allowance, Austudy or ABSTUDY payments will be able to earn up to \$400 per fortnight from part-time employment before their payments are reduced. The personal income threshold will also be indexed according to the Consumer Price Index (CPI).<sup>911</sup> The Australian Government estimates that this measure will benefit around 61,500 students receiving income support who have personal earnings from part-time work in excess of \$236 per fortnight.<sup>912</sup>

### *The impact of employment on study*

Many inquiry participants suggested that part-time work has the potential to negatively affect academic achievement. Research suggests that excessive hours of work are detrimental to students' progress at university. Long working hours reduce the time available for study and may even cause some students to miss classes, ultimately impacting on academic performance.<sup>913</sup> The Universities Australia Student Finances survey found that from the perspective of students, work could be detrimental to study. Approximately 40 per cent of full-time undergraduates in paid employment reported that their work was adversely

<sup>906</sup> Centrelink, 'Personal income test,' Centrelink, <http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/chartda.htm> (accessed 25 November 2008).

<sup>907</sup> Centrelink, 'Income and assets tests for Youth Allowance,' Centrelink, [http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/ya\\_iat.htm#assets](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/ya_iat.htm#assets) (accessed 16 July 2009).

<sup>908</sup> For example, Ms K. Leadbeater, Second Year Student, RMIT University, Written Submission, April 2008, 4; South West LLEN, Written Submission, April 2008, 7; Dr J. Russell, Director, Mildura Regional Clinical School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 44.

<sup>909</sup> Ms S. Cole, State President, Victorian Branch, National Union of Students, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 19–20.

<sup>910</sup> For example, Ms S. Sly, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 56; University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 5.

<sup>911</sup> Australian Government, 'Student Income Support—Personal Income Test Threshold,' *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheet 19 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 1.

<sup>912</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>913</sup> For example, Monash Residential Services, Written Submission, May 2008, 6; Ms K. Boorn, Second Year Student, Bachelor of Nutrition and Dietetics, Monash University, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), Written Submission, May 2008, 14; University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 5; Ms S. Cole, State President, Victorian Branch, National Union of Students, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 18; Mr G. and Mrs L. Code, Parents, Aberfeldy, Written Submission, May 2008, 2; Mr N. and Mrs W. O'Brien, Parents, Wodonga, Written Submission, April 2008, 3; Ms J. Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Support Services, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 6; Ms M. Pearson, University Student, Hallam, Written Submission, March 2008, 1.

affecting their performance at university, while 22.7 per cent said that they regularly missed classes or study commitments due to work.<sup>914</sup>

The Committee heard that where work hours are excessive, combined academic, social and emotional effects increase the risk that a student will discontinue university without completing their studies.<sup>915</sup> A 2003 study based on Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) data found that moderate amounts of work did not increase the likelihood of dropping out, but that university students undertaking more than 20 hours of paid employment per week were up to twice as likely to drop out as those not working.<sup>916</sup> An additional study also found that while working up to ten hours per week did not increase the likelihood of dropping out, increased hours of paid work over this threshold were associated with higher attrition.<sup>917</sup> Another large survey of first year Australian students found that long work hours were associated with higher attrition, and that more than one-third of discontinuing students cited difficulties balancing work and study as a major or moderate influence on the decision to drop out.<sup>918</sup>

In addition to the possible impact of part-time work on academic achievement, participants highlighted its potentially negative consequences for health and wellbeing. For students who have relocated, excessive work might reduce the time and energy available for forming new friendships and maintaining connections with family, friends and sporting clubs at home.<sup>919</sup> Universities, students and student associations described decreasing levels of engagement and participation in broader 'university life', and attributed this in part to student work commitments.<sup>920</sup> The Committee heard that disengagement from university life contributes to social isolation and diminishes the support networks available to a student encountering academic or other difficulties.<sup>921</sup>

On the other hand, the Committee heard evidence that there are positive outcomes to part-time work undertaken by students, besides the obvious financial benefits. Professor Erica Smith, Dean of Graduate Studies, University of Ballarat, pointed to findings from her own research showing that students gain enjoyment and new knowledge from working. Conversely, students who do not work tend to experience lower self-esteem and a greater

---

<sup>914</sup> Richard James and others, *Australian University Student Finances 2006: Final report of a national survey of students in public universities* (Canberra: Universities Australia, 2007), 41.

<sup>915</sup> For example, Ms B. Flatt, Vice-President, Waurn Ponds Campus, Deakin University Student Association, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 66; Ms C. Edwards, President, Deakin University Student Association, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 67; Ms T. Burgoyne, Principal, Portland Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 18; Ms H. Rawlings, Bairnsdale, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

<sup>916</sup> Margaret Vickers, Stephen Lamb and John Hinkley, *Student workers in high school and beyond: The effects of part-time employment on participation in education, training and work*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 30 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2003), 28.

<sup>917</sup> Julie McMillan, *Course Change and Attrition from Higher Education*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 39 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2005), 30–31.

<sup>918</sup> Michael Long, Fran Ferrier and Margaret Heagney, *Stay, play or give it away? Students continuing, changing or leaving university study in first year* (Melbourne: Centre for the Economics of Education and Training, 2006), 36, 47.

<sup>919</sup> Ms D. Vandenberg, Teacher and Welfare Coordinator, Robinvale Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 38; Ms D. Howcroft, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 62; Ms L. Bartlett, Regional Youth Affairs Consultant, Barwon Adolescent Task Force, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 39; Mr N. and Mrs W. O'Brien, Parents, Wodonga, Written Submission, April 2008, 3–4; University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 5; Rural City of Wangaratta, Written Submission, May 2008, 3.

<sup>920</sup> For example, Ms C. Edwards, President, Deakin University Student Association, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 66; Bendigo Student Association, Bendigo Campus, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 2; The University of Melbourne, Written Submission, March 2008, 7.

<sup>921</sup> Rural City of Wangaratta, Written Submission, May 2008, 3; Mr N. and Mrs W. O'Brien, Parents, Wodonga, Written Submission, April 2008, 3–4; Ms B. Flatt, Vice-President, Waurn Ponds Campus, Deakin University Student Association, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 66.



risk of unemployment after graduation, as well as financial difficulty.<sup>922</sup> The Committee notes that not all students are able to work while studying, but agrees that paid employment is likely to offer beneficial contacts and experiences, as well as financial rewards.

Professor Smith went on to argue that the higher education sector has the capacity to improve the working lives of students through greater collaboration with employers, provided it 'ceases to regard student-working as a problem and accepts it as a long-term reality with many positive aspects'.<sup>923</sup> In fact, the Committee was pleased to learn that some universities are taking steps to help students access the benefits of work while reducing its impact on their studies. One example is the co-op program at Monash University's Gippsland campus. This program gives students the opportunity to earn \$17,000 participating in industry placements over three years. The program offers pre-placement training and as placements are in an area relevant to the student's studies, they are often an avenue for permanent employment after graduation.<sup>924</sup> The Committee agrees that such initiatives on the part of universities and other organisations have the potential to reduce the pressure on students to work excessive hours during semester, while offering them paid work and industry experience.

Some participants suggested that the Victorian Government could play a role in coordinating and supporting the wider implementation of an industry placement program for higher education students.<sup>925</sup> The Committee supports this view, and encourages the Victorian Government to develop a program that represents best practice in this area.

## Scholarships

For some students, scholarships are another important form of financial support. The Committee heard that students who have been awarded scholarships are able to work fewer hours in paid employment, and experience reduced financial and emotional stress.<sup>926</sup> Students have the opportunity to devote more time and attention to their studies and are better able to afford course and study materials.<sup>927</sup> Ms Catherine Timpano, a pharmacy student at La Trobe University in Bendigo and recipient of a Chances for Children scholarship, told the Committee that without a scholarship she would have been required to work 'from day one', making her dream of higher education 'quite a struggle'.<sup>928</sup>

The Committee found that scholarships can be useful in promoting access, retention and success in higher education for under-represented groups. The director of the Institute for Koorie Education at Deakin University told the Committee that substantial scholarships and fee reductions help the Institute to attract Indigenous students.<sup>929</sup> Similarly, the Committee heard that at regional universities, scholarships play an important part in attracting students to particular courses and encouraging them to study full-time rather than deferring or

---

<sup>922</sup> Professor E. Smith, Dean of Graduate Studies and Professor of Education, University of Ballarat, Written Submission, April 2008, 1–2.

<sup>923</sup> *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>924</sup> Associate Professor H. Ballis, Acting Pro Vice-Chancellor, Gippsland Campus, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 28.

<sup>925</sup> Monash University Gippsland Student Union, Written Submission, March 2008, 9; Warrnambool City Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 8.

<sup>926</sup> North Central LLEN, Written Submission, May 2008, 6; Ms J. Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Support Services, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 4.

<sup>927</sup> Mornington Peninsula Shire, Written Submission, May 2008, 5; Ms J. Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Support Services, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 4.

<sup>928</sup> Ms C. Timpano, Student, Bendigo Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 27, 29.

<sup>929</sup> Professor W. Brabham, Director, Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 58.

reducing their study load.<sup>930</sup> The Committee also heard that receipt of a scholarship can be a decisive factor in a student's decision to accept a university place.<sup>931</sup>

As well as improving access to higher education, scholarships can improve students' chances of succeeding in their studies. Representatives of organisations delivering scholarship programs remarked that scholarship recipients experience higher success rates than students without scholarships,<sup>932</sup> while another participant described research findings showing lower drop-out rates for scholarship recipients at particular universities.<sup>933</sup> A 2006 study of first year attrition in Australian universities also found that scholarship holders had lower rates of drop-out, but acknowledged that it was unknown whether this was due to the financial impact of scholarships or the academic characteristics of scholarship holders.<sup>934</sup> At the same time, the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation advised the Committee that its research has found that students who receive non-repayable grants in addition to student loans are substantially more likely to complete their studies than students with similar characteristics who were reliant on loans only.<sup>935</sup>

### *Availability of scholarships*

A major source of scholarships for Victorian students is the Commonwealth Scholarships Program. Introduced in 2004, Commonwealth Scholarships assist low socioeconomic status background students, particularly Indigenous students and those from rural areas, with the costs of higher education. In 2007–08, approximately 7,200 Commonwealth Scholarships were available to commencing students in Victoria, in the three categories:

1. Commonwealth Education Costs Scholarships provided \$2,162 per year to assist with general education costs.
2. Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarships assisted students relocating from regional areas with \$4,324 annually towards accommodation costs.
3. Indigenous Access Scholarships provided \$4,080 for one year to Indigenous students undertaking enabling courses.

Commonwealth Scholarships were allocated to individual institutions, which administered the program and application process. As outlined earlier in this chapter, in May 2009, the Australian Government announced major changes to the Commonwealth Scholarship Program. As well as changes to the number and value of scholarships, administration of Commonwealth Scholarships will be transferred to Centrelink from 2010.<sup>936</sup>

In addition to Commonwealth Scholarships, universities offer their own institutional scholarships, including equity scholarships. Each university has different eligibility requirements for equity scholarships, but generally include the following applicant

---

<sup>930</sup> Associate Professor H. Ballis, Acting Pro Vice-Chancellor, Gippsland Campus, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 27.

<sup>931</sup> Orbost Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 2.

<sup>932</sup> Ms F. Harley, Manager, Chances for Children, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 28; Ms H. Worlidge, Executive Director, Western Chances, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 54.

<sup>933</sup> Mr D. Conley, Youth Services Coordinator, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 11 July 2008, 4; Mornington Peninsula Shire, Written Submission, May 2008, 5; Queensland University of Technology, *QUT Equity Scholarship Impact Survey and Attrition Report 2007* (Brisbane: QUT, 2007), 1.

<sup>934</sup> Michael Long, Fran Ferrier and Margaret Heagney, *Stay, Play or give it away? Students continuing, changing or leaving university study in first year* (Melbourne: Centre for the Economics of Education and Training, 2006), 39.

<sup>935</sup> Meeting with representatives of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Montreal, 2 September 2008.

<sup>936</sup> Australian Government, 'Student Income Support—The Student Start-up Scholarship,' *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheet 17 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 1.

categories: low socioeconomic status; rural or isolated; Indigenous Australian; and non-English speaking background. While some universities have a consolidated equity scholarship scheme, others offer a wide variety of scholarships. The value of institutional equity scholarships varies markedly, from around \$1,000 through to \$8,000 per year. While most universities offer discretionary funds, Deakin University and RMIT University also offer equity scholarships that pay the student contribution amounts.

Further scholarships are available from philanthropic and community organisations, and from some local governments, businesses, industry bodies, political parties and other individuals and groups. The Committee also notes that some Victorian Government departments, including the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, currently offer a variety of scholarships to higher education students. These scholarships are offered in areas of particular skill needs, and are largely at the postgraduate level, although some are targeted at Indigenous students or students from regional areas.<sup>937</sup>

Throughout the inquiry, various organisations argued that changes to Australian Government legislation were likely to increase both the supply and effectiveness of equity scholarships outside of the Commonwealth Scholarships Program.<sup>938</sup> Under the *Social Security Act 1991*, scholarships that provide discretionary funds, excepting Commonwealth Scholarships, are currently considered as income for social security purposes.<sup>939</sup> Hence, scholarships from sources other than the Commonwealth Scholarships Program are assessed as income and can therefore diminish income support payments. The Committee heard that this may reduce the value of scholarships for recipients, and create a disincentive for universities, philanthropic bodies and others to offer them.<sup>940</sup> Mr Tim Payne, Deputy Executive Director, Group of Eight, told the Committee that the organisation has recently discontinued a scholarship scheme that targeted high-achieving students from low socioeconomic backgrounds for this reason.<sup>941</sup>

The Committee was therefore pleased to note the Australian Government's recent announcement that from January 2010, equity and merit-based scholarships awarded by universities and other organisations will be exempted from being treated as assessable income for means testing under the *Social Security Act*, up to the equivalent combined value of Commonwealth Scholarships. The Australian Government estimates that this measure will benefit around 3,500 students who currently lose some portion of their income support payment as a result of receiving an equity or merit-based scholarship.<sup>942</sup> The Committee notes this policy change may encourage universities and other organisations to increase the number of scholarships offered, meaning that the number of eventual beneficiaries may be greater.

<sup>937</sup> Based on analysis of Victorian Government websites and annual reports, 15 June 2009.

<sup>938</sup> Mr M. Gallagher, Executive Director, Group of Eight, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 2; Dr G. Withers, Chief Executive Officer, Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 15; Dr K. Ferguson, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Equity and Student Services, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 22; Ms J. Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Support Services, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 3, 5.

<sup>939</sup> *Social Security Act 1991* (Cwlth), s. 8(8).

<sup>940</sup> Mr M. Gallagher, Executive Director, Group of Eight, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 2; Ms J. Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Support Services, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 3, 5; Cr V. Knight, Deputy Mayor, Mildura Rural City Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 30.

<sup>941</sup> Mr T. Payne, Deputy Executive Director, Group of Eight, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 4.

<sup>942</sup> Australian Government, 'Student Income Support—Exempt Equity and Merit-Based Scholarships,' *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheet 21 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 1.

### *Value of scholarships*

One limitation of scholarships as a strategy for raising participation is that they may be of too little value relative to the costs of university study to constitute an incentive. In particular, some participants noted that while equity scholarships are helpful, most represent only a small proportion of the total costs of studying away from home.<sup>943</sup> Therefore, they may not be sufficient to 'tip the balance in favour of going at that point in time'.<sup>944</sup> Furthermore, since many scholarships cannot be deferred, recipients who need to defer their studies may have little choice but to forfeit their scholarships.

A number of participants argued that in order to be effective, scholarships aimed at students from regional and remote areas should make a substantial contribution to accommodation and other living costs.<sup>945</sup> Professor Sally Walker, Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, stated that 'it is the scholarships for \$7,000 a year that make the difference in whether a student can go to university or not'. Deakin University has therefore elected to offer fewer but more generous scholarships through its equity program.<sup>946</sup>

The Committee is aware of the difficulty in determining the balance between the number of scholarships an organisation can offer, and their value. While some institutions may choose to offer a small number of larger scholarships, others prefer to reduce the value of the scholarship to reach a wider recipient pool. The Committee believes that further research is required to determine the value of scholarships most likely to increase participation in higher education among students from under-represented groups.

### *Access to scholarships*

Almost by definition, scholarships are selective awards that are not available to all students who require or seek assistance. The selectivity and scarcity of scholarships was therefore a common concern of inquiry participants.<sup>947</sup> The Committee heard personal accounts of students who were unsuccessful in their attempts to obtain a scholarship, while universities reported high levels of unmet demand for equity scholarships.<sup>948</sup>

Evidence received by the Committee suggests that although Commonwealth Scholarships are particularly well known and sought after in regional areas, few applicants are successful. Ms Cheryl Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, said that the College assists every student to apply for the Commonwealth Scholarships for which they are eligible, but 'very few' receive assistance through the program and 'statistically it is just not washing up'.<sup>949</sup> Similarly, Mr Kevin Lee, Principal, Robinvale Secondary College, told the

---

<sup>943</sup> For example, Mr S. Kozlowski, Chief Executive Officer, East Gippsland Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 7; Mrs R. Sutton, Parent, Written Submission, March 2008, 1; Dr K. Ferguson, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Equity and Student Services, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 23.

<sup>944</sup> Dr L. Wilkinson, Executive Officer, Gippsland East LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 11.

<sup>945</sup> Mornington Peninsula Shire, Written Submission, May 2008, 6; Ms J. Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Support Services, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 6; Wellington Shire Council, Appendix to Written Submission, March 2008, 3; Gannawarra Shire Council, Written Submission, March 2008, 10; Gippsland East LLEN, Written Submission, March 2008, 7.

<sup>946</sup> Professor S. Walker, Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 17.

<sup>947</sup> Mr M. Goldsworthy, Acting Principal, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 3; Ms C. Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 6; Ms S. Sly, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 56.

<sup>948</sup> Supplementary information provided by Victorian universities, March 2009.

<sup>949</sup> Ms C. Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 6.

Committee that he could not recall any student from his school having been awarded a Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarship.<sup>950</sup>

The Committee also heard that access to scholarships is limited for a key group—students from middle-income families who must leave home to study.<sup>951</sup> All institutional equity scholarships require applicants to demonstrate disadvantage or need in order to be eligible for consideration. In many cases, being in receipt of Youth Allowance is the primary or only criteria. Thus, current scholarship programs leave a significant proportion of students without access to income support or scholarships:

Scholarships, sadly from my perspective, are for either the very bright or the very poor. There are none, or very few, for the wage earner in the middle.<sup>952</sup>

While acknowledging the needs of those on very low incomes, several participants felt that the lack of support available to regional students from middle income families is unfair.<sup>953</sup>

Some participants suggested that as well as being scarce, scholarships are often not accessible to those with the greatest need. Selection of successful applicants for institutional equity scholarships is often based on achievement. At Monash University, for example, an Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER) of at least 95.00 is required before a student is even considered for an Excellence and Equity scholarship.<sup>954</sup> Similarly, some universities select Commonwealth Scholarship recipients on an academic merit basis,<sup>955</sup> sometimes setting high benchmarks for eligibility. The Committee heard from parents that this can mean even high-achieving students in need cannot be sure of receiving a scholarship.<sup>956</sup>

Some participants argued that merit-based selection processes can put equity scholarships beyond the reach of those who would most benefit from them, and that scholarships should be awarded on the basis of need rather than prior achievement.<sup>957</sup> In particular, the Committee heard that merit-based selection further disadvantages students whose level of academic achievement at school may have been adversely affected by a range of school-based or personal factors.<sup>958</sup>

Participants offered a number of suggestions to improve access to equity scholarships for students who must relocate to study. Some suggested that such scholarships should give greater consideration to home location, the number of children in the family undertaking study, or academic achievement.<sup>959</sup> Others argued that the eligibility criteria for scholarships, including Commonwealth Scholarships, should be broadened to include

<sup>950</sup> Mr K. Lee, Principal, Robinvale Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 34.

<sup>951</sup> Ms M. Hein, Parent, Portland, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Ms C. Barker, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Ms S. Sly, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 56; Mr J. and Mrs T. Wilson–Brown, Parents, Wulgulmerang, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

<sup>952</sup> Ms S. Sly, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 51.

<sup>953</sup> For example, Ms C. Barker, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Ms F. Haldane, Senior Campus Principal, Bairnsdale Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 38; Mr B. Perry, Student, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 41.

<sup>954</sup> Monash University, 'Monash University Scholarships for Excellence and Equity,' Monash University, <http://www.adm.monash.edu/scholarships/opportunities/excellence-equity.html> (accessed 24 November 2008).

<sup>955</sup> Based on analysis of scholarship selection criteria on Victorian university websites, 24 November 2008.

<sup>956</sup> Mrs T. Baker, Parent, Bunyip, Written Submission, May 2008, 1; Ms H. Webster, Parent, Barnawartha, Written Submission, April 2008, 1.

<sup>957</sup> Monash University Gippsland Student Union, Written Submission, March 2008, 6; Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 12; Orbest Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 2.

<sup>958</sup> Orbest Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 2.

<sup>959</sup> Woodall Family, Walpeup, Written Submission, June 2008, 1; Ms M. Hein, Parent, Portland, Written Submission, April 2008, 1.

regional students who are not eligible for Youth Allowance, but whose families cannot meet the costs of supporting them to live away from home.<sup>960</sup>

The Committee notes that, subject to the passage of legislation, administrative arrangements for Commonwealth Scholarships will change from 2010, when the existing Commonwealth Scholarships will be replaced by the Student Start-up Scholarship and the Relocation Scholarship. Both scholarships will now be more widely available. Additionally, the Australian Government believes that by transferring these payments to Centrelink, and applying a rigorous income support assessment process, students who are most in need will receive Commonwealth Scholarships as part of their student income support entitlement.<sup>961</sup> A benefit of the administrative change is that students will be guaranteed to retain their Commonwealth Scholarship if they transfer from one university to another.<sup>962</sup>

The Committee acknowledges that the above administrative changes may be beneficial for many students. However, as stated earlier in this chapter, the Committee is concerned that the value of the Relocation Scholarship will be less than the existing Accommodation Scholarship. Further, given the main criteria for access to Commonwealth Scholarships is eligibility for Youth Allowance or another government income support payment, the Committee believes there will remain significant gaps in the government income support system, which are likely to disproportionately affect young people from rural and regional Victoria. The Committee therefore encourages universities and other organisations to take account of such gaps when setting eligibility and selection criteria for scholarship programs.

### *Timing of scholarships*

The timing of scholarships may also decrease their value as a strategy for improving participation in higher education. Scholarships are typically targeted at students at the end of year 12, well after the point at which a young person's orientation towards university is shaped. Professor Sally Walker, Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, therefore suggested an early award approach to scholarships, in which low socioeconomic status students in early secondary school are promised a scholarship should they go on to higher education.<sup>963</sup>

The Committee was interested to learn about an early intervention approach to scholarships being piloted by the Canada Millennium Scholarships Foundation in the province of New Brunswick. Beginning with students in year 9 and continuing over three years, the Future to Discover Project engages young people in a series of workshops designed to develop an understanding of the range of post-secondary education and employment options. At the same time, the program supports low-income students with Learning Accounts, through which instalments totalling CA\$8,000 are deposited in an individual trust account over three years from year 9.<sup>964</sup> These funds are to be made available to students upon successful completion of high school and enrolment in a tertiary course. The purpose of Learning Accounts is to remove any perceived financial barrier to study early in a student's decision making process.

---

<sup>960</sup> National Rural Health Alliance, Written Submission, February 2008, 9; Ms M. Hein, Parent, Portland, Written Submission, April 2008, 1.

<sup>961</sup> Australian Government, 'Student Income Support—The Student Start-up Scholarship,' *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheet 17 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 1.

<sup>962</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>963</sup> Professor S. Walker, Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 33.

<sup>964</sup> Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, *Future to Discover: Pilot Project; Early Implementation Report* (Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2007), 106–109.

Future to Discover has been inspired by similar early intervention programs in the United States, such as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars in the state of Indiana. Future to Discover is being subject to a rigorous evaluation, which will include outcome comparisons with a control group of students who do not receive a learning account. The Committee believes that the program's innovative approach combining career education and the pre-award of scholarships has the potential to increase the participation of low-income students in post-secondary education. The Committee therefore encourages the Victorian Government to consider piloting an early intervention scholarship program for students from under-represented groups.

### *Scholarship application processes*

The fragmentation of scholarship programs, together with the complexity of individual application processes, has the potential to limit the effectiveness of scholarships in raising participation in higher education among under-represented groups. As described, an array of scholarships is available to Victorian students from a range of sources, and most have different eligibility requirements, deadlines and application processes. Often students do not know which institution or course they will gain a place in. Therefore, they may need to make multiple scholarship applications. This situation is exacerbated for students who live near Victoria's borders, who commonly apply to both Victorian and interstate universities.<sup>965</sup>

In order to apply for and receive a scholarship, students must first be aware of what is on offer. There is some evidence to suggest that many students and families who might benefit from scholarships are not aware of the support available. Many scholarships are not widely advertised, and schools and career educators therefore can play a critical role in promoting awareness of scholarship opportunities amongst students and parents.<sup>966</sup>

Furthermore, completing scholarship applications can be complex and time consuming. Applications for equity scholarships often require detailed information about the family's financial situation and/or personal statements describing the student's experiences of educational disadvantage.<sup>967</sup> Ms Fiona Harley, Manager, Chances for Children scholarship program, outlined the detailed application process:

... an application has to be made by a referring professional. It is quite a detailed process, but we are investing often significant community dollars in that young person, so we feel we have to know a lot about them. We certainly ask for a lot of detailed information in respect of their family background, and particularly the financial aspects of their family background ...<sup>968</sup>

Ms Harley noted that career teachers willing to act as referring professionals may work with up to fifteen students at a time on applications.<sup>969</sup> The Committee also heard from schools and career teachers who devote significant time to supporting students and their parents with a variety of scholarship applications.<sup>970</sup>

<sup>965</sup> Mr G. Stone, Interim Executive Officer, Northern Mallee LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 35.

<sup>966</sup> For example, Equity and Access Unit, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 5; Mr G. Stone, Interim Executive Officer, Northern Mallee LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 35, 38; Mr R. Johnson, Careers Pathways Manager, Swan Hill College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 20.

<sup>967</sup> Ms T. Wilson-Brown, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 24.

<sup>968</sup> Ms F. Harley, Manager, Chances for Children, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 30.

<sup>969</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>970</sup> For example, Orbost Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2008, 2; Ms C. Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 6; Ms L. Healey, Managed Individual Pathways Coordinator, Maffra Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 42; Ms L. Steele, Principal, North Campus, Sunshine College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 6; Ms P. Ericson, Deferred Student, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 49.

The Committee understands that detailed application processes may be necessary to ensure that equity scholarships are awarded to those students with genuine need. At the same time, the Committee acknowledges concerns that complex application processes may advantage particularly proactive students<sup>971</sup> and those who are 'best supported to go through the application process'.<sup>972</sup> The Committee is especially concerned that Victorian students may need to master several different application processes in order to apply for all the scholarships for which they may be eligible.

Participants in Ouyen argued for a more coordinated approach to scholarships, pointing to New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and South Australia as examples of best practice in this area.<sup>973</sup> Universities in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory have combined all Commonwealth Scholarships and institutional equity scholarships into one online application process that is centrally administered by the Universities Admissions Centre. The South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre also enables students to apply for Commonwealth Scholarships and institutional equity scholarships with a single application.

While the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre has an equivalent in the Special Entry Access Scheme, only some Victorian universities use the scheme to administer Commonwealth Scholarships and/or institutional equity scholarships. The Committee encourages higher education institutions in Victoria to continue to progress towards a more coordinated approach to equity scholarships through the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre, to improve accessibility for students most in need.

## Financial support from family

Most Australian undergraduate students receive some financial support from their family or partner. The Universities Australia Student Finances survey found that in 2006, more than half of all full-time undergraduate students (55.5%) were financially supported by a parent or other relative. A further 7.7 per cent were supported by a partner or spouse, while 37.7 per cent were financially independent.<sup>974</sup> A 2008 study based on ABS data found that one-third of university students live with, and are financially dependent on, their parents.<sup>975</sup>

In addition, many parents continue to support their children after they have left the family home. Throughout the inquiry, the Committee heard from a number of parents from rural and regional areas who were paying the costs of one child or more living away from home for study. This was considered to be a significant and unfair burden on parents, especially when considering the generally lower average household incomes in regional Victoria,<sup>976</sup> and the effects of drought.<sup>977</sup> Supporting one or more children to live away from home for

---

<sup>971</sup> Equity and Access Unit, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 6.

<sup>972</sup> Mr M. Goldsworthy, Acting Principal, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 3.

<sup>973</sup> Ms C. Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 6; Mr G. Stone, Interim Executive Officer and Mr G. Simpson, Chair, Northern Mallee LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 35, 38.

<sup>974</sup> Richard James and others, *Australian University Student Finances 2006: Final report of a national survey of students in public universities* (Canberra: Universities Australia, 2007), 17–18.

<sup>975</sup> Alicia Payne and Richard Percival, *What price the clever country? The costs of tertiary education in Australia*, AMP.NATSEM Income and Wealth Report 21 (Sydney: AMP Limited, 2008), 1.

<sup>976</sup> Mr S. Kozlowski, Chief Executive Officer, East Gippsland Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 2; Ms R. Kava, Chief Executive Officer, Gannawarra Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 2; Mr J. Hicks, Chief Executive Officer, Hindmarsh Shire Council, Written Submission, March 2008.

<sup>977</sup> For example, Australian Catholic University, Written Submission, March 2008, 3; Ms H. Rawlings, Bairnsdale, Written Submission, March 2008, 1; Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE, Written Submission, March 2008, 4–5; Victorian Council of Social Service, Written Submission, April 2008, 4; Equity and Access Unit, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 13; South West Association of Post Primary Principals, Written Submission, April 2008, 7; South Gippsland Bass Coast LLEN, Written Submission, May 2008, 7; North Central LLEN, Written Submission, May 2008, 6.



study causes great financial stress for many families. A number of participants described parents in this situation taking out loans, pooling resources with extended family, or re-mortgaging their homes to cover expenses.<sup>978</sup>

The Committee also received a great deal of evidence on how awareness of parents' financial stress can impact on a young person's decision about attending university. The Committee heard that young people in rural areas are often 'acutely aware' of their parents' financial situation, and are reluctant to exacerbate difficulties by moving away to study.<sup>979</sup>

Some students are also concerned that should they move away from the family farm, their labour will not be replaced and additional stress will be placed on their parents. Ms Patricia Nunan, Principal, Werrimull P-12 School, offered an evocative description of this awareness among students at her small, remote school:

As I drove in at 6:30 this morning those tractors were already out in the paddock under huge lights. They know the hours their parents put in. They know how tough it is for them at the moment, and they feel that they contribute a lot to handling the responsibilities on a farm. If they go away, that means their parents do not have their help either.<sup>980</sup>

Younger siblings in particular are sometimes deterred from study after seeing how supporting a brother or sister at university impacted upon the family.<sup>981</sup> Ms Kerry Conabere, a parent from Traralgon, described how her youngest daughter rejected her offer of an university place for this reason, instead taking up a local traineeship.<sup>982</sup>

An understanding of parents' financial situation can also affect the decisions of students in metropolitan areas. Ms Phuong Le, Year 12 Student, Sunshine College, told the Committee:

I think the only thing that is keeping me away from my goal is money, because I really do not want my parents to spend so much just on me to go to university. I know they have other things to worry about as well.<sup>983</sup>

Research into the higher education participation of people from low socioeconomic status backgrounds has found that although the perception is stronger for those who would need to relocate, low socioeconomic status young people from both metropolitan and regional areas are more likely to believe that their parents cannot afford to financially support them during their studies.<sup>984</sup> The Committee commends young people's consideration of their family's financial circumstances, but is concerned that this causes some of them to forgo participation in higher education.

---

<sup>978</sup> For example, National Rural Health Alliance, Written Submission, February 2008, 9; Ms M. Pendergast, Principal, Warrnambool College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 29; Ms K. Conabere, Parent, Traralgon, Written Submission, February 2008, 1; Ms D. Howcroft, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 28 April 2008, 63.

<sup>979</sup> For example, Cr C. Smith, Mayor, Colac Otway Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 10; Ms D. Howcroft, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 63; Ms R. Kava, Chief Executive Officer, Gannawarra Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 3; Cr D. Atkinson, Mayor, Warrnambool City Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 9.

<sup>980</sup> Ms P. Nunan, Principal, Werrimull P-12 School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 50.

<sup>981</sup> South West Association of Post Primary Principals, Written Submission, April 2008, 2-3; Woodall Family, Walpeup, Written Submission, June 2008, 1; Ms M. Pendergast, Principal, Warrnambool College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 29.

<sup>982</sup> Ms K. Conabere, Parent, Traralgon, Written Submission, February 2008, 1.

<sup>983</sup> Ms P. Le, Scholarship Recipient and Year 11 Student, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 55.

<sup>984</sup> Richard James, *Socioeconomic Background and Higher Education Participation: An analysis of school students' aspirations and expectations* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2000), 34.

## Deferring costs

---

The Committee found that a common strategy for dealing with the costs of undertaking higher education is to defer the costs to a later time. The Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) offers students the opportunity to delay paying tuition fees until their income meets the repayment threshold. Some participants argued that a similar scheme should be established to allow students to take out an income contingent loan to cover living costs whilst studying. Alternatively, many students choose to defer the costs of studying by deferring the study itself, in order to save money and put themselves in a better position to cover costs when they take on their studies. The Committee is concerned about the number of students, particularly those in rural and regional Victoria, who are deferring their studies purely for financial reasons.

### Higher Education Loan Program

HELP, which replaced the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) in 2005, provides loans to assist both Commonwealth supported and fee-paying higher education students with the costs of study. There are two components to the program. HECS-HELP enables students in Commonwealth supported places to defer all or part of their student contribution. FEE-HELP enables full fee paying students to defer tuition fees with a FEE-HELP loan, which is subject to an administration charge of 20 per cent. Both HECS-HELP and FEE-HELP loans are indexed to reflect changes in the CPI, and are interest free. Loans are repaid through the tax system once income reaches a minimum threshold.

The Committee notes that income deferred loans through HELP comprise a major component of public support for participation in higher education. The recent Review of Australian Higher Education made some useful international comparisons of public support for tertiary students, noting Australia's ranking with and without income contingent loans. It reported that when income contingent loans, income support and scholarships are all considered, Australia ranks 5<sup>th</sup> among OECD countries in terms of total public support for tertiary education students.<sup>985</sup> However, when income contingent loans are not taken into account, the picture changes. Based on income support and scholarships alone, Australia's position in the OECD falls to 14<sup>th</sup>, just above the OECD average.<sup>986</sup>

The Committee heard that the option to defer tuition fees can reduce the influence of costs on decisions about higher education participation. Large scale studies assessing the impacts of HECS have suggested that the re-introduction of tuition fees in Australia, and subsequent increases in charges, have not impacted upon higher education participation rates.<sup>987</sup> Several inquiry participants agreed that the costs of tuition are not a major concern for potential students.<sup>988</sup> La Trobe University's Access and Equity Unit described the findings of a 2006 study which found that because tuition costs could be deferred, most students did not perceive them to be a barrier.<sup>989</sup>

---

<sup>985</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 57.

<sup>986</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>987</sup> See, for example, Buly Cardak and Chris Ryan, *Why are high ability individuals from poor backgrounds under-represented at university?*, Discussion Paper A06.04 (Melbourne: School of Business, La Trobe University, 2007); Francis Robertson, Judith Sloan and Neil Bardsley, *The Impact of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS)*, Evaluation and Investigations Program (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1990).

<sup>988</sup> Mr M. Murphy, Executive Officer, Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 11; Ms J. Devereaux, Executive Officer, Wimmera Southern Mallee LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 5; Southern Grampians Youth Network, Written Submission, April 2008, 3.

<sup>989</sup> Equity and Access Unit, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 6.

On the other hand, a number of participants told the Committee that university fees can be a deterrent to participation in higher education for some groups. Many young people, including current and prospective university students, told the Committee that the costs of tuition were of concern to them.<sup>990</sup> Some participants commented that students may be discouraged if they have inaccurate perceptions of tuition costs, or are unaware of the opportunity to defer payments through HELP.<sup>991</sup> Deakin University reported that in its experience, students considering progressing from TAFE to higher education are usually aware that fees can be deferred, but are often concerned that debt will impact on their capacity for future spending in important areas such as housing.<sup>992</sup> Other participants commented that people from low socioeconomic status backgrounds tend to be debt-averse,<sup>993</sup> and may be deterred by the cost of university tuition.<sup>994</sup>

It is the Committee's view that the available evidence is insufficient to form definitive conclusions about the impact of tuition fees and study debt on higher education participation rates. While research suggests that fees have not affected overall participation rates, the Committee found evidence to indicate that fees, in combination with other factors, may be a deterrent for some groups in the community. The Committee notes that research in other countries has found that student debt and tuition costs influence decisions about participation in education and training.<sup>995</sup> The Committee therefore believes that the impact of tuition fees should not be disregarded when considering the factors that may affect participation in higher education. It also believes that specific attention should be given to the potential effects of any increases to tuition fees on participation in higher education among under-represented groups.

### Loans to cover living costs

The Committee notes that university students have access to a range of loans to assist them with study and living costs, including commercial loans through the major banks and small supplementary loans offered by universities.

All Victorian universities offer student loans, however, the amount available, the term of the loan and other conditions vary.<sup>996</sup> Typically, loans are provided to cover costs that would affect the ability of a student to continue their studies if funds are not available. Generally, universities will provide a student loan for study materials and practicum placements, housing costs, bills, medical costs and emergency situations. Loan terms typically range from 6 months (for a small loan of around \$500) to 12 months or longer for loans of \$1,000 to \$3000.<sup>997</sup> La Trobe University offers student loans of up to \$4,000 for those in special

---

<sup>990</sup> For example, Mr S. Robertson, Former Student, Warrnambool College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 30; Mr T. Ballard, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 11; Ms L. Toddun, Facilitator, Glenelg Local Community Partnership, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 33; Ms T. Johnson, Year 12 Student, Kurnai College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 47; Ms C. Alphey, Deputy President, MONSU Peninsula, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 31.

<sup>991</sup> Equity and Access Unit, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 6; Smart Geelong Region LLEN, Written Submission, May 2008, 13.

<sup>992</sup> Deakin University, Written Submission, March 2008, 12.

<sup>993</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>994</sup> Gippsland Local Government Network, Written Submission, April 2008, 4; Dr D. Morris, Lake Boga, Written Submission, March 2008, 11; Bendigo Student Association, La Trobe University, Bendigo Campus, Written Submission, April 2008, 3; City of Whittlesea, Written Submission, April 2008, 34; Mr N. and Mrs W. O'Brien, Parents, Wodonga, Written Submission, April 2008, 2.

<sup>995</sup> Meeting with representatives of the Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate, Edinburgh, 29 August 2008; Meeting with representatives of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Montreal, 2 September 2008.

<sup>996</sup> Based on analysis of university websites, July 2009.

<sup>997</sup> *ibid.*

need.<sup>998</sup> Most student loans are interest free, although the University of Ballarat charges 10 per cent interest (discounted to 5% if the loan conditions are met and payments are made on or before the due date).<sup>999</sup> The Australian Catholic University gives particular attention to the requirements of students from rural and isolated areas, and other disadvantaged groups when assessing loan applications.<sup>1000</sup>

The Victorian Government Office of Housing's Bond Loan Scheme is also a useful source of funds for students who need to move away from home to study. The scheme allows those who cannot afford to pay a bond to borrow up to \$1,200 to cover a bond, with the full (interest-free) amount to be paid back at the end of the tenancy agreement.<sup>1001</sup>

Students may also be able to access funds to assist with study or living costs through various financial institutions. For example, one major bank offers student loans of between \$500 and \$2,000, with payments deferred until course completion. The Committee notes, however, that despite preferential interest rates for students, a commercial loan may be an expensive and risky option for many young people.

Some participants, predominantly from the higher education sector, suggested that students should also be given the opportunity to defer living or accommodation costs as a part of, or along the same lines as, the Higher Education Loan Program.<sup>1002</sup> Such systems operate in other countries. In the United Kingdom, for example, students can access a maintenance support loan, in addition to the income contingent maintenance grant.<sup>1003</sup> The maximum entitlement is affected by place of residence (parental home, away from parental home or away from parental home in London), year of course and eligibility for other financial support. All students undertaking an eligible course qualify for 75 per cent of the maximum loan, regardless of income, with the remaining 25 per cent being income-assessed.<sup>1004</sup> Repayments are income contingent, with interest accruing at the rate of inflation. For people due to commence repaying their maintenance loan from April 2012, there will be the option of repayment breaks of up to five years, to assist during major life stages, such as purchasing a home or starting a family.<sup>1005</sup> Similarly, students in Canada can access a mix of loans and grants to assist them with living costs during their studies.<sup>1006</sup>

---

<sup>998</sup> La Trobe University, 'Student loans,' La Trobe University, <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/study/fees-scholarships/student-loans> (accessed 16 July 2009).

<sup>999</sup> University of Ballarat, 'Financial Assistance and Student Loans,' University of Ballarat, [http://www.ballarat.edu.au/fdp/operations/student\\_loans.shtml](http://www.ballarat.edu.au/fdp/operations/student_loans.shtml) (accessed 16 July 2009).

<sup>1000</sup> Australian Catholic University, 'Student Loan Scheme,' Australian Catholic University National, [http://www.acu.edu.au/apply\\_and\\_enrol/fees\\_and\\_charges/australian\\_students/student\\_loan\\_scheme/](http://www.acu.edu.au/apply_and_enrol/fees_and_charges/australian_students/student_loan_scheme/) (accessed 16 July 2009).

<sup>1001</sup> Office of Housing, Department of Human Services (Victoria), *Bond Loan Scheme Policy & Procedure Manual: Version 7.0 October 2008*, section 1 (Melbourne: DHS, 2008), 16, 25.

<sup>1002</sup> For example, Australian Catholic University, Written Submission, March 2008, 3; Mr T. Payne, Deputy Executive Director, Group of Eight, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 5; Ms Pam McDonald, Parent, Written Submission, April 2008, 1.

<sup>1003</sup> Student Finance England, 'Student Loans,' Directgov, [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/StudentFinance/Applyingfortheirstime/DG\\_171539](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/StudentFinance/Applyingfortheirstime/DG_171539) (accessed 16 July 2009).

<sup>1004</sup> Student Finance England, 'Student Loan Rates 2008/09,' Directgov, [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/StudentFinance/Applyingfortheirstime/DG\\_171551](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/StudentFinance/Applyingfortheirstime/DG_171551) (accessed 16 July 2009).

<sup>1005</sup> UK Government, 'Money for university: a parent's guide,' Directgov, [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Schoolslearninganddevelopment/Optionsafterschool/DG\\_071144](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Schoolslearninganddevelopment/Optionsafterschool/DG_071144) (accessed 16 July 2009).

<sup>1006</sup> Meeting with representatives of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Montreal, 2 September 2008.

The Review of Australian Higher Education also considered various models for income contingent loans to cover study and living costs. The review concluded:

On balance, while the advantages of extending income support with the use of income contingent loans is conceptually attractive there are currently important questions associated with how this might best, and most equitably, be adopted.

The panel is not drawn to making recommendations on the introduction of a loans-supplement scheme or using FEE-HELP as an instrument for income support on the basis of the information available to it at this stage. However, these are matters which would benefit from further consideration and more detailed analysis of their impact on students.<sup>1007</sup>

The Committee supports the review's findings and is also wary of recommending the introduction of income contingent loans to cover study and living costs on the basis of information currently available. While recognising their potential to expand the financing options available to students, the Committee is conscious that Australian students already pay a relatively high price for undertaking a higher education degree. Further, the Committee heard during its investigations in Canada, that income contingent living cost loans have not been found to be effective in widening access to higher education.<sup>1008</sup> The Committee would therefore like to see further enhancements to the system of government income support, along with detailed analysis of the benefits and disadvantages of income contingent living cost loans, before this system is considered for implementation in Australia.

### Deferred enrolment

Most applicants who receive the offer of a place in a university course have the option of deferring their place and enrolling in study at a later date, generally after one year. The Committee heard that deferment can have benefits for prospective students, particularly school leavers. According to On Track data, just under two-thirds of 2007 year 12 completers who deferred said that a lack of readiness for further study was one reason for their decision.<sup>1009</sup> Many students wish to take some time off from study, and a 'gap year' offers these young people the opportunity to unwind after the rigours of year 12. Further, some defer because they are uncertain about their chosen course. Taking time off and gaining work experience can therefore provide a useful opportunity to reconsider and clarify education and career aspirations.

While some students defer for positive reasons, the Committee was concerned to hear that many young Victorians wish to begin university, but defer their study for financial reasons. Throughout the inquiry, the Committee heard from young people who had deferred their place at university, or planned to do so, because they could not otherwise afford to relocate for study.<sup>1010</sup> Often, these young people emphasised that deferment had not been a choice, but something they were required to do despite preferring to go directly to university.<sup>1011</sup> One

<sup>1007</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 65.

<sup>1008</sup> Meeting with representatives of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Montreal, 2 September 2008.

<sup>1009</sup> Sheldon Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria; Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009), 59.

<sup>1010</sup> Ms J. Molley, Student, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 36; Mr H. Barton, School Captain and Year 12 Student, Bairnsdale Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 48; Ms T. Johnson, Year 12 Student, Kurnai College, Transcript of Evidence, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 42; Ms S. Holcombe, Year 12 Student, Kurnai College, Transcript of Evidence, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 44.

<sup>1011</sup> For example, Mr P. Dempsey, Deferred Student, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 53; Ms M. Freckleton, School Captain, St Brigid's College, Written Submission, March 2008, 1; Ms S. Powell, Student, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 38; Ms M. Collins, First Year Student, Bachelor of Arts/Science, Monash University, Written Submission, April 2008, 2.

student told the Committee that she had 'never considered deferring' until the end of year 12 when she was confronted with the challenge of financing relocation.<sup>1012</sup>

The Committee heard that two key motivators underpin deferment for financial reasons. The first is that a year in the workforce can enable students to save money towards the costs of higher education. The other is the need to qualify for Youth Allowance, through the workforce participation route to independence. As noted, Australian Government policy changes will greatly restrict opportunities to qualify for Youth Allowance through this route from 2010.

On Track data confirms the importance of financial concerns for many young people who defer their studies. Of school leavers who deferred in 2007, the costs of study and financial pressure on family were both cited as a reason for deferral by approximately one-third of deferrers, and around four in ten said they were waiting to access the Youth Allowance.<sup>1013</sup> Concerns about the costs of travel were also reported by large numbers of students who deferred.<sup>1014</sup> A recent Deakin University study also found that 'to earn income to study later' was the most common reason for deferment cited by students who had applied to study at the University's Warrnambool campus under the Special Entry Access Scheme.<sup>1015</sup>

The decision to defer university studies for financial reasons was particularly common in rural and regional Victoria, where participation in higher education for young people usually involves the additional costs of leaving home. Findings from On Track show that deferrers from rural and regional areas are more likely than their metropolitan counterparts to cite financial reasons as influencing their decision to defer.<sup>1016</sup> Likewise, a number of schools in regional Victoria linked particularly high levels of deferment to financial concerns.<sup>1017</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, the disproportionately high and increasing rate of deferment for students from regional and rural Victoria is perhaps the most notable trend in higher education participation in recent years.

The Committee heard that deferring and qualifying for income support as independent under the workforce participation criteria can bring its own challenges. In some rural and isolated areas, young people who have deferred face significant difficulties in obtaining suitable employment and earning enough income to satisfy independence criteria. In particular, participants highlighted the lack of employment for young people in many small and remote regional communities, especially where drought has reduced the opportunities available in agriculture. The Committee also heard that the traineeships available to young people often pay low wages which alone do not meet the minimum income threshold. Mr Tony Barton, Careers Coordinator, Orbost Secondary College, commented that for young people in the Gippsland region, qualifying as independent becomes more difficult further east where wages are sometimes below award and paid as cash-in-hand.<sup>1018</sup>

---

<sup>1012</sup> Ms K. Leadbeater, Second Year Student, RMIT University, Written Submission, April 2008, 2.

<sup>1013</sup> Sheldon Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria: Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009), 59.

<sup>1014</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1015</sup> Deakin University, Written Submission, March 2008, 11.

<sup>1016</sup> Sheldon Rothman and others, *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria: Statewide Report* (Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009), 59.

<sup>1017</sup> For example, Mr B. Ridgeway, Acting Principal, Rosebud Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 50; Mr M. Goldsworthy, Acting Principal, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 2; Mr B. Simons, Principal, The Hamilton and Alexandra College, Written Submission, February 2008, 1; Ms M. Pendergast, Principal, Warrnambool College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 29.

<sup>1018</sup> Mr T. Barton, Careers Coordinator, Orbost Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Baringsdale, 20 May 2008, 40.

It appears to be common for young people to juggle multiple jobs in an effort to earn the required amount, while others relocate to a metropolitan area for employment.<sup>1019</sup> One parent expressed disappointment that even where regional young people overcome these challenges through hard work, they may consequently have no ‘down time’ in which to ‘relax and recharge’ before returning to study.<sup>1020</sup> The Committee heard that employment difficulties may also cause some students to put off study for a second year.<sup>1021</sup>

Perhaps of greatest concern in relation to higher education participation is that a proportion of students who defer do not subsequently take up their place in higher education. Schools, parents, universities, student associations, local governments, Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) and others expressed strong concern that a number of young people in regional areas do not return to study after deferring.

Reasons for non-participation after deferment vary. The Committee heard that students who have deferred often become accustomed to a working lifestyle and income, and are reluctant to return to being a ‘poor’ student.<sup>1022</sup> Other participants argued that deferment forces young people to disengage from education, diminishing the confidence and motivation to study and distracting them from their original ambitions.<sup>1023</sup> The Committee also heard that during their time away from study, many young people form significant relationships in the local community, which creates an additional motivation to remain at home rather than relocating for study.<sup>1024</sup> There was speculation that those from low socioeconomic status backgrounds,<sup>1025</sup> those with lower ENTERs<sup>1026</sup> and those who were offered a place in a less preferred course<sup>1027</sup> were least likely to take up their place after deferring.

<sup>1019</sup> Ms J. Molley, Student, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 37; Ms P. Ericson, Deferred Student, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 50; Mr T. Barton, Careers Coordinator, Orbost Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 41; Ms L. Healey, Managed Individual Pathways Coordinator, Maffra Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 42; Ms H. Rawlings, Bairnsdale, Written Submission, March 2008, 1; Mr N. and Mrs W. O’Brien, Parents, Wodonga, Written Submission, April 2008, 3; Southern Grampians Youth Network, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Ms K. Leadbeater, Second Year Student, RMIT University, Written Submission, April 2008, 2.

<sup>1020</sup> Ms D. Howcroft, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 62.

<sup>1021</sup> Mr M. Murphy, Executive Officer, Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 55.

<sup>1022</sup> For example, Ms L. Davis, Student, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 36–37; Ms T. Linsen, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 25; Ms G. Ferrari, Executive Officer, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 8–9; University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 5; Mr R. Juratowitch, Campus Principal, Kurnai College, Gippsland Education Precinct, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 3; Mr T. McMahon, Student Representative, South West Regional Youth Affairs Network, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 12; Mr D. Visser, Parent, Wodonga, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Bendigo Student Association, Bendigo Campus, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 2; Southern Grampians Youth Network, Written Submission, April 2008, 2; Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), Written Submission, May 2008, 17; Gippsland Education Precinct, Written Submission, May 2008, 3.

<sup>1023</sup> Mallee Family Care, Written Submission, March 2008, 10; Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 15, 21; Mr R. Butler, Chair, Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 27; Mr R. Vecchiet, Principal, Baimbridge College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 16; Ms P. McDonald, Parent, Chiltern, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Mr S. Collins, Parent, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria), Written Submission, May 2008, 17; Ms J. Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Support Services, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 3.

<sup>1024</sup> Mrs H. Thiele, Principal, Murrayville Community College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 49; Dr D. Morris, Lake Boga, Written Submission, March 2008, 9.

<sup>1025</sup> Dr J. Oriel, Head, Student Equity Unit, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 54.

<sup>1026</sup> Ms T. Burgoyne, Principal, Portland Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 17.

<sup>1027</sup> Mr R. Vecchiet, Principal, Baimbridge College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 18.

The impressions of inquiry participants are supported by recent research that examined the destinations of 806 year 12 completers from regional Victoria who had deferred a university place in 2007.<sup>1028</sup> These young people, originally surveyed as part of On Track, were contacted again in 2008. The survey found that 69.9 per cent had taken up their place at university, while an additional 9.4 per cent were engaged in Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses, and 3.1 per cent had begun apprenticeships or traineeships.<sup>1029</sup> The majority of the remaining young people were working.<sup>1030</sup> The researchers also examined the backgrounds of respondents, and found that those from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds, or with a lower achievement profile, were less likely to have taken up their university place.<sup>1031</sup>

The Committee believes that deferment is undoubtedly beneficial for some young people, and should remain an option for students who receive the offer of a place in higher education. Nevertheless, the Committee agrees with participants who argued that students who are eager to continue their studies directly from school should not need to defer for financial reasons.<sup>1032</sup> The Committee was concerned to find such strong evidence suggesting that disproportionately high deferment in rural and regional areas arises primarily due to financial concerns. Given that fewer young people in rural and regional areas complete secondary school, apply to university and accept offers, the Committee is concerned about the additional 'leakage' resulting from deferment, particularly for low socioeconomic status students.

---

## Conclusion and recommendations

---

Meeting the costs of higher education was one of the most important themes in the inquiry for many students and families. While the Committee's investigations found that the range of factors discussed throughout this report explain geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education, it is clear that the costs of study are an important contributor. The costs of study appear to influence participation for low socioeconomic status young people in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. However, due to the substantially higher cost of living away from home, costs constitute a greater concern for young people from non-metropolitan and interface areas. Many participants from rural Victoria argued that the high cost of study, combined with inadequate financial support, were the most important causes of geographical differences in higher education participation rates.

The Committee believes that a fair and accessible system of student income support is of fundamental importance. While acknowledging recent Australian Government reforms to the income support system, the Committee believes further changes are required. The Committee believes that income support payments should be increased to take account of the costs of living and relevant poverty indicators. It is also the Committee's view that all students who are required to relocate to undertake tertiary studies should be eligible to

---

<sup>1028</sup> John Polesel, *Deferring a University Offer in Regional Victoria (interim report)* (Melbourne: Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2008).

<sup>1029</sup> *ibid.*, 10.

<sup>1030</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1031</sup> *ibid.*, 13.

<sup>1032</sup> For example, Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 21; Ms P. O'Connell, Executive Officer, Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 27; Mr J. Ireland, Coordinator, School Focused Youth Service, Gippsland Lakes Community Health, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 18.



receive Youth Allowance. The Committee believes that the Victorian Government should advocate to the Australian Government for these changes. The Committee further believes that the Victorian Government should take additional measures to financially support Victorian students undertaking higher education. These include piloting an early intervention scholarship program for students from under-represented areas, providing affordable public transport for higher education students, and strengthening university and industry partnerships to help students earn while they study.

### Recommendations

- 7.1 That the Victorian Government advocate to the Australian Government for an increase to student income support payments, taking into account costs of living.
- 7.2 That the Victorian Government advocate to the Australian Government that young people who are required to relocate to undertake tertiary studies be eligible to receive Youth Allowance.
- 7.3 That the Victorian Government, in collaboration with universities, pilot an early intervention scholarship program for students from under-represented groups and areas.
- 7.4 That the Victorian Government coordinate an industry placement program to assist higher education students from regional areas and low socioeconomic status backgrounds.



# Transition and completion

---

Probably what struck us most was something that one of our parents said. She said that city children are much better prepared and just had to take a small step to tertiary education; however, the transition for the country student is not a skip but a bloody long jump.<sup>1033</sup>

---

After the long journey to enrolment, students must make a successful transition to university and complete their studies if they are to enjoy the full benefits of participation in higher education. According to OECD estimates, 69 per cent of Australian students enrolling in an undergraduate degree can be expected to complete a course.<sup>1034</sup> The completion rate for those beginning undergraduate studies as a current or recent school leaver is estimated to be slightly higher.<sup>1035</sup>

Completion of university rests on successful adjustment to the academic and social environment of university, and for some, adjustment to a new living environment and lifestyle. Following these adjustments, students need sustained commitment for the duration of a course of study. While the transition to university is often highly anticipated and enjoyable, it can also be challenging. The Committee found that students from some geographical areas and from low socioeconomic backgrounds can face additional difficulties in making the transition to higher education and in continuing their studies through to completion. Therefore, a key focus of the Committee's investigations was student services and programs aimed at supporting the retention and course completion of higher education students.

---

## Transition to university

---

The transition to higher education is a period of change during which all first-time students must adapt to the academic, cultural and social environment of university. These are adjustments that students make with different levels of ease and success and at an individual pace.

---

<sup>1033</sup> Ms P. Nunan, Principal, Werrimull P-12 School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 48.

<sup>1034</sup> Gary N. Marks, *Completing University: Characteristics and Outcomes of Completing and Non-completing Students*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 51 (Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2007), 2.

<sup>1035</sup> *ibid.*, 17.

The Committee heard that students may feel intimidated, unwelcome or uncomfortable at university.<sup>1036</sup> Mr Tony Edwards, Project Manager, Access and Success, Victoria University, provided a poignant account of how students may be overwhelmed by the university environment:

... the careers teacher [received] a phone call from a young man who was at RMIT. He had got into RMIT on a fairly decent score of about 79. He was standing outside RMIT almost in tears saying, 'I cannot cope with all of this'. He was clearly dropped into the deep end in terms of social and cultural capital, even though he may have had the educational capital.<sup>1037</sup>

Other participants suggested that adjustment difficulties can contribute to lack of confidence, anxiety or depression, and can increase the risk that the student will drop out of university without completing their studies.<sup>1038</sup> Three key aspects of the transition to university were identified that may affect students' chances of success: academic, living and social environments.

### **Academic transition**

In making the transition to higher education, first-time students must adjust to the academic environment at university. New students need to develop an understanding of university administrative procedures and jargon, as well as the conventions of academic study.<sup>1039</sup> Crucially, most higher education institutions expect students to be self-directed learners. Students must therefore adopt a relatively independent learning style that may differ sharply from the secondary school learning experience.<sup>1040</sup>

While this transition is common to all commencing students, some participants suggested that the shift can be greater for students from particular areas or backgrounds. The Committee heard that the transition to university study can be challenging for students from smaller schools, especially in non-metropolitan areas. Ms Chelsea Manley, Year 12 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, told the Committee that she anticipated feeling 'extremely uncomfortable and intimidated' in large university classes after attending a school with very small classes and extensive individual support from teachers.<sup>1041</sup> A number of other students from Ouyen Secondary College expressed similar concerns about this adjustment. Other participants commented that there may be a cultural gulf between a large, metropolitan institution and the local school and community environment.<sup>1042</sup> Some parents and teachers added that high-achieving rural students, who are often highly visible and well

---

<sup>1036</sup> Mrs J. de Freitas, Parent and Teacher, Alexandra, Written Submission, May 2008, 1; Dr J. Oriel, Head, Student Equity Unit, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 53.

<sup>1037</sup> Mr T. Edwards, Project Manager, Access and Success, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 23.

<sup>1038</sup> Ms M. Weiss, Student Counsellor, Counselling Service, Parent Information Program, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 30; Southern Grampians Youth Network, Written Submission, April 2008, 2; Bendigo Senior Secondary College, Written Submission, March 2008, 5; Ms H. Rawlings, Bairnsdale, Written Submission, March 2008, 1; Mallee Family Care, Written Submission, March 2008, 12; Mrs V. Draper, Parent, Eildon, Written Submission, May 2008, 1; Ms H. Sobey, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 65.

<sup>1039</sup> Ms M. Weiss, Student Counsellor, Counselling Service, Parent Information Program, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 30.

<sup>1040</sup> Bendigo Student Association, Bendigo Campus, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 4; Mr K. Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 46.

<sup>1041</sup> Ms C. Manley, Year 12 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 14.

<sup>1042</sup> Dr J. Oriel, Head, Student Equity Unit, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 53; The University of Melbourne, Written Submission, March 2008, 7; Mrs J. de Freitas, Parent and Teacher, Alexandra, Written Submission, May 2008, 1.

supported in their communities, can have particular difficulty adjusting to an environment where they are one of many such students.<sup>1043</sup>

Other participants suggested that students from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds who are the first in their family to attend university may also have difficulty adjusting to the changed academic environment. These students may have less knowledge of what to expect at university,<sup>1044</sup> and their family members may be less able to assist with study tasks and may have a misunderstanding of the amount of time required for study.<sup>1045</sup> Research supports the argument that the academic transition can be somewhat less smooth for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. Students from this group are more likely to report difficulty adjusting to the style of teaching at university and in comprehending study material.<sup>1046</sup>

Despite these concerns, research and data suggests that the difficulties experienced by some student groups in adjusting to university do not adversely affect their academic results. Based on a large survey of domestic undergraduate Australian students, one study found that students from rural backgrounds were in fact more positive than metropolitan students about their experience of university, reporting less uncertainty about their academic progress and less fear of failure.<sup>1047</sup> They were also more positive about the quality of teaching, expressed fewer concerns about workload and showed 'greater signs of engagement and overall satisfaction'.<sup>1048</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, Australian Government equity performance indicators suggest that students from rural and regional backgrounds are actually more likely to pass enrolled units than their peers, while students from remote areas pass units at rates that approach or equal the average.

Equity performance indicators suggest slightly lower academic performance for low socioeconomic status students, with the success ratio remaining steady at 0.97 during the years 2002 to 2006 for Victorian students under 25 years of age.<sup>1049</sup> Nevertheless, Professor Richard James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, told the Committee that the current differences are small and 'probably not relevant for policy purposes'.<sup>1050</sup> Similarly, the chief executive officer of Universities Australia told the Committee that students from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds experience roughly comparable academic success in their first year of study. He added, however, that the quality of the learning experience for these students tends to be somewhat lower, as they often feel less comfortable in the university environment.<sup>1051</sup>

<sup>1043</sup> Mrs H. Thiele, Principal, Murrayville Community College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 48; Southern Grampians Youth Network, Written Submission, April 2008, 2.

<sup>1044</sup> Ms M. Weiss, Student Counsellor, Counselling Service, Parent Information Program, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 30; Bendigo Student Association, Bendigo Campus, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 4.

<sup>1045</sup> Ms M. Weiss, Student Counsellor, Counselling Service, Parent Information Program, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 30.

<sup>1046</sup> Kerri-Lee Krause and others, *The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from a Decade of National Studies* (Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005), 69.

<sup>1047</sup> *ibid.*, 70.

<sup>1048</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1049</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Victoria Equity Performance Indicators 2002 to 2006* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2006).

<sup>1050</sup> Professor R. James, Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 10.

<sup>1051</sup> Dr G. Withers, Chief Executive Officer, Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 12.

## Living environment

In addition to the academic changes experienced by all students, the Committee heard about further changes faced by students relocating from rural and remote areas. Many young people who relocate to study experience independent living for the first time.<sup>1052</sup> Submissions from parents, in particular, emphasised that young students move from a comfortable home environment to one where they 'have to fend for themselves',<sup>1053</sup> attending to shopping, meal preparation, cleaning and budgeting, as well as more stressful tasks such as finding accommodation.<sup>1054</sup> Some students may not slip into this new role comfortably, and can find the adjustment difficult without family support.<sup>1055</sup> One youth worker suggested that this transition to independent living may be most challenging for high-achieving students, who have often benefited from a very supportive home environment during secondary school.<sup>1056</sup>

As highlighted by many participants from rural, regional and outer urban areas, university students relocating for study need to adjust to a new setting and lifestyle vastly different from what they have previously experienced in small communities. For a number of students, the Committee heard that this change to the 'bright lights' of the city is keenly anticipated.<sup>1057</sup> For others, particularly those with little or no prior experience in large cities, contemplating a move to this unfamiliar environment can be daunting, even 'scary'.<sup>1058</sup>

The Committee heard that prospective students from more remote areas are likely to be most affected by such concerns.<sup>1059</sup> Ms Hilary Thiele, Principal, Murrayville Community College, told the Committee that for students from her small community in north-west Victoria this cultural step was probably the most significant barrier to further study:

... there is a lack of connection when you are living in a tiny little town to what is out there. The challenge is that when you go away to university you have got to go into a culture that is totally different from what you are used to. I believe that if you asked a city kid to spend the three years after they left secondary education in the country, they would not be able to do it either. It is just a cultural thing, but the thing that is being asked of rural kids is that huge jump into a totally different culture.<sup>1060</sup>

---

<sup>1052</sup> Ms K. Conabere, Parent, Traralgon, Written Submission, February 2008, 1; The University of Melbourne, Written Submission, March 2008, 7; Mrs J. Dowlin, Parent, Warrnambool, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Mr N. and Mrs W. O'Brien, Parents, Wodonga, Written Submission, April 2008, 3; Mrs J. de Freitas, Parent and Teacher, Alexandra, Written Submission, May 2008, 1; Cr V. Knight, Deputy Mayor, Mildura Rural City Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 30.

<sup>1053</sup> Mrs J. Dowlin, Parent, Warrnambool, Written Submission, April 2008, 1.

<sup>1054</sup> Mrs M. Hein, Parent, Portland, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Ms M. Barton, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 26; Ms A. Trickey, Executive Officer, Careers Connection, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 25.

<sup>1055</sup> Ms K. Conabere, Parent, Traralgon, Written Submission, February 2008, 1; Mrs J. de Freitas, Parent and Teacher, Alexandra, Written Submission, May 2008, 1.

<sup>1056</sup> Ms L. Bartlett, Regional Youth Affairs Consultant, Barwon Adolescent Task Force, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 38.

<sup>1057</sup> Ms H. Barry, School Captain and Year 12 Student and Ms E. McKenzie, Year 12 Student, Bairnsdale Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 49–50; Ms C. Manley, Year 12 Student, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 14; Ms D. Howcroft, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 64.

<sup>1058</sup> For example, Mr B. Gregg and Ms S. Wills, Year 11 Students, Ouyen Secondary College, Written Submissions, April 2008; Equity and Access Unit, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 7, 10; South West LLEN, Written Submission, April 2008, 6; Mrs J. de Freitas, Parent and Teacher, Alexandra, Written Submission, May 2008, 1; Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Written Submission, April 2008, 13–14; Mr B. Simons, Principal, The Hamilton and Alexandra College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 16; Ms M. Barton, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 29; Ms F. Harley, Manager, Chances for Children, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 27; Ms A. Trickey, Executive Officer, Careers Connection, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 25.

<sup>1059</sup> Mr R. Boucher, Principal, Swifts Creek Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 44.

<sup>1060</sup> Mrs H. Thiele, Principal, Murrayville Community College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 48.

Several participants commented on the need for young people to develop an understanding of the 'basics of living in the city', such as how to use the public transport system with which they may have no prior experience and which can seem like 'a frustrating mystery'.<sup>1061</sup> Security and safety in a metropolitan environment, especially in Melbourne, can also be a concern for some prospective students and their families.<sup>1062</sup>

### **Social connectedness**

Another dimension of relocation is that students from rural and regional areas must move away from family, friends and the community. Participants told the Committee that the anticipated or actual loss of these social networks can be difficult and overwhelming for some young people.<sup>1063</sup> Some participants suggested that isolation from these social networks may also affect a young person's sense of identity or their capacity for resilience in times of stress.<sup>1064</sup> During a potentially difficult period of adjustment to university study, relocated students have less access to assistance and emotional support from loved ones and the broader community.<sup>1065</sup>

The Committee heard that this experience of isolation can stand in particularly sharp contrast to the experience of life in a rural area. Ms Tam Linsen, a parent from the small community of W Tree in East Gippsland, described the difference:

Our children are raised in a very idyllic lifestyle, it is a beautiful area, it is very supportive. All the families are a community. We all look after each other's children; we are a very strong community in that regard. And the kids go off to Melbourne and they just fall apart. They get there and there is no support. They cannot just drop next door for some advice. There is no-one there for them.<sup>1066</sup>

The particular 'feeling of connectedness' and mutual support in many rural communities was also highlighted by other inquiry participants. Ms Sue Oakley, Assistant Principal, Benalla College, even wondered whether country communities in some way do young people a disservice by creating a strong sense of community, recognition and support—a sense that is lost when students relocate.<sup>1067</sup>

---

<sup>1061</sup> For example, Mrs J. de Freitas, Parent and Teacher, Alexandra, Written Submission, May 2008, 1; Mrs J. Dowlin, Parent, Warrnambool, Written Submission, April 2008, 1; Ms K. Conabere, Parent, Traralgon, Written Submission, February 2008, 2; Ms H. Sobey, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 64; Mrs J. Boyle, Principal, Mortlake P-12 College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 32; Ms F. Harley, Manager, Chances for Children, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 27.

<sup>1062</sup> Southern Grampians Youth Network, Written Submission, April 2008, 2; Ms D. Howcroft, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 63; South West LLEN, Written Submission, April 2008, 6; Deakin University, Written Submission, March 2008, 12; Ms S. Connelly, Koorie Educator, Swan Hill North Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 56.

<sup>1063</sup> Mr J. Heppell and Ms M. Gordon, School Captains, Leongatha Secondary College, Written Submission, March 2008, 1; Rural City of Wangaratta, Written Submission, May 2008, 3; Ms J. Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Support Services, Swinburne University of Technology, Written Submission, March 2008, 3; Mrs J. de Freitas, Parent and Teacher, Alexandra, Written Submission, May 2008, 1.

<sup>1064</sup> Gippsland Local Government Network, Written Submission, April 2008, 4; Ms D. Howcroft, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 63.

<sup>1065</sup> Ms R. Kava, Chief Executive Officer, Gannawarra Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 3; Ms M. Barton, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 26; Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Written Submission, April 2008, 13–14; Ms J. McGinness-Whyte, Parent, Portarlington, Written Submission, May 2008, 1; Ms D. Howcroft, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 63; Mr K. Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 47; Ms H. Sobey, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 65.

<sup>1066</sup> Ms T. Linsen, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 25.

<sup>1067</sup> Mrs S. Oakley, Assistant Principal and VET Coordinator, Senior School, Benalla College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 13–14.

The Committee heard that students adjust to this loss of social connection in different ways. One approach is to visit home frequently in order to maintain contact with known social networks.<sup>1068</sup> For some students, however, this may be complicated due to study and work requirements or travel times and costs.<sup>1069</sup> This approach also has the potential to delay the formation of new social networks, thereby prolonging the period of transition.<sup>1070</sup>

As well as maintaining existing social networks, most students who move away for university will need to form new relationships. While this is an important part of the transition process for all school leavers beginning university,<sup>1071</sup> it is of even greater importance for relocated students.<sup>1072</sup> The Committee heard that this process can be difficult or slow for some students.<sup>1073</sup> While metropolitan students often attend university with friends from secondary school, and international students frequently form connections with others from their home country, for rural students 'there is often no natural or easily identifiable cohort to join'.<sup>1074</sup> It was widely thought that, lacking a support network, regional students are at greater risk of experiencing loneliness, anxiety or depression at university, impacting on health and wellbeing and persistence and success in their studies.<sup>1075</sup> The University of Melbourne noted that students from rural and remote areas who attended the university's counselling service, compared to all users of the service, tended to be younger, attend more sessions of counselling, and were more likely to be suffering from anxiety or depression.<sup>1076</sup>

Despite these challenges, the Committee heard that most students who relocate to a metropolitan area for study are successful in forming new social networks.<sup>1077</sup> Two students who moved from regional Victoria to study at the Australian National University in Canberra suggested that the transition becomes easier over time. Both students described to the Committee their initial experiences of homesickness and considering a return to Victoria. After this difficult period of adjustment, however, they had made new friends and become aware of the support available.<sup>1078</sup> One noted that 'if you can last the first bit, then you are okay'.<sup>1079</sup>

---

<sup>1068</sup> Mr P. Brown, Executive Officer, Country Education Project, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 27.

<sup>1069</sup> Ms C. Timpano, Student, Bendigo Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 27; Ms D. Howcroft, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 62; Mr M. Goldsworthy, Acting Principal, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 2.

<sup>1070</sup> The University of Melbourne, Written Submission, March 2008, 6.

<sup>1071</sup> Supplementary information provided by RMIT University, March 2009; Tanya Kantanis, 'The role of social transition in students' adjustment to the first year of university,' *Journal of Institutional Research* 9, no. 1 (2000): 102–103.

<sup>1072</sup> Mr T. Ballard, Recent School Leaver, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 11; Mr K. Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 46–47; Ms M. Levy, VCE Graduate 2008 and Sport and Recreation Trainee, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 6.

<sup>1073</sup> Frankston Learning City Stakeholder Network, Written Submission, March 2008, 3; Mr G. and Mrs L. Code, Parents, Aberfeldy, Written Submission, May 2008, 1–2; Mr J. Ireland, Coordinator, School Focused Youth Service, Gippsland Lakes Community Health, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 18; The University of Melbourne, Written Submission, March 2008, 6.

<sup>1074</sup> The University of Melbourne, Written Submission, March 2008, 6.

<sup>1075</sup> Southern Grampians Youth Network, Written Submission, April 2008, 2; South West Association of Post Primary Principals, Written Submission, April 2008, 7; Rural City of Wangaratta, Written Submission, May 2008, 3; Mr G. Fryatt, Chairman, Education Committee, Victorian Farmers' Federation, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 34; Bendigo Senior Secondary College, Written Submission, March 2008, 5; Ms H. Rawlings, Bairnsdale, Written Submission, March 2008, 1; Mallee Family Care, Written Submission, March 2008, 12; Mrs V. Draper, Parent, Eildon, Written Submission, May 2008, 1; Ms H. Sobey, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 65.

<sup>1076</sup> The University of Melbourne, Written Submission, March 2008, 6.

<sup>1077</sup> Mr B. Baker, Convener and Member, South West Regional Youth Affairs Network, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 11.

<sup>1078</sup> Ms K. Lam and Ms K. Ottrey, Representatives, Australian National University Students' Association, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 27.

<sup>1079</sup> Ms K. Ottrey, Representative, Australian National University Students' Association, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 27.



## The impact of transition experiences on retention and completion rates

Although there is considerable evidence to suggest that the transition to university can be more complex for students from regional and remote areas, and for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, research and data indicate that geographical differences in participation in higher education largely come into play before the transition to university. Once enrolled, students from regional Victoria and from low socioeconomic status backgrounds tend to experience broadly comparable success in their studies. As discussed in Chapter 2, differences between the completion rates of Australian higher education students from regional and urban areas appear to be small. Similarly, differences in retention and completion rates by socioeconomic status are slight.

The experiences of low and middle socioeconomic status students from more remote areas are an important exception to this pattern. Although their academic performance is roughly equivalent to their peers, the retention rate for students from remote areas is between seven and ten percentage points lower than urban students.<sup>1080</sup> Inquiry participants suggested that difficulty adjusting to the metropolitan environment and disconnection from strong social networks may help to explain this disparity. However, the Committee found that there is a lack of research which specifically addresses the causes of lower retention and completion for students from remote areas. This is an issue requiring further research which may help universities, schools and governments to devise appropriate strategies to support students from remote areas through to completion of their higher education course.

---

## Accommodation

---

The importance of accommodation was a particularly strong theme in evidence about factors that may impact on students' success at university. As one student from Benalla explained, access to suitable accommodation can contribute to students' overall state of mind during the transition to university:

I think you want to find somewhere that you feel really, really comfortable in that you really like so that that can help you when you go onto your higher education, which can be quite stressful. It's nice to have somewhere you feel happy living in, studying in and relaxing and you feel safe in.<sup>1081</sup>

The Committee heard that securing suitable accommodation, particularly university-run on-campus accommodation, is a foremost concern for many students when planning to relocate for study. Despite this, the Committee heard that some students have difficulty accessing appropriate accommodation.

## Types of accommodation

In Victoria, higher education students have a range of accommodation options. Like other individuals, students can seek private rental accommodation, either alone or in shared rental housing. Homestay accommodation, where a student boards in a private household, is another option. Students also have access to accommodation designed specifically for students.

---

<sup>1080</sup> Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, for Universities Australia, *Participation and Equity: A review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people* (Melbourne: CSHE, 2008), 38.

<sup>1081</sup> Mr P. Marple, School Captain, Benalla College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 13.

Most Victorian universities own and operate some on-campus student accommodation. University-run student accommodation is usually in colleges or halls of residence, although some universities offer flat or house-style accommodation located on or near campus. Sometimes, colleges and halls of residence are privately owned and operated, but are affiliated with a particular university. Private companies also own and operate a range of student accommodation facilities, located close to universities and in Melbourne's inner city. These facilities generally take the form of large complexes of self-contained and furnished apartments. Finally, some not-for-profit organisations also operate student accommodation, although provision appears to be very limited.

### **Benefits of on-campus accommodation**

Many inquiry participants were of the view that on-campus student accommodation during the first year of study is a useful 'stepping stone' to university and to independence. While the level of support and services vary between different types of accommodation, students living on campus typically have access to greater academic and social support, including programs such as mentoring or study groups. Students living in on-campus accommodation also have fewer household responsibilities in terms of budgeting, cleaning and meal preparation.

Social engagement is another critical aspect of on-campus living. At many residential colleges, extensive orientation activities provide opportunities for new students to form friendships and develop a sense of community. Frequently, established students are paid to act as assistants, offering advice and support to enable a successful transition. Mr Waseem Awan, Manager of On-Campus Accommodation at Monash University's Gippsland campus, told the Committee that social outcomes are better for students living on campus.<sup>1082</sup> The University of Melbourne's 2007 Melbourne Experience Survey also found that students living on campus had a greater sense of belonging within the university than other students.<sup>1083</sup>

### ***Academic outcomes for students living on campus***

The Committee found evidence supporting the perception that living on campus may impact positively on students' success. Deakin University's internal studies show that students living on campus have experienced better academic results.<sup>1084</sup> Similarly, the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement, a large scale survey to assess students' experiences of conditions and activities that support high quality learning, has also indicated some benefits from on-campus accommodation. The 2007 survey found that students living on campus experienced a more supportive learning environment and more interactions with teachers than students living off campus.<sup>1085</sup> Figures provided by Monash Residential Services also show that students at the university who live on campus have a consistently higher pass rate when compared to other students (refer Table 8.1).

---

<sup>1082</sup> Mr W. Awan, Manager, On-Campus Accommodation, Monash Residential Services, Gippsland, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 60–61.

<sup>1083</sup> Supplementary information provided by the University of Melbourne, March 2009.

<sup>1084</sup> Mr J. Temple, Manager, Personal Support and Residences, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 48.

<sup>1085</sup> Australian Council for Educational Research, *Attracting, Engaging and Retaining: New Conversations About Learning: Australasian Student Engagement Report, Australasian Survey of Student Engagement* (Camberwell: ACER, 2008), 15, 18.

Table 8.1: Student Progress Units ratios for Monash University domestic students, by living situation (2001 to 2006)

Living situation	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Living in MRS managed on-site accommodation	0.86	0.92	0.93	0.92	0.94	0.95
Not living in MRS managed on-site accommodation	0.83	0.86	0.86	0.87	0.87	0.89

Note: The Student Progress Units (SPU) ratio is the ratio of load successfully completed by the student to the total assessed student load by the student. SPU ratios in the table were prepared by Monash University Statistical Services, using data from the profiles of students living at the Clayton residential complex. Other Monash Residential Services sites have too small a residential population to be included in the analysis.

Source: Monash Residential Services, Written Submission, May 2008, 3 (adapted).

At the same time, Mr John Devereaux, Director, Division of Student Life, Deakin University, noted that there is a lack of 'authoritative' Australian or international research regarding the impacts of on-campus accommodation.<sup>1086</sup> The Committee agrees that the better academic outcomes on the part of students living on campus should be interpreted with some caution, given that a students' prior academic achievement is often part of the selection criteria for on-campus accommodation places. Nevertheless, it appears likely that the supportive and social environment in most residential colleges contributes to student retention and success.

### *Benefits for rural and regional students*

Due to the additional support and social opportunities available, many young people, parents and school representatives argued that on-campus accommodation is ideal for most rural and regional students. The opportunity to live on campus may be even more important for those students who do not relocate with existing friends, or who lack prior support networks (such as extended family) in their new location.<sup>1087</sup> Professor Ross Chambers, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic, Charles Sturt University, told the Committee that making on-campus accommodation available to first year students is 'the most important thing' that the university does to support students living away from home.<sup>1088</sup> The Committee believes that ideally, all students from rural areas should be able to access on-campus student accommodation during their first year of study.

The Committee heard that for some prospective students from rural areas, access to on-campus accommodation is a deciding factor in choosing where—and even whether—to study. Ms Kate Ottrey, an Australian National University student originally from regional Victoria, told the Committee that on-campus accommodation was central to her choice of university:

For me, getting a place in a hall or college was the most important thing. If I did not have a place at ANU, I was going to go to Melbourne Uni instead; it was that important. It is really stressed at school, I find, in regional areas, that that is the way to make friends.<sup>1089</sup>

Similarly, one parent reported that his daughter chose to study in Sydney, rather than at a Melbourne-based university, simply because she was offered a place in on-campus

<sup>1086</sup> Mr J. Devereaux, Director, Division of Student Life, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 48.

<sup>1087</sup> Mr J. Ireland, Coordinator, School Focused Youth Service, Gippsland Lakes Community Health, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 20.

<sup>1088</sup> Professor R. Chambers, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic, Charles Sturt University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 43.

<sup>1089</sup> Ms K. Ottrey, Representative, Australian National University Students' Association, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 25.

accommodation.<sup>1090</sup> One Victoria University student also described how being offered a place at the university's Maribyrnong Student Village made a crucial difference to her decision to study.<sup>1091</sup>

While student accommodation offers popular benefits, the Committee heard that the cost of student accommodation currently poses a barrier to access for some students. Ms Sarah Cole, State President, Victorian Branch, National Union of Students, noted that accommodation in halls of residence is an expensive option that is unaffordable for many students.<sup>1092</sup> Participants called for increased provision of affordable, supported and supervised accommodation for young students.<sup>1093</sup> The Committee agrees that there should be a range of student accommodation options to meet different needs and that this should include lower-cost alternatives such as self-catering facilities.

## Access to student accommodation

There is strong demand for on-campus accommodation in Melbourne. In most cases, the number of applications is in excess of the places available. Data provided to the Committee by universities that operate accommodation in metropolitan Melbourne showed that applications tend to exceed available places by between 30 and 300 per cent. For example, in 2008, Deakin University received 572 applications for 200 accommodation places in Melbourne for the following year.<sup>1094</sup> In addition, university-operated student accommodation in Melbourne had 100 per cent occupancy rates in almost all instances.<sup>1095</sup>

There was significant concern among inquiry participants that students from rural areas often miss out on a place in on-campus accommodation,<sup>1096</sup> with a relatively widespread perception that metropolitan students and international students are advantaged in terms of gaining a place.<sup>1097</sup> Some teachers argued that active intervention on the part of teachers, or parental know how about how to maximise the chance of selection is often necessary.<sup>1098</sup> Several participants suggested that universities should prioritise students from rural and regional areas when offering places in high-demand on-campus accommodation.<sup>1099</sup>

---

<sup>1090</sup> Mr M. Wagg, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 64.

<sup>1091</sup> Ms S. Powell, Student, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 38.

<sup>1092</sup> Ms S. Cole, State President, Victorian Branch, National Union of Students, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 21.

<sup>1093</sup> For example, Mr T. Barton, Careers Coordinator, Orbost Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 41; Ms J. Billingsley, School Captain, Benalla College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 4; Mr P. Marple, School Captain, Benalla College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 5; Australian Catholic University, Written Submission, March 2008, 4.

<sup>1094</sup> Supplementary information provided by Deakin University, March 2009.

<sup>1095</sup> Supplementary information provided by Victorian universities, March 2009.

<sup>1096</sup> Mr N. and Mrs W. O'Brien, Parents, Wodonga, Written Submission, April 2008, 2; South West Association of Post Primary Principals, Written Submission, April 2008, 5; Ms C. Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 6; Mr M. Wagg, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 64; Ms A. Dunn, Treasurer, Colac Otway Youth Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 24; Ms M. Barton, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 26; Ms K. Hodge, Later Years Manager, Maffra Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 43.

<sup>1097</sup> South West Association of Post Primary Principals, Written Submission, April 2008, 5; Ms E. Shepherd, Project Officer, Greater Green Triangle Area Consultative Committee, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 37; Mr T. Barton, Careers Coordinator, Orbost Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 41.

<sup>1098</sup> Ms C. Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 6; South West Association of Post Primary Principals, Written Submission, April 2008, 5.

<sup>1099</sup> Catholic College Wodonga, Written Submission, June 2008, 4; Ms C. Torpey, Careers Coordinator, Ouyen Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 6; Mr T. Barton, Careers Coordinator, Orbost Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 41; Ms K. Hodge, Later Years Manager, Maffra Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 43; Ms J. Billingsley and Mr P. Marple, School Captains, Benalla College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Benalla, 3 March 2009, 4-5.

The Committee reviewed selection criteria for places in on-campus accommodation, and found that rurality or distance from the campus forms part of the selection criteria at many, but not all, university owned and operated halls of residence and colleges. Deakin University, Swinburne University of Technology and the University of Ballarat indicated that students relocating from a rural or regional area are given preference, although it is sometimes unclear how heavily this is weighted against other criteria.<sup>1100</sup> Selection criteria at Victoria University do not make reference to rurality or relocation.<sup>1101</sup> Other universities either did not supply information about selection criteria, indicated that they do not operate substantial student accommodation, or stated that there is no specific selection policy for places.<sup>1102</sup>

Some universities supplied data showing the geographical backgrounds of residents in university-operated student accommodation. At those universities for which data was received, students with a regional background substantially outnumber those from the local area, while international students also make up a significant proportion of residents.<sup>1103</sup>

The Committee notes that students from a range of backgrounds may benefit from the academic and social advantages of on-campus accommodation, and that there are a number of considerations that universities must balance in allocating student places. However, the Committee was struck by the particular importance placed on on-campus accommodation by rural and regional students who have no choice but to relocate to study. The Committee believes that universities should, where possible, give priority to students from rural and regional areas when selecting applicants for on-campus accommodation in Melbourne.

At the same time, the Committee also heard that on-campus accommodation does not always live up to high initial expectations, with some parents and teachers sharing examples of students who had negative experiences of on-campus accommodation.<sup>1104</sup> Mr Rob Johnson, Careers Pathways Manager, Swan Hill College, offered a representative anecdote:

She thought staying on campus would be the right decision so that she could make links and start to develop friends and start to fit in. She expected that there would be a lot of regional students on campus because who else is going to want on-campus accommodation? The fact is that when she got down there, that on-campus accommodation is full of people from Melbourne ... All these friendship groups come in together into this on-campus accommodation and the regional student is left isolated, and she is one of the ones who is actually planning to leave at mid-year.<sup>1105</sup>

A common theme running through this and other experiences with on-campus accommodation is the social isolation in the absence of other students with a similar background.

Anecdotes suggest that to some extent, on-campus living may simply replicate and reinforce the minority status of students from rural and regional areas. The Committee notes that this is likely to be true for students from all 'minority' cultures, who may find that on-campus

---

<sup>1100</sup> Supplementary information provided by the Deakin University, Swinburne University of Technology and the University of Ballarat, March 2009.

<sup>1101</sup> Supplementary information provided by Victoria University, March 2009.

<sup>1102</sup> Supplementary information provided by La Trobe University, RMIT University, Monash University and the Australian Catholic University, March 2009.

<sup>1103</sup> Supplementary information provided by Victorian universities, March 2009.

<sup>1104</sup> Ms T. Wilson-Brown, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 24; Ms P. Nunan, Principal, Werrimull P-12 School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 51; Mr R. Johnson, Careers Pathways Manager, Swan Hill College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 18.

<sup>1105</sup> Mr R. Johnson, Careers Pathways Manager, Swan Hill College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 18.

living replicates the dominant culture of the university. The Committee notes that other forms of accommodation, such as boarding with a family or sharing private accommodation with like-minded students, may help students develop a sense of belonging in the university environment.

Participants made suggestions as to how student accommodation could be expanded. The National Union of Students suggested there might be some scope for the integration of student accommodation with public housing initiatives.<sup>1106</sup> Another participant proposed that providing students with accommodation allowances may create an incentive for developers and others to work with universities to build more supported student accommodation.<sup>1107</sup> The Committee believes that there may be a role for the Victorian Government to work with universities and developers to investigate options for the expansion of affordable supported student accommodation for rural and regional students.

---

## **Student services and transition support programs**

---

Universities in Victoria have a range of standard and specialised services and programs designed to support students throughout their studies. The Committee heard that these programs and services can make a genuine difference to students, particularly those from under-represented areas and groups. For example, Professor David Battersby, Vice-Chancellor, University of Ballarat, attributed the high success rate of students with lower Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Ranks (ENTERS) or from disadvantaged backgrounds to the 'immense support' provided by the university in the first 18 months of study.<sup>1108</sup>

Services and programs for universities are likely to become increasingly important as the higher education system expands. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Australian Government is seeking an overall increase in participation in higher education, with a target of 40 per cent attainment of a bachelor degree among 25- to 34-year-olds by 2025. At the same time, the Australian Government hopes to increase the proportion of undergraduate enrolments from low socioeconomic status backgrounds to 20 per cent by 2020. Both of these participation targets are relevant to the Committee's inquiry, as they are unlikely to be met without increased participation among population groups where participation is currently low.

Universities participating in the Committee's inquiry noted that as participation in higher education increases as a result of Australian Government policy changes, institutions will need to provide more of the support services that increase students' chances of success. Mr Chris Sheargold, Associate Vice-Chancellor, Melbourne Campus, Australian Catholic University, observed that expansion of higher education provision will inevitably change the characteristics of the student cohort. Mr Sheargold argued that if greater numbers of students who are less academically prepared for higher education are admitted, universities will require funding to provide greater support.<sup>1109</sup> Professor Elizabeth Harman, Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University, emphasised the high cost to universities of providing

---

<sup>1106</sup> Ms S. Cole, State President, Victorian Branch, National Union of Students, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2008, 21.

<sup>1107</sup> Mr D. Conley, Youth Services Coordinator, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Rosebud, 12 May 2008, 4.

<sup>1108</sup> Professor D. Battersby, Vice-Chancellor, University of Ballarat, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 28.

<sup>1109</sup> Mr C. Sheargold, Associate Vice-Chancellor, Melbourne Campus, Australian Catholic University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 18–19.

student support programs such as English language support and financial assistance for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds.<sup>1110</sup>

The Committee heard the view that those institutions that educate large numbers of students with additional support needs require additional Australian Government funding. Professor Richard Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, argued that funding should reward the universities that are prepared to work with low-income or low-achieving students, arguing that the current funding model instead tends to penalise these institutions:

The penalties are that they are exposed to greater attrition rates, to a weaker reputation. Their resources must be more focused on teaching than research, yet research is the thing that universities are graded on.<sup>1111</sup>

Similarly, Professor Sally Walker, Vice-Chancellor of Deakin University, argued that funding should be provided to those institutions that are 'genuinely and authentically interested in equity and access'.<sup>1112</sup>

The Committee agrees that student support services will need to be expanded and strengthened as participation in higher education increases, if completion rates are to remain stable or improve. The Committee also believes that additional resources will be most effective if they are directed at those institutions where student needs are greatest. The Committee therefore welcomes Australian Government moves to offer a clear financial incentive for universities to enrol more students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. Under the announced changes, universities will be provided with a loading related to the number of such students enrolled. This loading will help universities to provide intensive support to disadvantaged students, with the goal of improving retention and completion rates.<sup>1113</sup>

With these considerations in mind, the Committee considered the types of services and programs currently available to students, and how they meet the needs of different student groups.

### University and student organisation services and strategies

All university students have access to services provided by their university and/or student organisation. These services help to enhance the student experience and to support students through to completion of their studies. The Committee found that in recent years, universities have begun to pay more attention specifically to the experiences of first year students, in an effort to ease the transition to university and to retain students during this critical phase.

---

<sup>1110</sup> Professor E. Harman, Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 3.

<sup>1111</sup> Professor R. Teese, Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 17–18.

<sup>1112</sup> Professor S. Walker, Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 18.

<sup>1113</sup> Australian Government, 'Funding to Support Low SES Participation Targets,' *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheet 2 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 1.

### *Student services*

Universities provide a range of services aimed at enhancing student wellbeing and success. These typically include services that promote health, wellbeing and personal development, such as counselling, chaplaincy, health services and career/employment services. In addition, academic skills units assist students with study, writing, speaking, time management and exam preparation skills. Universities also offer advice or other assistance with regard to finances, housing and childcare, while Indigenous and disability units support specific student groups.

Student organisations have also traditionally had a strong role in supporting the social transition to university through clubs and societies, orientation week activities and other social events. They have also supported students with academic and legal advocacy and welfare, housing, sporting and retail services. These services and activities were seen as crucial by student organisations, universities, peak bodies and others participating in the inquiry. In particular, Mr Tim Beckett, Registrar, Australian National University Student Services, told the Committee that orientation programs are 'exceedingly important' for students, and noted that a study of international students had shown that those who do not attend orientation are more likely to experience transition difficulties.<sup>1114</sup>

Numerous participants, predominantly from the higher education sector, therefore expressed concern about the impact on student services of the *Higher Education Support (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Student Fees) Act 2005*, which removed the right of universities to charge compulsory upfront fees for membership of a student organisation or the provision of non-academic services. Student organisations told the Committee that the reforms had affected their ability to provide essential support services, resulting in price increases and reduced services at a number of Victorian campuses. This was seen as a particular concern at regional campuses, where there are fewer opportunities for economies of scale, and replacement services are not readily available outside of the university.<sup>1115</sup> An Australian Government review of the impact of voluntary student unionism also found that the abolition of upfront compulsory student fees had resulted in a reduction in services and amenities, and that the impact was greatest at small and regional campuses.<sup>1116</sup>

While student organisations have reduced in size or ceased to exist at some universities and campuses, at others, universities have replaced part of the funding lost to student organisations.<sup>1117</sup> Professor Richard Larkins then Vice-Chancellor, Monash University, explained that the university had put money back into student organisations to provide additional services and extra-curricular activities. Professor Larkins added that these services are seen as 'absolutely fundamental' to the university experience.<sup>1118</sup>

---

<sup>1114</sup> Mr T. Beckett, Registrar, Australian National University Student Services, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 19–20.

<sup>1115</sup> National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division), Written Submission, March 2008, 5; Bendigo Student Association, Bendigo Campus, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 4; Deakin University Student Association, Written Submission, April 2008, 4–5.

<sup>1116</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *The Impact of Voluntary Student Unionism on Services, Amenities and Representation for Australian University Students: Summary Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 2.

<sup>1117</sup> Mr M. Gallagher, Executive Director, Group of Eight, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 5; Professor R. Larkins, Chair, Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 24–25.

<sup>1118</sup> Professor R. Larkins, Chair, Universities Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 3 March 2008, 25.



Under changes announced by the Australian Government in late 2008, universities will be allowed to levy a compulsory fee of up to \$250 for student services and amenities from July 2009. Payment of the fee can be deferred, and the prohibition on compulsory student organisation membership will remain.<sup>1119</sup> The Committee welcomes these changes as a means of helping to restore services that support student transitions and success, whether these are provided directly by universities or by student organisations.

### *First year and transition strategies*

In February 2009, the Committee wrote to all Victorian universities requesting specific information on universities' strategies and programs that address the specific transition needs of first year students. Information provided in response to this request indicates that in addition to standard services, many universities have specific transition or first year experience strategies or plans aimed at enhancing the first year experience and the likelihood of successful transition. These strategies may focus both on supporting the social transition through support services and extra-curricular activities, and on supporting the academic transition to higher education studies.

For example, Deakin University has developed a formal student transition program, informed by research and experience. Transition is centrally coordinated and managed by a Transition Team, which draws together representatives from all faculties and administrative areas, while a Transition Advisory Working Party of the Academic Board provides governance in the area of transitions. Transition strategies and programs are integrated into key academic plans such as the Teaching and Learning Plan, Faculty and School Work Plans and professional development programs for teaching staff. The student transition program brings together academic, social and support elements and includes specialised programs for specific target groups. Information and support is provided to students through trained senior student hosts and mentors, presentations, printed materials, online, and at showcase events such as a Student Services Carnival.<sup>1120</sup>

Similarly, at the University of Melbourne, a range of initiatives and activities have been implemented to support the transition of first year students. In addition to standard orientation events, presentations and academic skills support opportunities, the university operates mentor schemes, study groups and first year learning centres. A weblog for first year students is hosted on the university's website. A range of additional opportunities and activities are available to students who have graduated from the university's Kwong Lee Dow Young Scholars Program.<sup>1121</sup> At the beginning of 2009, the University of Melbourne piloted a three-day orientation program specifically for students who face a long commute to campus. Hosted by later year students, the program included two nights in a residential college and a mix of academic and social activities designed to introduce students to university life. The program aims to help students develop a familiarity with university services and the skills to manage university life as a commuter.<sup>1122</sup>

---

<sup>1119</sup> Kate Ellis MP, Australian Government Minister for Youth, 'Rebuilding Student Support Services in Our Universities,' Media Release 3 November 2008, Ministers' Media Centre, Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio, [http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Ellis/Media/Releases/Pages/Article\\_081130\\_112847.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Ellis/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_081130_112847.aspx) (accessed 27 May 2009).

<sup>1120</sup> Supplementary information provided by Deakin University, March 2009.

<sup>1121</sup> The Kwong Lee Dow Young Scholars Program is an academic enrichment program designed to support high-achieving Victorian secondary school students and select secondary school students from the New South Wales and South Australian border. For more information, see <http://www.futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/school/kwongleedow/>.

<sup>1122</sup> Supplementary information provided by the University of Melbourne, March 2009.

The Committee heard that transition initiatives can also be integrated into teaching and curriculum through a wide range of approaches. These include: the development of more responsive first year curriculum; the use of smaller tutorial groups to facilitate social interaction; professional development for academic staff who teach first year students; learning resources; early feedback on work; and supportive approaches to teaching and assessment.<sup>1123</sup> For example, as a part of its Curriculum Renewal project, La Trobe University has identified a need for improvements to first year curriculum. Additionally, the university's Curriculum Taskforce has recommended a review of first year teaching to ensure that it helps students to develop essential academic skills that they will need to successfully complete their studies.<sup>1124</sup>

A number of universities also have mechanisms to gather student feedback that is used in planning for future orientation and transition programs. For example, the University of Melbourne runs a First Year Summit that gives students the opportunity to offer feedback on their experiences as first year students.<sup>1125</sup> Other universities gather feedback on transition experiences through mechanisms such as first year surveys or ongoing online discussion forums.<sup>1126</sup> Information from the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement and the First Year Experience survey also provides universities with information that can be used to inform new strategies and initiatives.<sup>1127</sup>

## Targeting student services and programs

Despite the efforts of universities to enhance the first year experience and provide student services and activities, many inquiry participants felt that the support available to promote successful transition is often insufficient, and that students from rural and remote areas could benefit from more intensive and targeted assistance. Comments from some participants suggest that a perception still exists that students at university are only 'one in a sea of thousands', and that little support is available to them.<sup>1128</sup>

As well as being accessible, the Committee heard that services and programs need to be targeted at those students most likely to benefit from them. Mr John Devereaux, Director, Division of Student Life, Deakin University, told the Committee that a challenge for universities is how to communicate effectively to the student body about the student support services provided.<sup>1129</sup> The Committee heard that some universities have tried to address these issues by identifying commencing students that are likely to benefit from the university's support services. For example, the University of Melbourne indicated that it is moving towards the use of an enrolment questionnaire to identify factors that place students at greater risk of academic difficulties, so that these students can be 'flagged and targeted for active support and assistance' during the transition period.<sup>1130</sup>

---

<sup>1123</sup> Kerri-Lee Krause, 'Transition to and through the first year: strategies to enhance the student experience' (keynote presentation to the Inaugural Vice-Chancellor's Learning and Teaching Colloquium 2006, University of the Sunshine Coast, Sippy Downs, 31 May 2006); Supplementary information provided by Deakin University and the University of Ballarat, March 2009.

<sup>1124</sup> Supplementary information provided by La Trobe University, March 2009.

<sup>1125</sup> Supplementary information provided by the University of Melbourne, March 2009.

<sup>1126</sup> Supplementary information provided by the University of Ballarat and the Australian Catholic University, March 2009.

<sup>1127</sup> Supplementary information provided by La Trobe University, March 2009.

<sup>1128</sup> Ms S. Monahu, Careers Officer, Bairnsdale Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 38; Equity and Access Unit, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 10; Ms H. Sobey, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 65.

<sup>1129</sup> Mr J. Devereaux, Director, Division of Student Life, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 49.

<sup>1130</sup> The University of Melbourne, Written Submission, March 2008, 7.

Whilst in Canada, the Committee heard from the University of Quebec about similar initiatives in its Outcome Improvement Centre. The Centre surveys new students and analyses the data to assign a 'likelihood of success' to each student. It then monitors students' progress, referring students to appropriate support services or assisting them to move into a more suitable course where necessary.<sup>1131</sup>

In addition to more closely targeting mainstream services to students with the greatest needs, universities and others can provide programs that address specific issues for target groups. The Committee heard about three types of targeted program: mentoring, pre-university transition initiatives, and activities that involve parents in supporting the move to higher education.

### *Mentoring*

Several participants suggested that students who have relocated for university should have access to personal support through mentoring or similar programs.<sup>1132</sup> The Committee received evidence about several mentoring initiatives at Victorian and interstate universities.<sup>1133</sup> The purpose of such programs is to support the transition of students to university by providing information and guidance as well as an avenue for social networking.

Typically, mentoring programs offer the opportunity for first year students to be linked with a later year student mentor, often from the same area of study. Approximately once per week for the first six to eight weeks of semester, small student groups meet with their mentor. These meetings may involve planned activities, or may simply offer an opportunity for informal discussion. The role of the mentor is to provide general advice on the transition process and on the services offered by the university. Mentors receive training in group dynamics, communication skills and university services and referral. Their participation is generally on a volunteer basis, although mentors in some programs are paid. Some mentoring programs target specific cohorts of first year students, including those from rural areas and interstate.

Mentoring programs may also be community-based rather than specific to a particular university. One exemplary program that came to the Committee's attention was Mallee Family Care's Chances for Children scholarship program, which is targeted specifically at regional students from Victoria's north-west. Chances for Children offers scholarship recipients the opportunity to be individually matched with a screened and trained volunteer mentor who provides support during the process of transition to university and to independent living in the metropolitan environment.<sup>1134</sup> In Melbourne, mentoring takes place through a partnership with Ernst & Young, while mentors in other locations are identified through word-of-mouth.<sup>1135</sup>

---

<sup>1131</sup> Meeting with representatives of the University of Quebec, Quebec, 3 September 2008.

<sup>1132</sup> National Rural Health Alliance, Written Submission, February 2008, 6; South West Association of Post Primary Principals, Written Submission, April 2008, 8; North Central LLEN, Written Submission, May 2008, 8; Mrs J. Boyle, Principal, Mortlake P-12 College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 32; Ms S. Monahu, Careers Officer, Bairnsdale Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 38.

<sup>1133</sup> Mr T. Beckett, Registrar, Australian National University Student Services, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 19-20; University of Ballarat, Written Submission, March 2008, 3; Mr M. Gallagher, Executive Director, Group of Eight, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Canberra, 17 June 2008, 5.

<sup>1134</sup> Chances for Children, 'Mentoring,' Chances for Children, <http://www.chancesforchildren.com.au/mentor.htm> (accessed 16 July 2009).

<sup>1135</sup> Ms F. Harley, Manager, Chances for Children, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 27.

The success of Chances for Children was acknowledged by some participants in the inquiry.<sup>1136</sup> One recipient of a Chances for Children scholarship told the Committee that mentoring provides a vital support for rural students making the difficult transition from school to higher education.<sup>1137</sup> A 2007 evaluation confirmed that a substantial majority of mentees participating in the program were supportive and enthusiastic about its benefits.<sup>1138</sup> The Committee commends Mallee Family Care on this innovative program, and suggests that it may provide a useful model for other groups interested in supporting transitions for students from their local area.

### *Pre-university transition initiatives*

Some participants suggested that initiatives to prepare rural and regional students for university before they enrol have the potential to ease transition difficulties for this group, as well as to build aspirations and confidence. For example, the Rural Education Forum Australia proposed the development of a country-city twinning program to provide opportunities for rural students to form sustained relationships with students in large city-based or regional schools who are aiming to enter higher education. The program would involve students in both onsite and ICT-based activities from year 9 onwards. The Forum suggested that such an approach may help to build an active interest in higher education pathways for a greater number of rural students, as well as immersing them in a wider network of university oriented peers.<sup>1139</sup>

The Committee also heard that similar activities, although on a smaller scale, have already been initiated by some schools. In recognition of the importance of social networks to successful transition, some schools in regional Victoria have worked together with their Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) to arrange social gatherings for secondary students who will be relocating for study.<sup>1140</sup> Similarly, two leaders from remote schools suggested that there may be potential to make greater use of videoconferencing and information and communications technologies to form social connections between students from regional areas.<sup>1141</sup>

It was also suggested that university-bound students from rural areas could benefit from increased opportunities to visit and gain familiarity with metropolitan environments.<sup>1142</sup> This may include assistance in locating and connecting with services and social networks in their new location, such as sporting clubs and accommodation providers, either through a brokerage model or by transition support workers.<sup>1143</sup> The Committee agrees that such programs may help relieve the isolation of students from small schools, and enable them to develop the familiarity and connections that have the potential to ease future transitions.

---

<sup>1136</sup> Ms J. Crealy, Coordinator, Reconnect Program, Gippsland Lakes Community Health, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 19–20; Cr V. Knight, Deputy Mayor, Mildura Rural City Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 31.

<sup>1137</sup> Ms C. Timpano, Student, Bendigo Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 27–28.

<sup>1138</sup> Daniel Edwards, *Chances for Children Mentor Program Process Evaluation Report* (Melbourne: Centre for Population and Urban Research, Monash University, 2007).

<sup>1139</sup> Rural Education Forum Australia, Written Submission, April 2008, 4–5.

<sup>1140</sup> Equity and Access Unit, La Trobe University, Written Submission, April 2008, 10.

<sup>1141</sup> Mrs H. Thiele, Principal, Murrayville Community College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Ouyen, 3 June 2008, 50; Mr R. Boucher, Principal, Swifts Creek Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 32.

<sup>1142</sup> Ms M. Barton, Parent, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008, 29; South West Association of Post Primary Principals, Written Submission, April 2008, 8–9.

<sup>1143</sup> Ms L. Bartlett, Regional Youth Affairs Consultant, Barwon Adolescent Task Force, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 38–40; Mr P. Brown, Executive Officer, Country Education Project, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 February 2008, 27.

The Committee was also advised about university transition initiatives during its international investigations. In Scotland, Ms Margaret Dundas, National Coordinator for Widening Participation, explained the role of the Scottish Wider Access Regional Forums, of which all colleges and higher education institutions in Scotland are a member. The purpose of the four regional forums is to advance the nation's wider access and participation agenda through a wide range of aspiration-raising and transition support projects.<sup>1144</sup>

For example, the West Forum's On Track Project was established in 2002 to support those students who are about to make, or who are considering making, the transition from college to degree level study at a higher education institution. On Track supports these students through a 10-hour study skills program aimed at: providing an insight to what degree level study involves; improving existing skills and equipping students with additional skills; boosting the confidence of students in their own abilities; and helping students to make a smoother transition into degree level study. The Committee heard the program works best when delivered by a postgraduate tutor working alongside an undergraduate mentor, particularly where the mentor and/or tutor are undertaking study in a discipline of interest to participants.<sup>1145</sup>

The experiences of the Scottish Wider Access Regional Forums hold a variety of lessons for policymakers in terms of working more effectively with people of certain age groups, genders or backgrounds. For example, they have found that sport is often a good way of engaging males of all ages, while programs with a focus on developing generic skills tend to be less attractive to males than to females. In general, the most effective approach in transition support programs in Scotland to date has been to deliver the program through a specific subject area.<sup>1146</sup>

### *Involving parents*

The Committee heard that increasing family support can be an important part of transition initiatives for higher education students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, particularly those who are first in their family to attend university. In Scotland, the Committee was advised that while involving parents in initiatives is very important, it is not an easy task, especially where young people exert their independence.<sup>1147</sup> It is also likely to be difficult to engage parents in the university transition if they have not experienced higher education themselves, or if they have prior negative experiences in the education system. The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation also emphasised to the Committee the importance of involving parents, particularly those of 'first-in-family' students who may not have the mentoring skills required to assist their child in the transition to higher education.<sup>1148</sup>

One innovative transition initiative that came to the Committee's attention is the Parent Information Program at Victoria University, which gives parents an opportunity to visit the university and learn about higher education and the transition process. Parents in the program listen to presentations, receive written materials and have the opportunity to talk informally with university staff. Topics covered include: administrative and practical matters; available support services; student finances; time management; the importance of social and recreational activities; and the ways in which parents can assist their children while

---

<sup>1144</sup> Meeting with Ms M. Dundas, National Coordinator for Widening Participation, Scottish Wider Access Regional Forums, Edinburgh, 29 August 2008.

<sup>1145</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1146</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1147</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1148</sup> Meeting with representatives of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Montreal, 2 September 2008.

studying.<sup>1149</sup> Evaluation feedback suggests that the program is considered useful by participants, and answers most parents' questions about higher education.<sup>1150</sup> According to evaluation feedback, approximately 80 per cent of participants in the program are parents of a student who is the first in their family to attend university, with most coming from Melbourne's west and outer west, as well as regional Victoria.<sup>1151</sup>

The Committee heard that Deakin University and the University of Ballarat also produce information resources for parents, particularly targeting those with little or no family experience of higher education.<sup>1152</sup> The Committee believes that initiatives to help engage parents in their children's education are likely to promote successful transition for some students, and therefore encourages universities to maintain and expand such initiatives.

---

## Conclusion and recommendations

---

Throughout the inquiry, the Committee heard from students, parents and others about the transition to higher education. In particular, the Committee heard that additional challenges often confront higher education students from rural and regional areas and low socioeconomic status backgrounds. At the same time, evidence about the completion rates of these students, while mixed, suggests that they experience comparable success in their studies. The Committee believes that the weight of attention and effort must therefore be focused on building achievement, aspirations and access to higher education. Students from remote areas with low and medium socioeconomic status backgrounds appear to be an important exception, and the Committee believes that further work may be needed in this area.

Nonetheless, the comparable success of rural and low socioeconomic status students does not imply that programs and services that support students' retention and success are not important. As participation in higher education by under-represented groups increases, it will be important for universities to sustain and enhance the supports that help students to be successful in their studies. Throughout the inquiry, the Committee identified various programs that may offer valuable support to these students, including university student services, mentoring programs, pre-transition programs and initiatives that involve parents in supporting transition. Programs such as these should continue to be developed and strengthened, and integrated with broader aspiration-raising initiatives.

The Committee also received a great deal of evidence that access to appropriate and affordable student accommodation is seen as critical for students commencing and completing higher education. Given the current challenges many students face in accessing suitable accommodation, the Committee believes that the Victorian Government should work with other stakeholders to evaluate the current availability and potential expansion of supported student accommodation in Melbourne.

---

<sup>1149</sup> Ms M. Weiss, Student Counsellor, Counselling Service, Parent Information Program, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 31.

<sup>1150</sup> Ms J. Halat, Acting Manager, Parent Information Program, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Sunshine, 12 August 2008, 32.

<sup>1151</sup> *ibid.*, 31.

<sup>1152</sup> Supplementary information provided by Deakin University, March 2009.

## Recommendations

- 8.1 That the Victorian Government work with higher education providers, other levels of government, and developers to evaluate the current availability and potential further development of affordable supported student accommodation in Melbourne for rural and regional students.
- 8.2 That the Victorian Government work with universities and other stakeholders to strengthen support to students making the transition to university, by:
- assisting small rural and remote schools to provide students with opportunities to visit metropolitan environments and meet peers from other areas as part of a country-city twinning program;
  - examining the causes of lower course completion rates among higher education students from remote areas, and developing options for additional support; and
  - facilitating the development of further targeted support programs reflecting best practice, including mentoring programs, pre-university transition initiatives and activities that involve parents in transition support.





# Indigenous students

---

Everyone says Indigenous students need flexibility. Indigenous students want the bar raised. They want structure, good support systems, high-level materials, excellent teachers and a partnership with the community. You put that in place, and the successes are there.<sup>1153</sup>

---

Indigenous Australians are the group most under-represented in higher education. The lower participation of Indigenous people in higher education is due in part to factors that have already been discussed in this report. Indigenous Australians make up less than one per cent of the total Victorian population.<sup>1154</sup> However, like Indigenous people across Australia, Indigenous Victorians are more likely to come from a low socioeconomic status background, have low achievement at school, and many live in non-metropolitan areas. In addition, the Committee heard that specific cultural needs should be considered by policymakers when developing strategies aimed at raising the level of participation in higher education among Indigenous communities.

The experience of Indigenous students was an important focus for the inquiry, in the context of the Victorian Government's overarching Indigenous policy framework, *Improving the Lives of Indigenous Victorians*. The framework, being implemented by the Victorian Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs, focuses on six areas of action, one of which is to improve year 12 or equivalent completion rates and develop pathways to further education, training and employment.<sup>1155</sup> The framework is consistent with the six targets set by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) for closing the gaps in outcomes for Indigenous people under the National Indigenous Reform Agreement. As outlined in a recent Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision report, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2009*, COAG has a range of targets and headline indicators reflecting the importance of education and training. Of most relevance to the inquiry, these include increasing school retention, achievement and year 12 attainment, and improving participation in post-secondary education.<sup>1156</sup>

---

<sup>1153</sup> Ms S. Rice, Director, Centre for Engagement in Vocational Learning, TAFE Division, Swinburne University of Technology, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 22.

<sup>1154</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Indigenous Status by Age by Sex,' table, *2006 Census of Population and Housing: Victoria (State)*, Cat. no. 2068.0 (Canberra: ABS, 2007).

<sup>1155</sup> Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, *Improving the lives of Indigenous Victorians: Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework* (Melbourne: Department for Victorian Communities, 2006), 4.

<sup>1156</sup> Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2009* (Canberra: Productivity Commission, 2009).

## Context of participation in higher education by Indigenous students

---

According to the 2006 Australian Census, there are around 33,000 Indigenous people living in Victoria.<sup>1157</sup> The state has around 30 distinct Indigenous communities, which are based around location, language and cultural groups, and extended familial networks.<sup>1158</sup> Almost half of all Indigenous Victorians live outside Melbourne.<sup>1159</sup> While Victoria's broader population is ageing, its Indigenous population is young; more than half of all Indigenous Victorians are aged under 25 and more than a third are aged under 15.<sup>1160</sup> There are six Local Government Areas with over 600 Indigenous young people aged 0 to 24 years: City of Greater Shepparton; Mildura Rural City; City of Greater Geelong; City of Casey; Shire of East Gippsland; and City of Greater Bendigo.<sup>1161</sup>

Statistics show significant gaps between Victorian Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in a variety of social indicators, such as health, crime and employment.<sup>1162</sup> According to the 2006 Census, the unemployment rate for Indigenous persons (aged 15 to 64) was 13.0 per cent in metropolitan Melbourne and 19.1 per cent in regional Victoria. The corresponding figures for the overall population were 5.4 per cent and 5.7 per cent, respectively.<sup>1163</sup> Indigenous Victorians are also over-represented in low-income Victorian households, with most Indigenous Victorian households living on incomes in the lowest and second lowest quintiles.<sup>1164</sup> In addition, there are significant differences in family structure between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Nearly 40 per cent of Indigenous families are sole parent families, compared with 15 per cent of non-Indigenous families,<sup>1165</sup> and extended family members are often closely involved in the care of Indigenous children.<sup>1166</sup>

Indigenous Australians are less likely to participate in higher education than their non-Indigenous peers. National and state statistics show significantly lower rates for Indigenous Australians at all stages of participation, including enrolment, retention and completion.<sup>1167</sup> In part, this arises from lower levels of educational achievement among Indigenous students generally. The highest level of education achieved for many Indigenous Victorians is year 9 or below, and less than a quarter of Indigenous Victorians have completed year 12, compared with almost half of other Victorians.<sup>1168</sup> Lower average attainment and achievement have prompted a range of government interventions at the

---

<sup>1157</sup> Department of Planning and Community Development (Victoria), *Victorian Government Indigenous Affairs Report 2007/08* (Melbourne: DPCD, 2009), 7.

<sup>1158</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1159</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1160</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1161</sup> Department of Planning and Community Development (Victoria), *Indigenous Data Mapping – Census 2006*, (Melbourne: DPCD, 2009).

<sup>1162</sup> Department of Planning and Community Development (Victoria), *Victorian Government Indigenous Affairs Report 2007/08* (Melbourne: DPCD, 2009), 8–10.

<sup>1163</sup> Department of Planning and Community Development (Victoria), *Indigenous Data Mapping – Census 2006*, (Melbourne: DPCD, 2009).

<sup>1164</sup> Department of Planning and Community Development (Victoria), *Victorian Government Indigenous Affairs Report 2007/08* (Melbourne: DPCD, 2009), 7.

<sup>1165</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1166</sup> Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria, 'Indigenous Housing Report,' AHBV, <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~ahbv/homelessnessreport/report3.htm> (accessed 3 July 2009).

<sup>1167</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Selected Higher Education Statistics* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008).

<sup>1168</sup> Department of Planning and Community Development (Victoria), *Victorian Government Indigenous Affairs Report 2007/08* (Melbourne: DPCD, 2009), 9.

state and national level to help raise the educational achievement of Indigenous Australians, including raising participation rates of Indigenous students in higher education.

At the same time, the Committee is conscious of the differences within the Indigenous population, and notes that average figures should not be generalised to reflect the Indigenous population as a whole. A recent paper published by the Centre for Independent Studies commented that generalised data relating to the Indigenous community can often underestimate the level of disadvantage experienced by some groups, while failing to recognise the achievements of others.<sup>1169</sup> The paper suggested that Indigenous data should differentiate between factors such as urban and rural background, parents' employment status and language background, to present a more accurate picture of Indigenous educational achievement.<sup>1170</sup>

The Committee acknowledges that efforts to improve higher education participation rates for Indigenous Victorians must take into account a range of contextual factors. Different approaches will be needed for different communities and individuals in urban, outer urban, regional and rural areas. With these considerations in mind, the Committee examined issues associated with participation in higher education among Indigenous communities.

### Indigenous enrolments in higher education

A 2008 report by Universities Australia noted that Indigenous people participate in higher education at less than half the rate they would if parity existed with non-Indigenous people.<sup>1171</sup> While the Indigenous population constitutes around 2.4 per cent of the Australian population, in 2006, Indigenous students comprised only 1.25 per cent of the higher education student population.<sup>1172</sup> The participation share of Indigenous students has remained at a consistent level over the period 2001 to 2006. Universities Australia noted that this persistent under-representation occurred during a period in which there were at least three factors that might have increased the rate of access: the increase in the Indigenous population overall; the increase in secondary school participation among Indigenous young people; and the higher proportion of young people in the Indigenous population than in the non-Indigenous population.<sup>1173</sup>

In 2007, there were 9,370 Indigenous students enrolled in Australian universities,<sup>1174</sup> with just over 1,000 enrolled in Victorian institutions. Deakin University had by far the greatest number of enrolments (443), followed by the University of Melbourne (181), Monash University (117) and La Trobe University (88).

The majority (62.0%) of Indigenous students at Victorian institutions identify their home address as in a metropolitan area, with 30.0 per cent having a home address in a provincial

---

<sup>1169</sup> Joe Lane, *Indigenous Participation in University Education* (St Leonards, New South Wales: The Centre for Independent Studies, 2009), 9.

<sup>1170</sup> *ibid.*, 3.

<sup>1171</sup> Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, for Universities Australia, *Participation and Equity: A review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people* (Melbourne: CSHE, 2008), 43.

<sup>1172</sup> Mr T. Greer, Group Manager, Indigenous Education Group, Meeting with representatives of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra, 17 June 2008.

<sup>1173</sup> Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, for Universities Australia, *Participation and Equity: A review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people* (Melbourne: CSHE, 2008), 44.

<sup>1174</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Selected Higher Education Statistics* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008).

location, and just over 7.0 per cent in remote and very remote locations.<sup>1175</sup> With government statistics showing that only around a half of Victoria's Indigenous population live in metropolitan areas, it seems that metropolitan Indigenous people are over-represented in higher education compared to their rural and regional counterparts.

Australia-wide, there has been a substantive change in the enrolment pattern of commencing Indigenous students over the past decade. Historically, Indigenous university entrants tended to enrol under special entry conditions, many in sub-degree courses. As shown in Table 9.1, there was a large increase in Indigenous enrolments in degree and postgraduate courses in Australia over the ten years to 2007, coinciding with a large decrease in Indigenous enrolments in sub-degree courses. In 2007, 76.4 per cent of Indigenous students were enrolled in degree level courses, 16.5 per cent were enrolled in postgraduate programs and 7.0 per cent were enrolled in enabling or other non-award courses.

Table 9.1: Indigenous enrolments in Australian higher education, by award level (1997 to 2007)

Year	Sub-degree	Degree	Postgraduate	Total
1997	1,411	3,863	723	5,997
1998	1,357	4,095	791	6,243
1999	1,419	4,351	765	6,535
2000	1,098	4,500	675	6,273
2001	1,068	4,630	716	6,414
2002	947	5,449	1,029	7,425
2003	986	5,664	1,079	7,729
2004	867	5,780	1,224	7,871
2005	647	5,697	1,158	7,502
2006	573	6,050	1,286	7,909
2007	588	6,408	1,390	8,386

Source: Derived from Australian Government Higher Education Statistics and published in Joe Lane, *Indigenous Participation in University Education* (St Leonards, New South Wales: The Centre for Independent Studies, 2009), 5.

Higher education statistics show that Indigenous students Australia-wide are enrolled predominantly in three key disciplines: Society and Culture (33.7%), Education (21.2%) and Health (16.5%).<sup>1176</sup> However, Indigenous students have been moving into more specialised and skill-intensive components within disciplines, and therefore into a wider range of occupations.<sup>1177</sup> For example, 'health' graduates are no longer only nurses but also doctors, podiatrists, physiotherapists, radiologists and pharmacists. Indigenous students are also slowly increasing their numbers in disciplines requiring mathematics and science, notably accounting, natural sciences, architecture and engineering.<sup>1178</sup>

Participation in higher education by Indigenous students is highly gender-biased. In 2007, Indigenous males accounted for only 34.7 per cent of Indigenous higher education students

<sup>1175</sup> Mr T. Greer, Group Manager, Indigenous Education Group, Meeting with representatives of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra, 17 June 2008.

<sup>1176</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Selected Higher Education Statistics* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008).

<sup>1177</sup> Joe Lane, *Indigenous Participation in University Education* (St Leonards, New South Wales: The Centre for Independent Studies, 2009), 6.

<sup>1178</sup> *ibid.*, 7.

in Victoria (and 33.8% nationally),<sup>1179</sup> despite constituting nearly half (48.9%) of the total Victorian Indigenous population.<sup>1180</sup> A recent paper published by the Centre for Independent Studies commented on some of the potential causes of the gender imbalance in higher education participation by Indigenous people Australia-wide:

There are different reasons, however, for the gender imbalance amongst Indigenous university students. Indigenous men are rarely able to follow their fathers into trades or farms or businesses. But Indigenous boys tend to drop out of secondary school earlier and in larger numbers than girls. In welfare-dependent populations, the situation is often even worse, with very few boys completing year 10.

The issue of Indigenous male educational disparities is becoming a critical one. With very poor math skills, Indigenous men tend to shut themselves out of more traditionally male university courses and careers. Careers that are popular with Indigenous female students, such as teaching or nursing, are regarded as female preserves. Because more Indigenous women than men go to university or TAFE, some Indigenous men tend to view these institutions as places for women.<sup>1181</sup>

Indigenous students also have a different age profile compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. In 2006, the average age of a commencing Indigenous undergraduate student in Australia was 29 years, compared to 22 years for other students.<sup>1182</sup> For enabling courses, the average age of commencing Indigenous students was 29 years, and for postgraduate students, the average was 38 years. The corresponding figures for the non-Indigenous population were 27 years and 33 years, respectively.<sup>1183</sup>

### University retention and completion rates among Indigenous students

The 2008 Universities Australia report commented that Indigenous students enrolled in higher education courses throughout Australia have lower apparent retention and completion rates than other students, with first year attrition rates being of particular concern.<sup>1184</sup> The Review of Australian Higher Education has also reported that Indigenous students pass their subjects at a rate 23 per cent below their non-Indigenous peers.<sup>1185</sup> In addition, the retention rate for Indigenous students has been between 19 per cent and 26 per cent below the rate for other students during the last six years.<sup>1186</sup> Universities Australia reports that the nationwide university completion rate for Indigenous students remains well below 50 per cent.<sup>1187</sup> Victoria needs to boost Indigenous completion rates by two-and-a-half times to reach parity with the wider community.<sup>1188</sup>

<sup>1179</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Selected Higher Education Statistics* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008).

<sup>1180</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Indigenous Status by Age by Sex,' table, *2006 Census of Population and Housing: Victoria (State)*, Cat. no. 2068.0 (Canberra: ABS, 2007).

<sup>1181</sup> Joe Lane, *Indigenous Participation in University Education* (St Leonards, New South Wales: The Centre for Independent Studies, 2009), 5.

<sup>1182</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2006* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2008), 109.

<sup>1183</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1184</sup> Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, for Universities Australia, *Participation and Equity: A review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people* (Melbourne: CSHE, 2008), 49.

<sup>1185</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 32.

<sup>1186</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2006* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2008), 110.

<sup>1187</sup> Universities Australia, *Advancing Equity and Participation in Australian Higher Education: Action to address participation and equity levels in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people* (Canberra: Universities Australia, 2008), 2.

<sup>1188</sup> Victoria University, 'Co-operation to close the gap in Indigenous higher education,' VU, [http://www.vu.edu.au/About\\_VU/Media\\_Releases/Co-operation\\_to\\_close\\_the\\_gap\\_in\\_Indigenous\\_higher\\_education/index\\_dL\\_94870.aspx](http://www.vu.edu.au/About_VU/Media_Releases/Co-operation_to_close_the_gap_in_Indigenous_higher_education/index_dL_94870.aspx) (accessed 27 May 2009).

Nonetheless, the number of Indigenous graduates Australia-wide is increasing. There has been a 29.3 per cent increase in the total number of course completions by Indigenous students, and a 43.6 per cent increase in bachelor degree completions since 2001.<sup>1189</sup>

Importantly, Indigenous graduates have higher take-up rates into full-time employment than non-Indigenous graduates (85.6% compared to 82.4%, respectively) and the mean starting salary for Indigenous graduates is higher (\$42,575 per annum compared to \$40,636 for non-Indigenous graduates).<sup>1190</sup> The Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council suggests that these outcomes may be partially explained by the mature age of many Indigenous students, the fact that many are in employment while studying, and the extent to which well qualified Indigenous people are sought after for leadership roles.<sup>1191</sup>

## National policy context

The Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council plays an important role in higher education policy for Indigenous people. The Council was established by the Australian Government in 2005 to provide policy advice to the Minister for Education, Science and Training on improving outcomes in higher education for Indigenous students and staff. The vision of the council is for a higher education system in which Indigenous Australians share equally in the life and career opportunities that a university education can provide.<sup>1192</sup>

In moving towards this vision, the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council identifies seven priority areas:

1. Encourage universities to work with schools and TAFE colleges and other registered training organisations to build pathways and raise the levels of aspiration and confidence of Indigenous students.
2. Develop a concerted strategy to improve the level of Indigenous undergraduate enrolment.
3. Improve the level of Indigenous postgraduate enrolment, enhance Indigenous research and increase the number of Indigenous researchers.
4. Improve the rates of success, retention and completion for Indigenous students.
5. Enhance the prominence and status of Indigenous culture, knowledge and studies on campus.
6. Increase the number of Indigenous people working in Australian universities.
7. Improve the participation of Indigenous people in university governance and management.<sup>1193</sup>

The above priorities are consistent with issues and needs identified in evidence to this inquiry.

---

<sup>1189</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2006* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2008), 110.

<sup>1190</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1191</sup> Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, *Improving Indigenous Outcomes and Enhancing Indigenous Culture and Knowledge in Australian Higher Education*, report to the Minister for Education, Science and Training (Canberra: Australian Government, 2006), 21.

<sup>1192</sup> *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>1193</sup> *ibid.*, 3.

The Committee is aware that the Australian Government supports participation in higher education by Indigenous Australians through a range of initiatives. These include programs which aim to support Indigenous higher education students through to degree completion. The Indigenous Support Program provides performance-based funding to higher education institutions for Indigenous services, while students can access direct academic support through the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme.

The Australian Government also offers a number of scholarships that support Indigenous students to participate in higher education, including scholarships offered through the Commonwealth Scholarships Program. The Indigenous Youth Leadership Program also provides scholarships for Indigenous students to attend high-performing schools and universities, while the Indigenous Youth Mobility Program supports Indigenous students from remote areas to relocate for participation in education or training. The Australian Government also supports higher education institutions to meet the costs of mixed-mode delivery through Away from Base funding, and offers Indigenous Staff Scholarships.

The Committee recognises current efforts aimed at improving participation in higher education among Indigenous communities. Many of the themes identified in the national policy context were reiterated in evidence to the inquiry. The Committee supports the recommendation of the Review of Australian Higher Education that the Australian Government, in consultation with the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, regularly review the effectiveness of measures to improve higher education access and outcomes for Indigenous people.<sup>1194</sup>

### The Toorong Marnong Accord

The Committee is also pleased to note recent moves in the Victorian higher education sector to improve participation rates for Indigenous students. The Toorong Marnong Accord (meaning 'joined hands' in the Woiwurrung language of the Wurundjeri people) was signed in December 2008 by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association and the Victorian Vice-Chancellors' Committee.<sup>1195</sup> It commits Victoria's nine universities to a range of collaborative initiatives to boost Indigenous participation in higher education, including joint recruitment and outreach, statewide staff and student networks, and a range of annual awards and conferences.

In a recent article, a spokesperson for the Victorian Vice-Chancellors' Committee announced that the Toorong Marnong Accord signalled a new era of institutional collaboration in meeting the needs of Indigenous students:

Rather than competing for students, the Victorian universities are now working cooperatively to ensure that as many Aboriginal people as possible have the opportunity to study at university ... The accord acknowledges that Indigenous people are the traditional owners of the land upon which our universities are built, that they have a rich history of education, and that we value the integrity and wisdom of our Koorie people. This is a new collective approach that encourages Aboriginal people to come to our universities as students, as members of staff and as representatives of their community.<sup>1196</sup>

---

<sup>1194</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), xxiii.

<sup>1195</sup> Victoria University, 'Co-operation to close the gap in Indigenous higher education,' VU, [http://www.vu.edu.au/About\\_VU/Media\\_Releases/Co-operation\\_to\\_close\\_the\\_gap\\_in\\_Indigenous\\_higher\\_education/index\\_d\\_94870.aspx](http://www.vu.edu.au/About_VU/Media_Releases/Co-operation_to_close_the_gap_in_Indigenous_higher_education/index_d_94870.aspx) (accessed 27 May 2009).

<sup>1196</sup> *ibid.*

The Committee commends the Victorian Vice-Chancellors' Committee on the development of this significant new approach, which provides a genuine opportunity for Victoria to lead the way in collaborative approaches to Indigenous participation in higher education.

---

## School factors influencing Indigenous participation in higher education

---

The Committee heard that along with other students, a number of factors affect the ability of Indigenous students to participate in higher education long before the threshold of enrolment has been reached. Lower school participation and achievement was identified as a significant barrier for Indigenous students. The high number of Indigenous students undertaking vocational rather than academic studies in years 11 and 12 was also identified as a potential issue of concern.

### School retention, engagement and achievement

In the last decade, the population of Koorie people aged between 5 and 19 years grew around 50 per cent to 10,700.<sup>1197</sup> At the same time, the number of Koorie students in Victorian schools rose by 89 per cent, to over 8,500.<sup>1198</sup> The vast majority of Koorie students (89%) are in government schools, of which two thirds have at least one Koorie student. In 2007, however, only 72 schools had 20 or more Koorie students (accounting for 35% of all Koorie students), with 200 having 10 or more.<sup>1199</sup> As noted by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, this pattern of enrolment, one of high dispersion but with pockets of high concentration, creates some unique policy and program challenges.<sup>1200</sup>

The education performance of Indigenous students in Victoria has shown some improvement over time, with quite significant gains in some areas. While Indigenous students in Victoria generally perform better than in other states, they remain substantially behind other students and cohorts with similar socioeconomic profiles.<sup>1201</sup> Their performance against key measures such as participation, attendance, literacy, numeracy, retention and completion remains poor.<sup>1202</sup>

The Committee found that improving school attendance may be the first step in setting Indigenous students on the path to higher education. Koorie students have lower levels of attendance than other students across all year levels. On average, by year 9, Koorie students are absent from school around one day per week.<sup>1203</sup> Ms Kellie Frankland, an Indigenous support worker in the Portland region, indicated that school attendance is a significant challenge in the area, where students may skip a day of school because they do not have enough to eat, and where many are 'not engaged whatsoever' in formal schooling.<sup>1204</sup> Behaviour problems present a further barrier to attendance, with Ms

---

<sup>1197</sup> In Victoria, the term 'Koorie' is often used to identify Victorian Indigenous people. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development uses this terminology to embrace all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Victoria.

<sup>1198</sup> Koorie Education Strategy Branch, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), *Wannik: Learning Together – Journey to Our Future: Education Strategy for Koorie Students* (Melbourne: DEECD, 2008), 8.

<sup>1199</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1200</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1201</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1202</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1203</sup> *ibid.*, 10.

<sup>1204</sup> Ms K. Frankland, Drug and Alcohol and Indigenous Family Violence Worker, Dhauward-Wurrung Elderly and Community Health Service, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 69.



Frankland commenting that in 2007, every Indigenous student in year 7 was suspended within three weeks of the start of the school term.<sup>1205</sup>

Indigenous students are also likely to leave school earlier than their non-Indigenous peers. The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association identified early school leaving as the most significant barrier to participation in higher education for Indigenous students.<sup>1206</sup> Currently, 16.0 per cent of Koorie students leave school between year 9 and 10, 22.0 per cent leave between year 10 and 11, and 41.0 per cent leave between year 11 and 12. The rates for other students are 3.0 per cent, 5.0 per cent and 18.0 per cent, respectively.<sup>1207</sup>

In Victoria, issues surrounding school retention and completion among Koorie students resemble those for other students. However, the Committee heard that retention issues may begin at a younger age for Koorie students, with a number of community representatives commenting that school retention is a significant issue from the middle years onwards.<sup>1208</sup>

Low levels of trans-generational wealth are impacting on disengaged Koorie students, resulting in early school leaving aimed at gaining immediate employment.<sup>1209</sup> Perceptions regarding the relevance of school curriculum to Koorie students are also seen as a key contributor to lower levels of student engagement. Mr Lawrence Moser, Indigenous Community Engagement Broker, Loddon Mallee Region, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, commented that the 'huge gaps' in cultural content in senior secondary curriculum send the message that Indigenous people are the 'forgotten mob'. This can contribute to low self-esteem and, consequently, disengagement among Indigenous students.<sup>1210</sup>

Concomitant with lower levels of engagement in schooling for Indigenous students is the lower level of student achievement. Indigenous achievement at school was a recurring concern in the inquiry, with one Koorie educator describing the underachievement of some children in her region as 'heartbreaking'.<sup>1211</sup> Another participant observed that many Indigenous people, especially in older generations, have English as their second language, which creates additional challenges in English-medium literacy and numeracy acquisition for students from Indigenous communities.<sup>1212</sup>

Lack of access to computers and the internet in the home was also raised as a concern during the Committee's public hearings in Robinvale.<sup>1213</sup> Mr Lawrence Moser, Indigenous Community Engagement Broker, Loddon Mallee Region, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, told the Committee that Swan Hill North Primary School had recently surveyed parents about their interest in purchasing laptops for their children. He advised, however, that the majority of families attending the school would not be able to afford the computers and that this would

<sup>1205</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1206</sup> Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Written Submission, March 2008, 1.

<sup>1207</sup> Koorie Education Strategy Branch, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), *Wannik: Learning Together – Journey to Our Future; Education Strategy for Koorie Students* (Melbourne: DEECD, 2008), 10.

<sup>1208</sup> For example, Mr L. Moser, Indigenous Community Engagement Broker, Loddon Mallee Region, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Department of Planning and Community Development (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 52; Ms K. Frankland, Drug and Alcohol and Indigenous Family Violence Worker, Dhauward-Wurrung Elderly and Community Health Service, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 70.

<sup>1209</sup> Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Written Submission, March 2008, 1.

<sup>1210</sup> Mr L. Moser, Indigenous Community Engagement Broker, Loddon Mallee Region, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Department of Planning and Community Development (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 54.

<sup>1211</sup> Ms S. Connelly, Koorie Educator, Swan Hill North Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 53.

<sup>1212</sup> Mr B. Kennedy, Koorie Liaison Officer, Robinvale Campus, Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 53.

<sup>1213</sup> *ibid.*, 58.

increase the gap between the 'haves and the have nots'.<sup>1214</sup> Ms Sue Connelly, Koorie Educator, Swan Hill North Primary School, stated:

If you look at, say, grade ones now and if you track them to secondary school, if they have not had computers at home it has to show up, they are so far behind. You cannot do your homework unless you have got a computer.<sup>1215</sup>

In its 2006 report on the inquiry into the effects of television and multimedia on education in Victoria, the Committee recommended that the Victorian Government investigate and encourage community education models that facilitate greater student, parent and community access to computer and multimedia resources after school hours. The Committee stated that the particular aim of this recommendation was to help provide more equitable access to computers and the internet for disadvantaged students.<sup>1216</sup> In its response to the Committee's report, the Victorian Government supported this recommendation in principle, pending further consideration.<sup>1217</sup>

The Committee notes that one of the strategies outlined in the Victorian Government's new education strategy for Koorie students (refer below) is to support greater student and community engagement by developing innovative learning tools and programs through the use of technology. The Committee believes that if this strategy is to be successful, the Victorian Government must ensure that Indigenous students have access to relevant technologies both in school and in the home. The Committee therefore believes that the Victorian Government should prioritise the upgrading of information and communications technology (ICT) in schools with large Indigenous populations and implement a program to ensure that all Indigenous school children have access to computers during and after school hours.

The Committee notes that Indigenous students who remain at school are also less likely to successfully complete the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), or to attain the tertiary entrance score required to enter a higher education course. The successful completion rate for the VCE in 2006 was 84.3 per cent for Koorie students, compared to 96.7 per cent for other students.<sup>1218</sup> Additionally, of Indigenous students nationwide who were undertaking an academic senior secondary certificate in 2005, only 12 per cent attained a tertiary entrance or equivalent score that would gain them university entrance, compared to 47 per cent of non-Indigenous students.<sup>1219</sup> Of all students commencing higher education in 2006, the proportion of Indigenous students with a tertiary entrance or equivalent score was 8.6 per cent, compared to 35 per cent for other students.<sup>1220</sup>

Another significant trend in Indigenous schooling is the high number of Indigenous students undertaking vocational rather than academic studies in years 11 and 12. In 2005, only 35 per cent of Indigenous students in government schools Australia-wide undertook year 11 or year 12 studies in a senior secondary qualification that provides a pathway to university,

---

<sup>1214</sup> Mr L. Moser, Indigenous Community Engagement Broker, Loddon Mallee Region, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 58.

<sup>1215</sup> Ms S. Connelly, Koorie Educator, Swan Hill North Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 59.

<sup>1216</sup> Education and Training Committee, Parliament of Victoria, *Education in the Net Age – New Needs & New Tools: Report on the inquiry into the effects of television and multimedia on education in Victoria* (Melbourne: Parliament of Victoria, 2006), 176.

<sup>1217</sup> Victorian Government, *Government Response – Inquiry into the Effects of Television and Multimedia on Education in Victoria* (Melbourne: Victorian Government, 2007), 7.

<sup>1218</sup> Koorie Education Strategy Branch, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), *Wannik: Learning Together – Journey to Our Future: Education Strategy for Koorie Students* (Melbourne: DEECD, 2008), 10.

<sup>1219</sup> Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, *Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education* (Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008), 14.

<sup>1220</sup> *ibid.*

compared to 80 per cent for other students.<sup>1221</sup> While the Committee does not have directly comparable figures for Victoria, the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association stated in its submission that Vocational Education and Training (VET) is a popular choice for Koorie students, and that they are participating in high numbers.<sup>1222</sup> In 2006, 25 per cent of Koorie students undertaking senior secondary schooling were enrolled in the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL).<sup>1223</sup> This suggests that a potential barrier to participation in higher education for some Indigenous students in Victoria is their tendency to pursue vocationally oriented studies, rather than a university oriented school curriculum.

### Wannik—Education Strategy for Koorie Students

During 2007, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development conducted the most comprehensive review of education provision for Indigenous students ever undertaken in Victoria. The review confirmed that the Victorian education system must do better in addressing the disadvantage experienced by many Indigenous students, and give them greater opportunities to succeed in life.<sup>1224</sup> As a result, the department, in close partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, developed a new major education strategy for Koorie students, known as Wannik.

Wannik recognises that an increased level of commitment and action is required from both within and outside the education sector.<sup>1225</sup> It sets out in detail the steps the Victorian Government will take to improve educational outcomes for Koorie children, in conjunction with their parents and the Koorie community. Fundamental to the strategy is the improvement of outcomes for Koorie students across the whole of the government school system.<sup>1226</sup> This will be achieved by:

- Repositioning the education of Koorie students within all government schools through strong leadership that creates a culture of high expectations and individualised learning for Koorie students.
- Underpinning this approach with explicit accountability mechanisms for improvement in outcomes for Koorie students across all levels of the school education system.
- Creating an environment that respects, recognises and celebrates cultural identity through practice and curriculum.
- Reinforcing the responsibility of all government schools to meet the needs of all students, by moving away from strategies designed around inadequacies in the general approach.<sup>1227</sup>

Wannik will support the individual learning needs of Koorie students through: intensive literacy and numeracy programs for low-achieving students; additional support and incentives for top students, to provide encouragement to excel; the development of leadership opportunities for Koorie students in secondary schools; and the celebration of Koorie culture and identity in all schools for all students.<sup>1228</sup>

---

<sup>1221</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1222</sup> Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Written Submission, March 2008, 3.

<sup>1223</sup> Koorie Education Strategy Branch, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), *Wannik: Learning Together – Journey to Our Future; Education Strategy for Koorie Students* (Melbourne: DEECD, 2008), 10.

<sup>1224</sup> *ibid.*, 5.

<sup>1225</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1226</sup> *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>1227</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1228</sup> *ibid.*

As part of the repositioning of the education of Koorie students within the government school system, school leaders and teachers will be given substantial professional support and development to lead reform.<sup>1229</sup> At the same time, the Koorie support workforce, which already plays a vital role in engaging families and supporting Koorie young people in early childhood and through their schooling, will be reformed and expanded.<sup>1230</sup> The strategy includes funding that allows schools and regions to be innovative and responsive to local needs, and to implement proven strategies.<sup>1231</sup>

The Committee sees Wannik as a potential means of improving the level of engagement and achievement among Koorie students, thereby providing the basis for future participation in higher education. It urges the Victorian Government to closely monitor its implementation and outcomes, in consultation with Indigenous communities.

---

## Aspirations

---

The complex and interrelated factors that contribute to young people's education, training and employment aspirations are explored in Chapter 4. These factors, including socioeconomic status, perceptions of affordability and perceptions of achievability are also relevant to Indigenous students. Additionally, the Committee heard that for many Indigenous students, the formation of aspirations towards higher education may be affected by inter-generational disadvantage and underachievement.

The Committee recommended in Chapter 4 that the Victorian Government implement a statewide program aimed at raising aspirations towards higher education among under-represented groups. The Committee believes that this program should include specific strategies aimed at assisting Indigenous students. The Committee notes that the Toornong Marnong Accord presents a significant opportunity for the coordination of relevant aspiration-raising activities developed by the university sector. A range of additional existing initiatives exist (including those developed by TAFE institutes and various community organisations) that could be further developed and expanded as part of a coordinated, statewide approach. Strategies aimed at raising aspirations for higher education among Koorie communities should focus on three key areas: creating a culture of high expectations within Koorie communities; developing and promoting role models and mentoring programs for Koorie students; and improving the quality of career advice, taking account of the specific cultural needs of young Koorie people.

### Creating a culture of high expectations

Perhaps most importantly, raising aspirations among Indigenous young people requires both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to believe that Koorie students can succeed in higher education. The Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne has suggested that low aspirations for higher education among Indigenous communities should not be attributed to an 'undervaluing of education', but to Indigenous students' lack of confidence in their academic ability.<sup>1232</sup> This was supported by the National Rural Health Alliance during the inquiry:

---

<sup>1229</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1230</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1231</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1232</sup> Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, for Universities Australia, *Participation and Equity: A review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people* (Melbourne: CSHE, 2008), 48.

For Indigenous students, self-esteem is a major issue in the decision to pursue further education. Many Aboriginal students are scared of failure because of doubts expressed about Indigenous students' abilities and the history of low Indigenous achievement generally.<sup>1233</sup>

A representative of Swinburne University of Technology described how Indigenous students thrive on challenging, high-level materials, as long as they have the support to build the skills to tackle them.<sup>1234</sup>

The Committee believes that acknowledging, rewarding and celebrating achievements is an important aspect of raising Indigenous students' aspirations, and belief in their ability to succeed. It therefore welcomes the Victorian Government's recently introduced scholarships for high-performing Indigenous school students, aimed at creating a culture of high expectations, and highlighting the contributions these students make to the community.

The Committee heard that it is especially important for Indigenous students that programs to raise aspirations begin well before school-leaving age. The National Rural Health Alliance suggested that universities should begin engaging Indigenous students in year 8, as 'by the time the possibility of higher education is raised, it is often too late for the student to gain the necessary prerequisite educational standards'.<sup>1235</sup> Mr Isaac Haddock, Koorie Home-school Liaison Officer, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, argued that outreach directed at Indigenous students needs to begin in primary school:

We have a lot of programs within the schools where the liaison officers will go in the final years of secondary education and try to 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.<sup>1236</sup>

Mr Ray Cadmore, Pathways Coordinator, Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, supported the view that Indigenous students should be introduced to tertiary education opportunities in primary school.<sup>1237</sup> The Committee also notes that a critically important strategy for putting Koorie students on the path to higher education is to engage parents and families in the education process.<sup>1238</sup> The Committee believes that this should commence from pre-school education, with Indigenous families being welcomed through culturally inclusive curriculum and environments within the early childhood sector.

Koorie representatives told the Committee that many Indigenous people currently do not see the long-term value of education, and that there is a lack of awareness of the benefits of higher education in particular. One participant described the ongoing cycle of low achievement and low expectations in Indigenous communities in the Robinvale area:

We are not being afforded the opportunities to become the accountants or the town planners or to participate proactively. It is always the lower end of the scale in terms of the labouring stuff and those sorts of things. The expectations are very low for our mob in that, 'This mob are not going to get past year 7 or 8 and therefore they are going to be in this sort of stream'.<sup>1239</sup>

---

<sup>1233</sup> National Rural Health Alliance, Written Submission, February 2008, 3.

<sup>1234</sup> Ms S. Rice, Director, Centre for Engagement in Vocational Learning, TAFE Division, Swinburne University of Technology, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 22.

<sup>1235</sup> National Rural Health Alliance, Written Submission, February 2008, 3.

<sup>1236</sup> Mr I. Haddock, Koorie Home-school Liaison Officer, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 23.

<sup>1237</sup> Mr R. Cadmore, Pathways Coordinator, Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 70.

<sup>1238</sup> National Rural Health Alliance, Written Submission, February 2008, 7.

<sup>1239</sup> Mr L. Moser, Indigenous Community Engagement Broker, Loddon Mallee Region, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Department of Planning and Community Development (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 57.

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association also reported a trend among Indigenous school leavers to regard 'anything' as a good job, provided it was full-time and provided an income.<sup>1240</sup> In the face of inter-generational social disadvantage, it is not surprising that some Indigenous students regard any form of paid employment as worthy of their aspirations, to lift them one step above the cycle of disadvantage.

Significantly, the Committee heard that the focus on attaining employment can create a vicious loop between aspirations and opportunities in some Indigenous communities. Mr Daryl Rose, Chairperson, Heywood Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, observed that the activities and support provided by the local cooperative could bias young people's aspirations away from higher education:

Part of the issue is because there is no support from the co-op to go to any further education stuff. If that is not fixed up they are going to still look at where their strength is and where they feel safe, and that is going to be at home. Therefore, the more we do by providing a service that actually meets their needs, they are only going to look at it very narrowly, staying home, staying around the place, and not look at broadening themselves.<sup>1241</sup>

Mr Rose suggested that the support provided by the cooperative for local employment opportunities can actually 'create a monster', as no other service is providing comparable support for participation in higher education.<sup>1242</sup>

## Role models

The presence of role models in Indigenous communities is another important factor in raising aspirations and showing Indigenous students what can be achieved. One participant commented that many Indigenous young people in her community are disengaged from education because they have 'no-one in their family who are positive role models—who get up, go to work, anything like that'.<sup>1243</sup> Mr Kent Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, also linked the lack of confidence to undertake higher education among many Indigenous students to a lack of role models in their families and the local community:

Part of that could be because ... there is no adequate role modelling in the family. If no other brothers, sisters, parents or close relatives have actually undertaken tertiary study, then there is no role modelling to encourage an individual to do just that ...<sup>1244</sup>

On the other hand, Mr Shane Kelly, Acting Principal, Swan Hill College, advised the Committee that the College has an active program to encourage role models to come 'back to town' to speak to Koorie students.<sup>1245</sup> Professor Wendy Brabham, Director, Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, also told the Committee that the 'success stories' of students and the students themselves constitute the institute's 'biggest recruitment strategy'.<sup>1246</sup> Professor Brabham commented that many of the institute's graduates remain in their communities and contribute to the local workforce.<sup>1247</sup>

---

<sup>1240</sup> Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Written Submission, March 2008, 1.

<sup>1241</sup> Mr D. Rose, Chairperson, Heywood Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 45.

<sup>1242</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1243</sup> Ms K. Frankland, Drug and Alcohol and Indigenous Family Violence Worker, Dhauward-Wurrung Elderly and Community Health Service, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 68.

<sup>1244</sup> Mr K. Farrell, Executive Director, Mildura Campus, La Trobe University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 46.

<sup>1245</sup> Mr S. Kelly, Acting Principal, Swan Hill College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 22.

<sup>1246</sup> Professor W. Brabham, Director, Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 60.

<sup>1247</sup> *ibid.*, 59.

The Committee heard that as more graduates permeate Indigenous communities, participation in higher education can gain a momentum of its own. Initiatives by Charles Sturt University in Wiradjuri country in New South Wales have reportedly raised Indigenous enrolments to ten per cent of the total student cohort, which in turn has created 'strong community aspirations' for Indigenous students to go on to further education.<sup>1248</sup> In addition, it means that many students attending the university are now second-generation students, overcoming the barriers faced by students who are the first in their family to participate in higher education.<sup>1249</sup> A similar trend was reported by representatives of Kurongkurl Katijin (Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research, Edith Cowan University) who commented during the Committee's meetings in Geraldton, that attaining a 'critical mass' of role models in the community provided a significant boost to aspirations and participation.<sup>1250</sup>

The Committee is aware that government and non-government organisations have implemented a range of successful role model programs aimed at raising aspirations and achievement among young Indigenous people. The Committee believes that continued development and expansion of these programs will be essential in lifting school retention and completion within Indigenous communities and providing the basis for the development of higher education aspirations. The Committee calls on the Victorian Government, through the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs, to develop and resource a program for Indigenous role model speakers to visit Victorian Indigenous school children, particularly those in the middle years, with the aims of lifting school completion and aspirations for higher education.

### Career education

Effective career education is necessary to ensure that students are aware of the available post-school opportunities. The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association commented that there is still a proportion of Indigenous students who are receiving inadequate careers counselling, and argued that Koorie students require more individualised career counselling and personalised education plans.<sup>1251</sup> The National Rural Health Alliance similarly stated that Indigenous students may suffer from a lack of planning and preparation for higher education, and insufficient setting of educational and career expectations.<sup>1252</sup> It suggested that the role of Indigenous education workers should be redefined to better complement that of careers educators in schools.<sup>1253</sup>

The Committee notes that a recent study by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne also highlighted some of the gaps in career education currently provided to Indigenous students. In particular, it noted inadequacies in the nature of careers advice provided in schools, particularly where a school relies on students to approach careers advisers, rather than the other way around.<sup>1254</sup> It also noted the lack of role models in the community who have been to university, and the inability of many families to inform

---

<sup>1248</sup> Ms R. Heckenberg, Head and Lecturer, Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 18.

<sup>1249</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1250</sup> Meeting with representatives of Kurongkurl Katijin, Edith Cowan University, Geraldton, 29 April 2009.

<sup>1251</sup> Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

<sup>1252</sup> National Rural Health Alliance, Written Submission, February 2008, 3.

<sup>1253</sup> *ibid.*, 7.

<sup>1254</sup> Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, for Universities Australia, *Participation and Equity: A review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people* (Melbourne: CSHE, 2008), 49.

their children of the options and possibilities, despite having high aspirations and wanting the best for their children.<sup>1255</sup>

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association suggested that given the focus for many Indigenous Australians is on obtaining work, participation in higher education must be clearly linked to defined employment pathways.<sup>1256</sup> Similarly, the Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, commented that it uses the strong employment outcomes for graduates to promote both the institute itself, and higher education in general.<sup>1257</sup> One way of making this link may be to focus aspiration-raising activities on identified areas of workforce need. For example, the National Rural Health Alliance suggested that the shortage of Indigenous health care workers provides a powerful impetus for raising the expectations of Indigenous young people regarding higher education.<sup>1258</sup> While fully supporting this as a useful strategy, the Committee believes that aspiration-raising activities can and should make the link to a broader range of employment opportunities in the public and private sectors.

---

## Pathways into higher education

---

As noted above, levels of participation and achievement in VCE are lower among Indigenous students than non-Indigenous students. Therefore, many Indigenous students lack the skills and qualifications necessary to enter higher education through mainstream pathways. However, there are a number of alternative pathways to higher education for Indigenous people who have not completed year 12 or equivalent. Many universities offer special entry programs to enable Indigenous students to access higher education without the need for an Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER). Evidence to the inquiry also suggests that pathways to higher education from VET, as well as programs to facilitate transition from the workforce, may be effective in improving higher education opportunities for Indigenous people.

### *Special entry options*

Indigenous people have access to the range of university special entry arrangements also available to non-Indigenous people, such as recommendation-based entry schemes. Indigenous applicants applying through the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre may also increase their chances of selection through the Special Entry Access Scheme (SEAS). As noted in Chapter 5, the Special Entry Access Scheme offers an opportunity for applicants to provide evidence of long-term educational disadvantage and/or circumstances affecting year 12 achievement. This may result in a re-ranking of the application, increasing a students' chance of selection. Prospective Indigenous students are eligible for special consideration under the scheme on the basis of Indigenous identification, and 74 Indigenous people made SEAS applications on this basis in 2007.<sup>1259</sup> At the same time, Indigenous people may apply under any additional applicable categories, such as rurality or socioeconomic disadvantage.

---

<sup>1255</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1256</sup> Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Written Submission, March 2008, 3.

<sup>1257</sup> Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Written Submission, May 2008, 1.

<sup>1258</sup> National Rural Health Alliance, Written Submission, February 2008, 6.

<sup>1259</sup> Supplementary information provided by the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre, June 2009.



Many universities also have selection processes, pathways or access schemes specifically for Indigenous students. At Monash University, for example, Indigenous applicants able to demonstrate writing ability at year 12 level and a strong commitment to tertiary study may be able to undertake the Indigenous Non-Award Pathway. With support, these students complete two normal units of study over two semesters. Successful completion of the units qualifies students for entry into an undergraduate degree.<sup>1260</sup>

At a number of universities in Victoria and interstate, admission of Indigenous students occurs on case-by-case assessment of each application, rather than through comparison with other applicants. In such cases, selection is based on capability and likelihood of success,<sup>1261</sup> which may be demonstrated through a variety of methods such as direct application, aptitude testing, interview, or relevant work experience. Typically, Indigenous support units at each institution offer extensive advice and support to prospective students throughout the admissions process.<sup>1262</sup> Where an applicant is deemed not to meet entry requirements, the university or Indigenous support unit will generally advise the student on other study and pathway options, such as TAFE study or enabling programs.<sup>1263</sup>

### *Building foundation skills*

Indigenous students who have disengaged from formal education may need additional help to build foundation skills before they consider seeking a pathway to higher education. Many Indigenous students currently leave school with a need for basic skill building in literacy and numeracy, and may also have other knowledge gaps that leave them unprepared for higher education. The Committee heard about a variety of courses available to help Indigenous students address knowledge gaps and build the general skills necessary for university study.

While foundation courses may be offered by a range of providers, the Committee heard that courses offered through the TAFE sector are especially well accessed by Koorie students. The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association stated that it has been active in advising the TAFE sector on the development of foundation courses that facilitate the transition of Koorie students to higher level qualifications.<sup>1264</sup> For example, the Learning Pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Certificate I, II and III courses were designed to provide accredited training for Koorie students who want to develop their skills in order to access further education, training or employment.<sup>1265</sup> The Association stated that these courses have been successful in achieving employment outcomes. They were therefore reaccredited in 2007 with some modifications aimed at better promoting transition through to higher level certificate courses, and from there to employment or further study.<sup>1266</sup>

The Committee also heard about the important role of the adult and community education sector in providing programs to build foundation skills specifically for Indigenous students. For example, Ms Sally Brennan, Chief Executive Officer, Upper Yarra Community House, outlined the success of the Oonah Pathways program it operates through the Oonah

---

<sup>1260</sup> Monash University, 'Non-Award Pathways Scheme,' Monash University, <http://arts.monash.edu.au/cais/support/nonaward.php> (accessed 25 June 2009).

<sup>1261</sup> Committee analysis of university admission and selection processes, May 2009.

<sup>1262</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1263</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1264</sup> Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

<sup>1265</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1266</sup> *ibid.*, 3.

Indigenous Learning Centre in Healesville.<sup>1267</sup> The program delivers Certificate I in General Education for Adults, which then provides a pathway into the VCAL, at either Foundation or Senior level.

Another program brought to the Committee's attention is the Academy of Sport, Health and Education, which is based in Shepparton. The academy is a unique education initiative of the Goulburn Valley Indigenous community, run in partnership between the University of Melbourne and the Rumbalara Football and Netball Club. It uses sport as an avenue for (primarily) Indigenous people to undertake education and training within a trusted and culturally appropriate environment.<sup>1268</sup>

The Committee is supportive of the breadth of activities undertaken by the Academy of Sport, Health and Education to help promote student engagement in the program. These include curriculum enhancements, promotion of healthy lifestyles and student support. Curriculum enhancement takes many forms (including field trips and camps, attendance incentives and guest speakers) aimed at personal development and increased employability of all students.<sup>1269</sup> The focus on healthy lifestyles includes a breakfast program, gym membership for full-time students and health and dietary advice.<sup>1270</sup> Student support services are extensive and include counselling and pastoral support, transportation, mentoring, personal development and goal setting, literacy and IT training, and employment assistance.<sup>1271</sup>

The Committee welcomes initiatives such as the Onah Pathways Program and the Academy of Sport, Health and Education. It notes that a critical factor in their success is the significant input by the local Koorie community in the management of the education of their young people. These, and other similar initiatives, are illustrative that partnerships between the various education sectors and local Indigenous communities can be highly effective in building Indigenous students' skills in preparation for further learning, as well as in raising their perceptions of the relevance and attainability of further education.

### *Articulation from VET*

Courses in the VET sector also provide an opportunity for students to develop skills towards participation in higher education. As noted in Chapter 5, the development of improved pathways from TAFE to higher education was identified as a critical issue in higher education participation for under-represented groups, especially those who have not gained the requisite skills for higher education in the school classroom. The Committee believes that pathways from TAFE to university are especially relevant to Indigenous participation, due to the popularity of TAFE courses among Indigenous students.

Participation rates in VET are much higher for Indigenous students than participation rates in higher education. In 2006, 4,800 Koorie students enrolled in VET in Victoria, representing 19.1 per cent of the Koorie population.<sup>1272</sup> The popularity of TAFE within Indigenous communities may be linked to efforts by the sector to offer a safe, comfortable learning environment. TAFE students are well supported by Koorie Liaison Officers and Koorie Support Units which provide a range of educational and personal support services.

---

<sup>1267</sup> Ms S. Brennan, Chief Executive Officer, Upper Yarra Community House, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 36.

<sup>1268</sup> Supplementary material provided by the Academy of Sport, Health and Education, March 2009.

<sup>1269</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1270</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1271</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1272</sup> Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Written Submission, March 2008, 3.

Indigenous participation in TAFE is underpinned by the Wurreker Strategy, which was developed by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association in partnership with the Victorian Government. Wurreker's overall vision is that vocational education, training and employment for Koorie communities support pathways and employment, Koorie community development, individual learner development and self determination.<sup>1273</sup> The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association noted in its submission that since being launched in 2000, Wurreker has made significant progress in building TAFE participation and completion rates for Koorie students.<sup>1274</sup>

The Committee heard some concerns that not all Indigenous people are able to benefit equally from TAFE provision, especially in small rural and remote communities. One participant commented that it is difficult to attract funding for quality programs where there is a small student cohort:

The problem is that the government is funding mickey mouse courses out in our region, things that are designed for us to become perpetual training people and not things that are going to get us off and into real employment.<sup>1275</sup>

The Committee acknowledges that the cost of delivery when dealing with a small cohort in rural Victoria can be prohibitive, particularly for small local education and training providers. Nonetheless, it heard a number of examples where successful TAFE programs have been developed, in close consultation between the TAFE and higher education sectors and local Koorie communities.<sup>1276</sup>

Although initiatives to improve Indigenous participation in TAFE will not necessarily lead to improved participation in higher education, vocational skills gained at certificate level can provide the basis for subsequent progression to university level courses. Ms Sharon Rice, Director, Centre for Engagement in Vocational Learning, TAFE Division, Swinburne University of Technology, described this development of higher-order skills through vocational programs, with reference to a pathway developed to a Bachelor of Social Science degree:

With Indigenous people it is about skilling them up and giving them the skills at the certificate III level, along with encouragement, and then up they come to certificate IV; you build that skill at the diploma level, and it is starting to put in more theory-based courses, increasing knowledge, looking at how to write for academic purposes, how to do reports, and how to reference documents at that advanced diploma level. So at that advanced diploma level we will be looking at again raising the bar and preparing them for the bachelor of social science that they would have to enter at mid point.<sup>1277</sup>

Ms Rice added that creating pathways that allow Indigenous students to build their skills ensures that they are able not only to enter higher education, but to succeed once they are there.<sup>1278</sup>

<sup>1273</sup> Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated and Office of Training and Tertiary Education (Victoria), 'Wurreker Strategy,' Wurreker Strategy, <http://www.wurrekerstrategy.org.au/general/strategy.html> (accessed 26 June 2009).

<sup>1274</sup> Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Written Submission, March 2008, 3.

<sup>1275</sup> Mr D. Rose, Chairperson, Heywood Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 43.

<sup>1276</sup> Mr D. Rose, Chairperson, Heywood Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 46; Ms D. Paton, Team Leader, Koorie Unit, Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 21.

<sup>1277</sup> Ms S. Rice, Director, Centre for Engagement in Vocational Learning, TAFE Division, Swinburne University of Technology, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 22–23.

<sup>1278</sup> *ibid.*

The Committee heard about a range of further initiatives to support articulation from TAFE to higher education for Indigenous students. The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association reported that it is currently looking at various strategies to encourage articulation between TAFE and higher education.<sup>1279</sup> The Institute of Koorie Education has also worked with the TAFE sector through the Wurreker program to build articulation pathways to higher education, especially into nursing, commerce, early childhood education and social work degrees.<sup>1280</sup>

In addition, through the Toorong Marnong Accord, Victorian universities and the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association are currently working together to strengthen pathways between higher education and other forms of tertiary study for Indigenous students. Professor Elizabeth Harman, Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University, described how the new collaborative approach to higher education under the Toorong Marnong Accord will enable Indigenous students to move more freely between institutions:

... we are trying to work together to ensure that any individual Indigenous student who comes into the tertiary sector in the state and needs to move or has a better opportunity elsewhere to continue their education has a chance to do so on a collegiate and collaborative basis in the system in Victoria, rather than us competing to hold on to them as they move from vocational to higher ed or from undergraduate to postgrad or to go from one discipline or field to another. I think that initiative will be a fabulous one if we can get it up and running as effectively as we hope to.<sup>1281</sup>

The Committee supports efforts in the tertiary sector to strengthen pathways from TAFE to higher education and believes that they would be further supported by the development of a structured career guidance and pathway program specifically for Indigenous TAFE students. The Committee believes that the Victorian Government should work with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association and the Victorian Vice-Chancellors' Committee to develop a program that includes individualised pathway plans outlining agreed articulation and credit transfer arrangements for Indigenous students seeking to progress from TAFE to higher education. The Committee also believes that broader work on developing improved articulation and credit transfer arrangements, as outlined in Chapter 5, may also be beneficial to Indigenous students.

### *Transition from the workforce*

The Committee heard that employment can also provide an important pathway to participation in higher education for Indigenous people. For example, the Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, has developed pathways into Bachelor of Nursing, Bachelor of Social Work and Master of Public Health degrees for workers already employed in Aboriginal health and welfare services.<sup>1282</sup> These programs have been supported by scholarships provided through the Indigenous Training and Recruitment Initiative (INTRAIN), offered by the Department of Human Services to improve workforce diversity and the responsiveness of the Victorian public sector to the needs of Indigenous Victorians. INTRAIN scholarships provide a fortnightly living allowance (valued at \$25,470 per annum) to assist Koorie students to complete degrees and diplomas in the health and community

---

<sup>1279</sup> Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Written Submission, March 2008, 3.

<sup>1280</sup> Professor W. Brabham, Director, Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 61.

<sup>1281</sup> Professor E. Harman, Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 March 2009, 16.

<sup>1282</sup> Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Written Submission, May 2008, 2.

sector.<sup>1283</sup> The Institute of Koorie Education has also developed an articulation pathway from the Graduate Diploma of Natural and Cultural Resource Management for Koorie land management facilitators, catchment liaison and cultural heritage practitioners employed by the Department of Sustainability and Environment or Victorian National Parks.<sup>1284</sup>

The Committee heard that supporting participation in higher education by Indigenous people can be a way to improve the responsiveness of government services, and to fill gaps more generally in Indigenous workforce participation. The National Rural Health Alliance commented on the 'serious and urgent need' to improve primary health care services for Indigenous people, and argued that increasing the number of Indigenous health professionals is one of the most effective ways of achieving this.<sup>1285</sup> The Committee encourages the Victorian Government to continue to support Indigenous scholarship programs as a way of addressing specific skill needs. The Committee also notes suggestions in evidence to the inquiry for improvements to the program, including enabling Indigenous public sector workers to participate in higher education without the burden of taking leave without pay, and backfilling these positions while they are studying.<sup>1286</sup>

---

## Community-based delivery

---

The Committee recognises that Indigenous people's strong connections and commitments within their families and communities make an important contribution to their sense of identity.<sup>1287</sup> Indigenous people are therefore less likely to participate in higher education if doing so requires leaving these networks.<sup>1288</sup> Ms Sue Connelly, Koorie Educator, Swan Hill North Primary School, explained the importance of staying connected:

I have three children in secondary, and I am brainwashing them every day, saying, 'You're going to university. You're going to university.' But what will happen when they go? I will have to shift with them because, as a Koorie mum, I am not sending my child to Melbourne with all these horror stories ... It is just that we have our extended family here and, really, why should we move out when this is where we are from and where we live and where all our connections are?<sup>1289</sup>

A participant in Robinvale commented that while there are a range of good higher education programs for Indigenous students, the reality is that few Indigenous people from the local area are moving away from the community to access them.<sup>1290</sup>

The Committee heard that another factor affecting the ability of Indigenous people to relocate to study is their tendency to have families younger, and to live independently at a younger age than many non-Indigenous people.<sup>1291</sup> One participant commented that it is 'near impossible' for Indigenous people to meet the cost of relocation for higher education

---

<sup>1283</sup> Department of Human Services (Victoria), 'InTrain scholarships,' DHS, <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/operations/careers/employment-programs/Indigenous-scholarships/intrain-scholarships2> (accessed 7 May 2009).

<sup>1284</sup> Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Written Submission, May 2008, 2.

<sup>1285</sup> National Rural Health Alliance, Written Submission, February 2008, 6.

<sup>1286</sup> Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Written Submission, May 2008, 4.

<sup>1287</sup> Mr D. Rose, Chairperson, Heywood Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 45.

<sup>1288</sup> Mr D. Rose, Chairperson, Heywood Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 45; Mr L. Moser, Indigenous Community Engagement Broker, Loddon Mallee Region, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 55.

<sup>1289</sup> Ms S. Connelly, Koorie Educator, Swan Hill North Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 56.

<sup>1290</sup> Mr L. Moser, Indigenous Community Engagement Broker, Loddon Mallee Region, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Robinvale, 2 June 2008, 55.

<sup>1291</sup> Mr I. Haddock, Koorie Home-school Liaison Officer, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 21.

once they have families of their own.<sup>1292</sup> Low levels of trans-generational wealth also mean that relocation may be financially out of the question for many Indigenous students.<sup>1293</sup> One participant commented that a multiplicity of challenges arise from the 'one little decision' to move away to study.<sup>1294</sup>

The Committee believes it is therefore especially important for Indigenous students to have opportunities to participate in higher education through a blended learning model that allows them to remain in their local community. This was emphasised by Ms Sharon Rice, Director, Centre for Engagement in Vocational Learning, TAFE Division, Swinburne University of Technology:

The success in the Indigenous area is taking the programs out into the regions and forming partnership arrangements with Indigenous organisations and providing it on site ... We do not go out and deliver, we always partner with Indigenous organisations, and we take it out into the community so we are running training in Mildura, Swan Hill, Shepparton, and we have trained in Warrnambool.<sup>1295</sup>

The Centre runs certificate IV courses in four one-week residential blocks, and diploma courses in five-week residential blocks. Students are often currently employed, or working as volunteers in the community, and their workplaces are utilised within the courses. Teachers will fly in regularly to provide training, assess students' skills and assist them on the job.<sup>1296</sup> Ms Rice indicated that this model has been an outstanding success in Indigenous communities:

That particular model—residential, which involves raising the expectations and participation—is getting 96 per cent completion rates and the students love it.<sup>1297</sup>

Ms Rice commented that while funding for the residential model is 'adequate', there are some difficulties around state and federal funding boundaries, and around paying for the students' accommodation and travel.<sup>1298</sup>

Flexible, community-based delivery has also been the underlying philosophy of the Institute of Koorie Education, established in 1992 at Deakin University. The Director, Professor Wendy Brabham, told the Committee that the institute's founders had been 'drawn to Deakin' because of its historical role in distance education provision, and that the institute has grown out of that base.<sup>1299</sup> Professor Brabham added that the institute is the only Indigenous education unit that has specialised in the delivery of higher education courses in a way that does not take Indigenous students out of their communities.<sup>1300</sup>

Evidence suggests that the Institute of Koorie Education makes a significant contribution to higher education for Indigenous Victorians. In 2008, the institute had 162 new students and 283 returning students, around half of whom (53%) were drawn from Victoria.<sup>1301</sup> Most of the institute's students are mature age, suggesting that the institute's community-based

---

<sup>1292</sup> Mr D. Rose, Chairperson, Heywood Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 42.

<sup>1293</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1294</sup> *ibid.*, 46.

<sup>1295</sup> Ms S. Rice, Director, Centre for Engagement in Vocational Learning, Swinburne University of Technology, Public Hearing, Lilydale, 17 July 2008, 20, 22.

<sup>1296</sup> *ibid.*, 22.

<sup>1297</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1298</sup> *ibid.*, 20, 22.

<sup>1299</sup> Professor W. Brabham, Director, Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 58.

<sup>1300</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1301</sup> Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Written Submission, May 2008, 1.

delivery model has offered a genuine 'second chance' at higher education for many Indigenous people who have previously left the formal education system.

All courses offered at the Institute of Koorie Education can be undertaken via community-based delivery, using blended learning. The institute offers 15 undergraduate and seven postgraduate programs in teaching, social work, nursing, law, arts and land resource management. The institute remarked that this is significantly different from Indigenous education programs at other universities, where students may be offered a limited number of courses or fields of study.<sup>1302</sup> The institute also supports students who are undertaking higher degrees by research.

Students undertaking courses by community-based delivery can remain in their home communities and attend the Institute of Koorie Education for one- or two-week intensive residential study blocks. When they are on campus, the institute provides accommodation for students at the Kitjarra student residences.<sup>1303</sup> The Committee heard that Deakin University has provided \$2 million towards the establishment of the student residences, which operate separately from other student residences to reflect the 'coming and going' of students for block courses.<sup>1304</sup>

Between study blocks, students receive ongoing assistance via telephone, teletutorials and e-mail. The Committee heard that students may sometimes use a public telephone to attend teletutorials if they do not have land lines in their homes.<sup>1305</sup> All students also have access to individual tutor support through the Australian Government's Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme, which funds tutors for Indigenous students at all levels of education. In addition, academic and administrative staff from the Institute of Koorie Education undertake 'field trips' to visit students in their home communities. While these visits are often based around the supervision of practicums for subjects such as social work, teaching and nursing, they may also simply be aimed at giving general support.<sup>1306</sup>

The Committee encountered strong support for the Institute of Koorie Education's community-based, blended learning model during the inquiry. A number of inquiry participants were students at the institute. One of these students told the Committee that he would have been unable to participate in higher education without the community-based approach:

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 ... 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.<sup>1307</sup>

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association also supported the flexible approach to learning offered at the Institute of Koorie Education, noting that the approach is 'uncommon for Australian universities' and suggesting that it should be more widely emulated.<sup>1308</sup>

---

<sup>1302</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1303</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1304</sup> Professor W. Brabham, Director, Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 60.

<sup>1305</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1306</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1307</sup> Mr I. Haddock, Koorie Home-school Liaison Officer, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 20.

<sup>1308</sup> Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Written Submission, March 2008, 4.

The Institute of Koorie Education's community-based learning model has also been recognised at a national level by the Australian Universities Quality Agency:

Through its commitment to the principles of community-based learning and a readiness to develop a broad range of programs to meet the needs of Indigenous communities, Deakin has sustained access and participation outcomes for Indigenous students at more than twice the rate experienced by the rest of Victoria and significantly higher than the national average.<sup>1309</sup>

The agency described the institute as 'an exemplar for Australia', noting its students' appreciation of the opportunities and extensive support provided.<sup>1310</sup>

The Committee believes that there is strong evidence that community-based delivery can help to improve participation in higher education among Indigenous people. The Committee believes that community-based delivery models may be worthy of further consideration by higher education institutions seeking to improve participation rates for Indigenous students. The Committee recognises that the success of these models will depend on high levels of engagement with, and responsiveness to, the individual needs of Indigenous communities.

---

## Financial considerations

---

The Committee is aware that financial disadvantage is a significant factor in the lower participation rates of Indigenous Australians in higher education. The importance of financial support to Indigenous students was therefore a strong theme of evidence to the inquiry. The Committee heard that the provision of financial support has proven to be a crucial factor both in access to higher education for Indigenous students, and in their success in their chosen course of study.<sup>1311</sup>

The main Australian Government income support program for Indigenous students is ABSTUDY. Research in 2006 found that 25.8 per cent of Indigenous students received ABSTUDY payments. A small number of Indigenous students received Youth Allowance or Austudy.<sup>1312</sup>

ABSTUDY was introduced in 1969 to address low rates of participation in higher education by Indigenous people.<sup>1313</sup> Under the original scheme, eligible full-time students received a Living Allowance, with higher rates applying to married students and those with dependent children. Compulsory course fees were also paid, as well as a book and equipment allowance. Travel costs were paid for students who needed to study away from home.<sup>1314</sup> Over time, the original scheme was expanded to cover Indigenous students at secondary school, as well as to provide a wider range of post-secondary opportunities, both in education institutions and through specially arranged courses provided for groups of Indigenous students.<sup>1315</sup>

---

<sup>1309</sup> Antony Stella and David Woodhouse, *Serving the Cause of Indigenous Issues: Thematic Analysis of the Institutional Audit Reports of AUQA* (Melbourne: Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2006), 43.

<sup>1310</sup> Australian Universities Quality Agency, *Report of an Audit of Deakin University* (Melbourne: AUQA, 2005), 35.

<sup>1311</sup> Professor W. Brabham, Director, Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 60; Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Written Submission, May 2008, 3; Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Written Submission, March 2008, 2.

<sup>1312</sup> Richard James and others, *Australian University Student Finances 2006: Final report of a national survey of students in public universities* (Canberra: Universities Australia, 2007), 57.

<sup>1313</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 'History of ABSTUDY,' DEEWR, [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/Indigenous\\_education/publications\\_resources/abstudy/foreword/](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/Indigenous_education/publications_resources/abstudy/foreword/) (accessed 7 May 2009).

<sup>1314</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1315</sup> *ibid.*



Further changes were introduced in 2000, bringing ABSTUDY Living Allowance payments into alignment with those payable under the Youth Allowance for students aged 16 to 20.<sup>1316</sup> Indigenous students aged 21 years and over became eligible for the Newstart rate, which is a higher rate of payment than students in receipt of Youth Allowance or Austudy. Students over 21 years also became subject to a more generous partner income test than applied for Newstart recipients.<sup>1317</sup>

The Committee heard some concerns that the current level of ABSTUDY is not sufficient to facilitate participation in higher education for many Indigenous students. The Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, commented that decreases to ABSTUDY in 2000 had 'a major impact' on higher education participation for Indigenous people.<sup>1318</sup> Another participant also commented that ABSTUDY was not 'properly' supporting Indigenous students.<sup>1319</sup> In particular, he observed that Indigenous students who relocate to study may have close ties to family and community and must frequently return home, creating additional travel costs and impacting on their ability to secure part-time work in their new location.<sup>1320</sup> The Committee notes that concerns about the limitations of ABSTUDY are very similar to widespread discontent with current payment levels under Austudy and Youth Allowance (refer Chapter 7).

The Australian Government announced changes to ABSTUDY in the 2009–10 budget (subject to the passage of legislation), in line with changes to other government income support programs. These include:

- an increase in the parental income test threshold for students applying for ABSTUDY and Youth Allowance from \$32,800 to \$42,559, from January 2010;
- entitlement to an annual Student Start-up Scholarship of \$2,254 to all university students receiving income support, from January 2010;
- access to a Relocation Scholarship of \$4,000 in the first year and \$1,000 in subsequent years for university students receiving ABSTUDY and Youth Allowance as dependents (as well as independent students who are disadvantaged by personal and relationship circumstances) and who have to live away from the family home to study, from January 2010;
- an increase in the personal income threshold from \$236 to \$400 per fortnight from January 2011, so that students receiving income support payments will be able to earn up to \$400 per fortnight without having their payments reduced;
- phased implementation of a reduced age of independence from 25 years to 22 years, by 2012;
- tightening of the workforce participation criteria for independence, requiring that a young person has worked full time for a minimum of 30 hours a week for at least 18 months in a two year period, effective January 2010; and

---

<sup>1316</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1317</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1318</sup> Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Written Submission, May 2008, 3.

<sup>1319</sup> Mr D. Rose, Chairperson, Heywood Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 45.

<sup>1320</sup> *ibid.*

- exempting equity and merit-based scholarships from being treated as assessable income for means testing under the *Social Security Act* for those on income support payments.<sup>1321</sup>

In addition to Australian Government financial support, Indigenous higher education students, in common with non-Indigenous students, have access to a variety of scholarships offered by state and local governments, universities and other organisations. Some scholarships are targeted specifically at Indigenous students. For example, the Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, reported that scholarships for Indigenous students are available through the Pratt Foundation, ANZ Bank and the Victorian Government, in addition to the support provided by the university.<sup>1322</sup> Scholarships offered by the Victorian Government are generally linked to departmental skills needs, such as teaching scholarships provided through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, scholarships for Indigenous health workers provided through the Department of Human Services, and scholarships in a range of justice related fields (law, criminology, para-legal, psychology, psychiatry, mental health and social work) offered by the Department of Justice.

While endorsing existing scholarship programs, the Institute of Koorie Education recommended that more scholarships be made available for Indigenous higher education students.<sup>1323</sup> At the same time, it added that universities and other agencies should not be expected to 'fill the gap' left by inadequate income support for Indigenous students.<sup>1324</sup> The National Rural Health Alliance agreed that there is 'significant unmet demand' for the scholarships and cadetships currently available to Indigenous students, and recommended a review of the quantity and effectiveness of scholarships available to Indigenous students.<sup>1325</sup>

In addition, the Institute of Koorie Education suggested that Indigenous students need further assistance with tuition fees, commenting that 'debt aversion' within Indigenous communities means that Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) debts have impacted negatively on participation rates.<sup>1326</sup> It suggested that strategies should therefore be pursued at the state and national level to abolish HECS-HELP liability for Indigenous students, 'until the participation is commensurate with that of other sections of the Australian community'.<sup>1327</sup> This concern was also raised in submissions to the Review of Australian Higher Education, with the Indigenous Department of the National Union of Students arguing for half-HECS equity scholarships to be made available to all HECS-liable Indigenous students,<sup>1328</sup> and the Indigenous Higher Education Council advocating for the removal of current HECS liabilities of Indigenous students, as well as the removal of HECS requirements for Indigenous students in the future.<sup>1329</sup>

The Committee agrees that appropriate financial support will be a key aspect of any government strategies to increase the participation of Indigenous students in higher education. In general, the Committee welcomes recently announced changes to ABSTUDY,

---

<sup>1321</sup> Australian Government. *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009.

<sup>1322</sup> Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Written Submission, May 2008, 3.

<sup>1323</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1324</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1325</sup> National Rural Health Alliance, Written Submission, February 2008, 7.

<sup>1326</sup> Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Written Submission, May 2008, 4.

<sup>1327</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1328</sup> Indigenous Department, National Union of Students, *Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education* (Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008), 9.

<sup>1329</sup> *ibid.*, 19.

which are likely to increase the level of financial support available to students most in need. However, as with Youth Allowance, the Committee is concerned that these changes may not go far enough to address the needs identified in evidence to the inquiry. The Committee believes that government income support programs should be closely monitored and reviewed to ensure they provide adequate support for Indigenous students to participate successfully in higher education. The Committee also supports the continued expansion and promotion of targeted scholarship schemes by federal, state and local governments, and the higher education sector.

---

## Transition and completion for Indigenous higher education students

---

The Committee noted that lower retention and completion rates among Indigenous higher education students remain a key concern. Attrition amongst Indigenous students is more severe than for non-Indigenous students, particularly in the first year of study.<sup>1330</sup> The Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council has noted that patterns of discontinuation are associated in part with the characteristics of Indigenous people who enrol in higher education, including age, field of study and enrolment type.<sup>1331</sup>

The Committee notes that most of the transition issues discussed in Chapter 8 are equally relevant to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Indigenous students who have withdrawn from studies report that the factors in their decision to withdraw include financial pressures, the academic demands of study and insufficient academic support.<sup>1332</sup> However, social or cultural alienation were also named among the reasons for some Indigenous students withdrawing from their studies, suggesting that there are specific cultural factors that may need to be addressed.

### Culturally inclusive study environments

Many Koorie people told the Committee that universities typically do not provide culturally friendly learning environments. One student commented that the environment could sometimes be 'completely culturally unsafe', either due to lecturers or culturally inappropriate course content.<sup>1333</sup> Another added that institutions are often unwilling to make the additional effort required to meet the material and cultural needs of Indigenous students:

The issues around trying to work with non-Indigenous organisations are that a lot of them have got their own sets of rules and ways they want to run, and they will make very little allowances for the Koorie things that are needed to do it. They are things to help support the families, help them to get transport there or to just have a feed when they are there.<sup>1334</sup>

---

<sup>1330</sup> Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, for Universities Australia, *Participation and Equity: A review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people* (Melbourne: CSHE, 2008), 49.

<sup>1331</sup> Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, *Improving Indigenous Outcomes and Enhancing Indigenous Culture and Knowledge in Australian Higher Education*, report to the Minister for Education, Science and Training (Canberra: Australian Government, 2006), 22.

<sup>1332</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1333</sup> Ms S. Heckenberg, Student, Gippsland Campus, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 20.

<sup>1334</sup> Mr D. Rose, Chairperson, Heywood Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 43.

Ms Robyn Heckenberg, Head and Lecturer, Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies, Monash University, commented that 'systemic racism' represents a major barrier to higher education participation for Indigenous students.<sup>1335</sup> Ms Heckenberg commented that universities are, by nature, 'bastions of the establishment', and find it difficult to accommodate differences in student needs:

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.<sup>1336</sup>

Ms Heckenberg observed that this does not necessarily reflect the views of individual institutions, but the difficulties of change inherent to all large organisations.<sup>1337</sup>

A submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education from the Indigenous Department, National Union of Students identified some of the positive steps already taken by universities to embrace Indigenous culture. These include cultural celebrations during NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee) Week, Reconciliation Week and other events to recognise and celebrate key achievements in the Indigenous community.<sup>1338</sup> It noted, however, a number of areas that could be improved, including basic measures such as flying the Indigenous flag on all campuses and promoting the Indigenous campus centres on university websites.<sup>1339</sup> Other areas suggested for improvement included ensuring staff involved in the delivery of services to Indigenous students are aware of Indigenous culture, and educating the wider student population about Indigenous culture in order to promote increased interaction and understanding.<sup>1340</sup> The Committee encourages all universities to embrace and promote Indigenous cultures in these simple ways.

The Committee believes, however, that recognition and engagement with Indigenous communities within the university environment must extend beyond the simple, symbolic measures. As the Review of Australian Higher Education observed, there is a need for institutional cultures and curriculum to recognise the value of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives:

Indigenous involvement in higher education is not only about student participation and the employment of Indigenous staff. It is also about what is valued as knowledge in the academy. Indigenous students and staff have unique knowledge and understandings which must be brought into the curriculum for all students and must inform research and scholarship.<sup>1341</sup>

The review went on to comment that meaningful recognition of Indigenous perspectives may mean that 'underlying assumptions in some discipline areas may themselves be challenged', and will require a deep and complex review of all elements of university study.<sup>1342</sup> The Committee also believes that culturally inclusive learning environments require strong leadership from universities, working in partnership with Indigenous communities and their leaders.

---

<sup>1335</sup> Ms R. Heckenberg, Head and Lecturer, Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 19.

<sup>1336</sup> *ibid.*, 18–19.

<sup>1337</sup> *ibid.*, 19.

<sup>1338</sup> Indigenous Department, National Union of Students, *Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education* (Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008), 1.

<sup>1339</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1340</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>1341</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (Canberra: DEEWR, 2008), 32.

<sup>1342</sup> *ibid.*

## Support services for Indigenous students

Evidence suggests that the provision of recognisable Indigenous support services in higher education institutions can also make a genuine difference to Indigenous students' sense of belonging and their capacity to succeed. Support services in Victorian universities are delivered through a variety of models, including Indigenous units, centres, schools and institutes. They provide a range of support services, such as course advice, tutorial and study support, accommodation, networking and personal support.

The Committee heard that transition support services may be especially important for Indigenous students in the early stages of their course, as they adjust to the university environment. One participant commented that universities can be 'very isolating' for Indigenous students from close-knit communities, as they are suddenly required to 'fend for themselves'.<sup>1343</sup> However, participants also commented that Indigenous support units continue to play a vital role in assisting Indigenous students throughout their course of study.<sup>1344</sup>

The Committee heard that additional support is important even in higher education environments that cater specifically for Indigenous students. The Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, reported that academic teams monitor and regularly review the progress of individual students.<sup>1345</sup> During a meeting in Geraldton, the Committee was advised that individualised support is also a critical feature at Kurongkurl Katitjin. This includes both academic support and social support with issues such as family caring responsibilities, child care, pregnancy or accommodation.<sup>1346</sup>

Professor Wendy Brabham, Director, Institute of Koorie Education, described the additional support that Indigenous students may require, on top of material and logistical assistance. This encompasses embracing cultural and traditional values and practices, as well as overcoming lower levels of confidence and self-esteem:

There are a lot of variables that impinge on success [for Indigenous students] ... There is a lot of 'sorry' business goes on—you have got to put that in place; and ceremonial matters—you have got to put that in place. You have got to also work up the expectations of the learner—how do you actually relate to the learner so that the learner really does take control and believe in himself or herself as a higher education student?<sup>1347</sup>

Professor Brabham went on to say that the provision of ongoing encouragement and support can be extremely time consuming, and requires a high level of focus from academic staff.<sup>1348</sup>

The Committee heard some further suggestions for how Indigenous students could be supported while they are studying. One community group aims to purchase a house in Melbourne for students from the local community who must relocate to study, although it is currently reliant on the generosity of a Melbourne-based community member who has

<sup>1343</sup> Ms R. Heckenberg, Head and Lecturer, Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 19.

<sup>1344</sup> Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Written Submission, May 2008, 2; Ms S. Heckenberg, Student, Gippsland Campus, Monash University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 20.

<sup>1345</sup> Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Written Submission, May 2008, 2.

<sup>1346</sup> Meeting with representatives of Kurongkurl Katitjin, Edith Cowan University, Geraldton, 29 April 2009.

<sup>1347</sup> Professor W. Brabham, Director, Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Colac, 29 April 2008, 60.

<sup>1348</sup> *ibid.*

opened her house to students.<sup>1349</sup> Another suggested that a program be piloted to introduce paid mentors for current and prospective Indigenous higher education students.<sup>1350</sup> Others suggested that the transportation needs of Indigenous students need to be addressed.<sup>1351</sup>

The Committee recognises that support services are important for all higher education students, from transition to course completion. However, it believes that these services may be particularly important for Indigenous students, especially during the early stages of their studies. The Committee acknowledges that the university environment has grown out of non-Indigenous models of social organisation, with a strong emphasis on self-reliance and individual endeavour. In contrast, Indigenous culture has a more collective orientation, and opportunities to connect with support services and networks are therefore highly valued. The Committee is therefore pleased to note that strengthening Indigenous staff and student networks is a key initiative of the Toorong Marnong Accord.

---

## Conclusion and recommendations

---

The difficulties faced by Indigenous Australians in education are well documented, and affect all levels of the education system. Evidence suggests that high levels of disengagement from education in Indigenous communities are in part due to an education system that is seen as unresponsive and irrelevant to the needs of Indigenous communities. The Committee was therefore pleased to note the many initiatives currently underway to make schools and universities more culturally inclusive, in consultation with Indigenous communities. These include models of delivery and pathways to higher education that take into account the particular needs, circumstances and preferences of Indigenous students.

Improving Indigenous participation in higher education will also require a willingness on the part of Indigenous communities to embrace higher education as a valuable and attainable means of social, economic and cultural empowerment. Many efforts are already underway to improve the profile and awareness of higher education within Indigenous communities. In particular, strategies involving community role models have proven particularly effective in promoting participation in higher education as desirable and attainable.

The Committee believes that the implementation of a statewide aspiration-raising initiative will further support existing efforts aimed at raising higher education participation rates in Indigenous communities. This initiative should encompass strategies aimed at addressing the needs of Indigenous students, including creating a culture of high expectations, further developing and promoting role models and mentors, and improving the quality of career advice to Indigenous students. Aspiration-raising activities should be supported through continued development and promotion of alternative entry pathways into higher education for Indigenous students, including special entry options, foundation courses, articulation pathways from TAFE, and transition from the workforce. Participation in higher education by Indigenous students must also be supported by adequate financial support and a range of transition and academic support programs.

---

<sup>1349</sup> Mr D. Rose, Chairperson, Heywood Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 42.

<sup>1350</sup> Mr S. Walsh, Central Gippsland Wurreker Broker, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 22.

<sup>1351</sup> Mr D. Rose, Chairperson, Heywood Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 43; Ms D. Paton, Team Leader, Koorie Unit, Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Churchill, 19 May 2008, 22.

A strong theme to emerge in evidence relating to Indigenous participation is the significance of engagement between the education sector and Indigenous communities. The Committee acknowledges that responding to the needs of Indigenous communities may involve profound shifts in how higher education is understood and delivered, and that meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities is unlikely to occur quickly or easily. Nevertheless, the Committee believes that institutions such as the Institute of Koorie Education demonstrate that the rewards of community engagement in raising Indigenous participation in higher education can be substantial. The Committee therefore encourages ongoing dialogue between universities and Indigenous communities throughout Victoria, and anticipates that this dialogue will become easier as participation increases and more models of best practice emerge.

At the same time, the Committee is aware that participation in higher education is just one area in which Indigenous Australians experience disadvantage. As one participant observed, social issues facing Indigenous communities such as health and housing must be addressed, otherwise Indigenous students will continue to struggle.<sup>1352</sup> The Committee is aware that the difficulties facing many Indigenous communities are significant, and can make raising participation in higher education seem like a distant goal. Nevertheless, the stories of participants in the inquiry were testament to the power of Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to work together to overcome disadvantage.

## Recommendations

9.1 That as part of a statewide initiative to raise aspirations towards higher education (recommendation 4.1), the Victorian Government:

- create a culture of high expectations for Indigenous students at all levels of education;
- maintain the scholarship program for high achieving Indigenous school students;
- through the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs, develop and resource a program for Indigenous role model speakers to visit Victorian Indigenous school children, particularly those in the middle years, with the aim of lifting year 12 or equivalent completion;
- ensure that Indigenous students receive individualised and culturally appropriate career education; and
- engage parents and families in these initiatives.

<sup>1352</sup> Mr D. Rose, Chairperson, Heywood Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Hamilton, 28 April 2008, 44.

9.2	<p>That the Victorian Government work with universities and Indigenous communities to improve participation in higher education by Indigenous Victorians by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• supporting targeted, high quality blended learning and community-based models of delivery;</li><li>• developing culturally inclusive curriculum and study environments;</li><li>• providing targeted scholarship schemes;</li><li>• advocating to the Australian Government for increased income support; and</li><li>• maintaining mentoring, academic and other support programs for Indigenous higher education students.</li></ul>
9.3	<p>That the Victorian Government, in consultation with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association and the Victorian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, support the development of a career guidance pathway program for Indigenous TAFE students. The program should involve individualised pathway plans outlining agreed articulation and credit transfer arrangements for Indigenous students seeking to progress from TAFE to higher education.</p>
9.4	<p>That the Victorian Government implement a program to ensure that all Indigenous school children have access to computers both during and after school hours and that the program be regularly monitored and reviewed.</p>

Adopted by the Education and Training Committee

Committee Room, Parliament House

East Melbourne

23 July 2009



# Appendix A

---

## Key research questions

Are students from different geographic areas (eg regions, suburbs or localities) in Victoria ...

- more or less likely to apply for university?
- more or less likely to receive or accept university offers?
- more or less likely to complete a university course once they enrol?

Is this because students from different geographic areas ...

- stay at school for longer, or leave earlier?
- choose different subjects or courses at school?
- choose different post-school pathways (eg TAFE, apprenticeships or employment)?
- have greater or fewer university campuses/courses available in their community?
- are affected by other factors, such as economic, social or cultural issues?

What effect does going to university (or not) have on ...

- students from different geographic areas in Victoria?
- their families and communities?
- skills shortages and the Victorian economy?

What could be done to address any barriers to university participation for students from different geographic areas?



# Appendix B

---

## Written submissions

Name of individual/organisation	Date received
Ms Marcia Gingold, Parent, Frankston	21 January 2008
Mr Greg Little, Parent, Rochester	4 February 2008
Dr Kathy Brothie, General Practitioner, Mount Beauty	7 February 2008
National Centre for Vocational Education Research	15 February 2008
Department of Education, Training and the Arts (Queensland)	18 February 2008
Ms Kerry Conabere, Parent, Traralgon	20 February 2008
Associate Professor Barry Golding, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, University of Ballarat	20 February 2008
Ms Margaret Cousins, Ballarat	22 February 2008
Mr Bruce Simons, Principal, The Hamilton and Alexandra College	25 February 2008
Murrabit Group School Parents and Friends Club	26 February 2008
National Rural Health Alliance	26 February 2008
Department of Education and Training (New South Wales)	28 February 2008
Committee for Ballarat	5 March 2008
Open Universities Australia	5 March 2008
Bendigo Senior Secondary College	6 March 2008
Ms Judith McLaughlin, Parent, Traralgon	6 March 2008
Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE	7 March 2008
Ms Helen Rawlings, Bairnsdale	7 March 2008
Ms Melanie Pearson, University Student, Hallam	10 March 2008
vicCentral Highlands Area Consultative Committee	11 March 2008
Wodonga Institute of TAFE	11 March 2008

<b>Name of individual/organisation</b>	<b>Date received</b>
Bass Coast Shire Council	11 March 2008
Mrs Carolyn Anne Griffin, Parent, Swan Hill	11 March 2008
Australian Catholic University	12 March 2008
Mrs Rhonda Sutton, Parent, Echuca	12 March 2008
Continuing Education Centre (Albury Wodonga)	13 March 2008
Ararat Rural City	13 March 2008
Ms Alison Walpole, Grandparent, Whorouly South	13 March 2008
Supplementary Submission	2 March 2009
Wellington Shire Council	14 March 2008
Sunraysia Institute of TAFE	17 March 2008
Mr Lionel Parrott, Croydon	17 March 2008
Hobsons Bay City Council	17 March 2008
Professor Phillip Steele, Academic Director, Berwick and Peninsula Campuses, Monash University	17 March 2008
Chisholm Institute of TAFE	17 March 2008
Ms Sandra O'Donnell, Parent and Teacher, Rye	17 March 2008
Frankston Learning City Stakeholder Network	17 March 2008
Central Goldfields Shire Council	17 March 2008
Ms Dalal Hamoud, School Captain, Isik College, Glenroy	17 March 2008
Mr Paul Kenny, Senior Project Manager – Surveys, Goulburn-Murray Water	18 March 2008
Australian Council for Educational Research	18 March 2008
National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division)	18 March 2008
Victorian Farmers Federation	18 March 2008
Monash University	18 March 2008
RMIT University	18 March 2008
Mr Trevor Budge, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, La Trobe University (Bendigo Campus)	18 March 2008
Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria	18 March 2008

Name of individual/organisation	Date received
La Trobe University	18 March 2008
Ms Jan Edwards, Manager, Equity and Disability Support Services, Swinburne University of Technology	18 March 2008
Bayside Glen Eira Kingston LLEN	18 March 2008
University of Ballarat	18 March 2008
East Gippsland Institute of TAFE	18 March 2008
Monash University Gippsland Student Union	18 March 2008
Deakin University	18 March 2008
Mallee Family Care	18 March 2008
City of Stonnington, Youth Services	19 March 2008
Gannawarra Shire Council	19 March 2008
Mid Murray Higher Education Working Party	19 March 2008
Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN	19 March 2008
Service Skills Australia	19 March 2008
Warrnambool City Council	19 March 2008
Engineers Australia, Victorian Division	19 March 2008
Mr Jamin Heppell and Ms Michelle Gordon, School Captains, Leongatha Secondary College	19 March 2008
Horsham Rural City Council	20 March 2008
Dr Dorothy Morris, Lake Boga	20 March 2008
Girton Grammar School, Bendigo	20 March 2008
Association of Independent Schools of Victoria	20 March 2008
Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce	20 March 2008
Ms Megan Freckleton, School Captain, St Brigid's College, Horsham	22 March 2008
Centre for Regional Development, Swinburne University of Technology	24 March 2008
Mr Jeff and Mrs Traci Wilson-Brown, Parents, Wulgulmerang	24 March 2008
Mr John Hicks, Chief Executive Officer, Hindmarsh Shire Council	24 March 2008

<b>Name of individual/organisation</b>	<b>Date received</b>
Upper Yarra Community House	25 March 2008
Barwon-South Western Region, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria)	25 March 2008
Mr Matthew Bertolacci, Senior Leader, Kealba College	25 March 2008
Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated	26 March 2008
The University of Melbourne	27 March 2008
Shire of Melton	27 March 2008
Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals	27 March 2008
Gippsland East LLEN	31 March 2008
Ms Pam McDonald, Parent, Chiltern	4 April 2008
Gippsland Local Government Network	4 April 2008
Mr Chris Williames, Student, Drouin	4 April 2008
Victorian Council of Social Service	7 April 2008
Victoria University	7 April 2008
Mr Derek Visser, Parent, Wodonga	8 April 2008
Equity and Access Unit, La Trobe University	8 April 2008
Shire of Yarra Ranges	8 April 2008
The Hon Julia Gillard MP, Australian Government Minister for Education	11 April 2008
Bendigo Student Association, Bendigo Campus, La Trobe University	11 April 2008
Mrs Kathy Hunt, Parent, Geelong West	12 April 2008
Mrs Kathryn Thompson, Parent, Cabarita	12 April 2008
Ms Aneeta Snow, Parent, Warrnambool	13 April 2008
Ms Wendy Dixon, Maiden Gully	15 April 2008
Melbourne's North and West Area Consultative Committee and Western Youth Futures	15 April 2008
Mrs Louise Pearce, Parent, Benalla	16 April 2008
Ms Barbara Medhurst, Parent, Nyora	17 April 2008

---

<b>Name of individual/organisation</b>	<b>Date received</b>
Ms Heather Webster, Parent, Barnawartha	17 April 2008
Youth Affairs Council of Victoria	17 April 2008
Ms Michayla Bush	19 April 2008
Ms Megan Collins, First Year Student, Bachelor of Arts/Science, Monash University	19 April 2008
Mrs Janet Scott, Parent, Ararat	20 April 2008
Mrs Deborah Keiller, Parent, Myamyn	20 April 2008
Mr Merrick Brewer, Parent, Warragul	20 April 2008
Ms Wendy Slorach, Teacher and Parent, Stawell	20 April 2008
South West LLEN	22 April 2008
Mrs Joylene Dowlin, Parent, Warrnambool	22 April 2008
City of Whittlesea	22 April 2008
Ms Kate Leadbeater, Second Year Student, RMIT University	22 April 2008
Professor Erica Smith, Dean of Graduate Studies and Professor of Education, University of Ballarat	23 April 2008
Mr Ben Gregg, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College	23 April 2008
Mr Dean McLean, Parent, Alexandra	23 April 2008
Ms Courtney Barker, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College	23 April 2008
Ms Greta Vallance, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College	23 April 2008
Mr Shane Dan, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College	23 April 2008
Ms Stefanie Wills, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College	23 April 2008
Ms Kaitlin Boorn, Second Year Student, Bachelor of Nutrition and Dietetics, Monash University	26 April 2008
Mrs Marie Hein, Parent, Portland	27 April 2008
Mr Neville and Mrs Wendy O'Brien, Parents, Wodonga	27 April 2008
Rural Education Forum Australia	28 April 2008
Deakin University Student Association	28 April 2008
South West Regional Youth Affairs Network	28 April 2008

<b>Name of individual/organisation</b>	<b>Date received</b>
South West Institute of TAFE	28 April 2008
Southern Grampians Youth Network	28 April 2008
Mr Ryan Monaghan, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College	28 April 2008
Ms Jasmine Marks, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College	28 April 2008
Mr Ben Corbett, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College	28 April 2008
Ms Jenna Lockett, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College	28 April 2008
Mr Thomas Hall, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College	28 April 2008
Ms Sophie Elliott, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College	28 April 2008
Mr Shane Collins, Parent, Wendouree	29 April 2008
Gordon Institute of TAFE	29 April 2008
South West Association of Post Primary Principals	29 April 2008
Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria)	2 May 2008
Mrs Vicki Love, Parent, Inverloch	3 May 2008
Gippsland Education Precinct	5 May 2008
Human Services Directors of the Interface Councils	5 May 2008
Rural City of Wangaratta	5 May 2008
Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch)	7 May 2008
South East LLEN	8 May 2008
South East Development (Melbourne) Area Consultative Committee	8 May 2008
Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University	8 May 2008
Mrs Loretta Ellis, Parent, Mildura	8 May 2008
Mrs Therese Baker, Parent, Bunyip	8 May 2008
Ms Janine McGinness-Whyte, Parent, Portarlington	11 May 2008
Mornington Peninsula Shire	12 May 2008
Monash University Student Union Peninsula	12 May 2008
Mrs Jennifer Coombs, Parent, Alexandra	12 May 2008



Name of individual/organisation	Date received
Ms Mandy Kirsopp, Parent, Haven	13 May 2008
Smart Geelong Region LLEN	13 May 2008
Mrs Jennie de Freitas, Parent and Teacher, Alexandra	13 May 2008
Mr Peter Dryden, Warrnambool	15 May 2008
Mrs Victoria Draper, Parent, Eildon	15 May 2008
Mr Axil Lonergan, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College	16 May 2008
Mrs Enid Kay, Parent, Traralgon	17 May 2008
Mr Joshua Langdon, Year 11 Student, Ouyen Secondary College	18 May 2008
Monash Residential Services	19 May 2008
Mr Grahame and Mrs Lynda Code, Parents, Aberfeldy	19 May 2008
Lakes Entrance Secondary College	20 May 2008
Orbost Secondary College	20 May 2008
Year 12 Students, Orbost Secondary College	20 May 2008
South Gippsland Bass Coast LLEN	21 May 2008
Mr Ian Whitehead, Former School Principal, Traralgon	22 May 2008
North Central LLEN	26 May 2008
WORKCO Limited	28 May 2008
Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres	2 June 2008
Ms Joan O'Haire, Parent, Robinvale	2 June 2008
Catholic College Wodonga	3 June 2008
Woodall Family, Walpeup	3 June 2008
Northern Mallee LLEN	3 June 2008
Wonthaggi Secondary College	4 June 2008
Mrs Lynne Cromer, TAFE Student, Red Cliffs	10 June 2008
Mrs Debra Mahy, Student, Commercial Cookery, Sunraysia Institute of TAFE	12 June 2008
Mrs Brigitte Bucknall, Surrey Hills	17 June 2008

<b>Name of individual/organisation</b>	<b>Date received</b>
Mrs Maria Moutis, Parent, Reservoir	19 June 2008
Ms Claire Cripps, Healesville	20 June 2008
Ms Cassandra Phillips, First Year Student, Deakin University	25 June 2008
Mr Laurence Money, Shelley (Western Australia)	8 August 2008
Ms Pam Gains, Parent, Cowes	10 August 2008
Access and Success, Victoria University	12 August 2008
Centre for Multicultural Youth	12 August 2008
Western Chances	12 August 2008
Ms Wendy Opresnik, Student and Parent, Shepparton	17 August 2008
Mrs Leanne Robson, Parent, Goughs Bay	2 October 2008
Mrs Jacqueline Horkings, Parent and Teacher, Mildura	20 January 2009
Ms Tricia Henry Schipp, Benalla	28 February 2009
Ms Julie Smith, Parent, Greta West	28 February 2009
Mr Gregory Barr, Acting Secretary, Shepparton Assembly Electorate District Council	23 March 2009
Dr Gillian Best, Lecturer, Student Learning, Learning Support Services, VU College, Victoria University	22 April 2009

# Appendix C

---

## Public hearings

---

### Melbourne, 25 February 2008

---

Name	Position	Organisation
Ms Elaine Wenn	Director	Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre
Dr Sue Loci	Executive Manager, Measurement and Reporting	Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre
Professor Richard Teese	Director, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning	The University of Melbourne
Mr Phil Brown	Executive Officer	Country Education Project
Mr Gary Allen	Chair	Country Education Project

---

### Melbourne, 3 March 2008

---

Name	Position	Organisation
Dr Hamish Coates	Principal Research Fellow	Australian Council for Educational Research
Professor Richard James	Director, Centre for the Study of Higher Education	The University of Melbourne
Professor Richard Larkins	Chair	Universities Australia
	Vice-Chancellor	Monash University

---

### Melbourne, 14 April 2008

---

Name	Position	Organisation
Mr Barry Wright	Executive Officer	Highlands LLEN
Ms Georgie Ferrari	Executive Officer	Youth Affairs Council of Victoria
Ms Jennifer Rose	Manager, Policy and Projects	Youth Affairs Council of Victoria
Mr Tom Ballard	Recent School Leaver	
Ms Sarah Cole	State President, Victorian Branch	National Union of Students

*Inquiry into Geographical Differences in Participation in Higher Education in Victoria*

---

Ms Robyn May	Industrial Officer	National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division)
Dr Steve McEachern	Representative	National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian Division)
Mr Gilbert Fryatt	Chairman, Education Committee	Victorian Farmers Federation

---

**Hamilton, 28 April 2008**

---

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Mr Michael Date	Executive Officer	Glenelg and Southern Grampians LLEN
Ms Jo Devereaux	Executive Officer	Wimmera Southern Mallee LLEN
Mr Barry Baker	Convener and Member	South West Regional Youth Affairs Network
Mr Tim McMahon	Student Representative	South West Regional Youth Affairs Network
Ms Leanne Watt	Member	South West Regional Youth Affairs Network
	Youth Worker	YouthBiz, Western District Health Service
Mr Bruce Simons	Principal	The Hamilton and Alexandra College
Mr Bernard Neal	Principal	Monivae College
Mr Bob Wilhelm	Principal	Good Shepherd College
Ms Toni Burgoyne	Principal	Portland Secondary College
Ms Suzanne Patterson	Managed Individual Pathways Coordinator	Portland Secondary College
Mr Robert Vecchiet	Principal	Baimbridge College
Ms Julie Neeson	Executive Officer	Southern Grampians Adult Education
Ms Kathryn Hamill	Youth Education Program Coordinator	Southern Grampians Adult Education
Ms Laura Scott	Former Student	Southern Grampians Adult Education
Ms Sarah Clark	Student	Southern Grampians Adult Education
Ms Amylee Sharrock	Student	Southern Grampians Adult Education
Mr Nathan Ainger	Student	Southern Grampians Adult Education
Ms Leigh Toddun	Facilitator	Glenelg Local Community Partnership

Ms Zoe Dyke	Student, Hamilton Campus	RMIT University
Ms Edwina Nagorcka	Student, Hamilton Campus	RMIT University
Ms Emma Shepherd	Project Officer	Greater Green Triangle Area Consultative Committee
Mr Michael Bell	Treasurer	Heywood Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
	Health Programs Manager	Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation
Mr Daryl Rose	Chairperson	Heywood Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
	Representative	Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation
Dr Leone Wheeler	Head, Learning Community Partnerships	RMIT University
Ms Julie Kean	Executive Manager, Organisational Development	South West Institute of TAFE
Ms Jacinta Roache	Research and Planning Officer, Quality and Innovation Branch	South West Institute of TAFE
Ms Helen Sobey	Parent	
Mr Mike Wagg	Parent	
Ms Deb Howcroft	Parent	
Ms Lena McCormack	Parent	
Ms Kellie Frankland	Drug and Alcohol and Indigenous Family Violence Worker	Dhauwurd-Wurrung Elderly and Community Health Service
	Koorie Liaison Officer	South West Institute of TAFE

---

**Colac, 29 April 2008**

---

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Cr Chris Smith	Mayor	Colac Otway Shire Council
Ms Tracy Slatter	Chief Executive Officer	Colac Otway Shire Council
Mr Mike Barrow	Manager, Economic Development	Colac Otway Shire Council
Cr David Atkinson	Mayor	Warrnambool City Council
Mr Andrew Paton	Grants/Business Development Officer, City Growth Directorate	Warrnambool City Council
Ms Toni Hancock	Executive Officer	South West LLEN

Mr Peter McDonald	Treasurer	South West LLEN
Mr Vince Callaghan	Member	South West LLEN
Dr John Henry	Board Member	Smart Geelong Region LLEN
Ms Ashley Dunn	Treasurer	Colac Otway Youth Council
Mr Thomas Szmidel	Vice-Chairman	Colac Otway Youth Council
Ms Jenna Kettle	Councillor	Colac Otway Youth Council
Mr Mark Holland	Principal, Murray Street Campus	Colac Secondary College
Ms Mary Pendergast	Principal	Warrnambool College
Mrs Jane Boyle	Principal	Mortlake P-12 College
Mr Shane Robertson	Former Student	Warrnambool College
Ms Leigh Bartlett	Regional Youth Affairs Consultant	Barwon Adolescent Task Force
Mr Aaron Lane	Student and Residential Assistant	Deakin University
Mr John Devereaux	Director, Division of Student Life	Deakin University
Mr John Temple	Manager, Personal Support and Residences	Deakin University
Dr Jennifer Oriel	Head, Student Equity Unit	Deakin University
Professor Wendy Brabham	Director, Institute of Koorie Education	Deakin University
Ms Fran Cooper	Project Officer, Institute of Koorie Education	Deakin University
Ms Cayla Edwards	President	Deakin University Student Association
Ms Josie Nelson	Vice-President, Warrnambool Campus	Deakin University Student Association
Ms Laura Williams	Vice-President, Waterfront Campus	Deakin University Student Association
Ms Breanna Flatt	Vice-President, Waur Ponds Campus	Deakin University Student Association
Ms Jan Golden	Executive Director, Education Programs	Gordon Institute of TAFE

## Rosebud, 12 May 2008

Name	Position	Organisation
Mr Joe Cauchi	Director, Sustainable Communities	Mornington Peninsula Shire Council
Mr David Conley	Youth Services Coordinator	Mornington Peninsula Shire Council
Mr Steve Wright	Executive Officer	Peninsula Training and Employment Program
Mr Simon Dwyer	Coordinator	Peninsula Training and Employment Program
Ms Jasmine Cairns	Student	Community VCAL
Ms Pat O'Connell	Executive Officer	Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN
Mr Richard Butler	Chair	Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN
	Area General Manager	Telstra
Mr Matthew Keates	President	MONSU Peninsula
Ms Cara Alphey	Deputy President	MONSU Peninsula
Ms Elise Pongrac	Overseas Student Services Director	MONSU Peninsula
Mr Adrian Gray	Representative	MONSU Peninsula
Ms Tara Trickey	Education, Community and Welfare Officer	MONSU Peninsula
Ms Claire Heath	Representative	MONSU Peninsula
Ms Zoe Francis	Representative	MONSU Peninsula
Ms Dionne Van Der Wath	Representative	MONSU Peninsula
Ms Sue Webb	Campus Manager, Peninsula Campus	Monash University
Professor Phillip Steele	Pro Vice-Chancellor, Campus Coordination and Academic Director, Berwick and Peninsula Campuses	Monash University
Mr Christopher Houlihan	Principal	Padua College
Ms Kristen Burt	Careers Adviser	Padua College
Mr Bryan Ridgeway	Acting Principal	Rosebud Secondary College
Ms Vikki Leggett	Planning and Research Officer, Rosebud Campus	Chisholm Institute of TAFE
Ms Helen McNamara	Manager, Strategic Planning, Rosebud Campus	Chisholm Institute of TAFE
Ms Clare Wilson		Australian Maritime College

Mr David Crockett                      Executive Consultant                      Australian Maritime College

---

**Churchill, 19 May 2008**

---

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Mr Rob Juratowitch	Campus Principal, Kurnai College	Gippsland Education Precinct
Mr Mike Answerth	Executive Officer	Gippsland Education Precinct
Mr Kevin Kennedy	Managing Director	Gippsland Group Training
Mr Mick Murphy	Executive Officer	Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN
Mr John Ernst	Member, Committee of Management	Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN
Mr David Roche	Executive Officer	South Gippsland and Bass Coast LLEN
	Governance Board	Leongatha Education Precinct
Ms Carol Elliot	Manager, Planning and Development	Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE South Gippsland and Bass Coast LLEN
Ms Doris Paton	Team Leader, Koorie Unit	Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE
Ms Sadie Heckenberg	Student, Gippsland Campus	Monash University
Ms Robyn Heckenberg	Head and Lecturer, Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies	Monash University
Mr Isaac Haddock	Koorie Home-school Liaison Officer	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria)
Mr Stephen Walsh	Central Gippsland Wurreker Broker	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
Associate Professor Harry Ballis	Acting Pro Vice-Chancellor, Gippsland Campus	Monash University
Ms Loretta Hambly	Director, Strategic Planning, Gippsland Campus	Monash University
Mr Alan Scarlett	Executive Officer and Campus Manager, Gippsland Campus	Monash University
Mr Don Paproth	Deputy Regional Director	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria)



Ms Yvonne Snell	Assistant to the Deputy Regional Director	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria)
Mr James Mills	Year 12 Student	Kurnai College
Mr Clayton Tebb	Year 12 Student	Kurnai College
Ms Laura Thorburn	Year 12 Student	Kurnai College
Ms Tegan Johnson	Year 12 Student	Kurnai College
Ms Samantha Holcombe	Year 12 Student	Kurnai College
Mr Matt Whitelaw	Year 12 Student	Kurnai College
Mr Daniel Yacoub	Year 12 Student	Kurnai College
Ms Casey Felmingham	Year 12 Student	Kurnai College
Mr Andrew McKernan	Year 12 Student	Kurnai College
Mr Patrick Dempsey	Deferred Student	
Ms Jodie Matthews	Project Officer	South Gippsland Bass Coast LLEN
Ms Kate Boyer	Youth Pathways Officer	Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN
Mr Waseem Awan	Manager, On-Campus Accommodation, Monash Residential Services, Gippsland	Monash University
Ms Kristine Papadopoulos	Manager, Off-Campus Housing, Monash Residential Services	Monash University
Ms Freda Webb	Student Adviser, Health, Wellbeing and Development, Monash Residential Services, Gippsland	Monash University
Ms Aspen Kilby	Student Advocate and Support Coordinator	Monash University Gippsland Student Union
Ms Leslie Schmidt	President	Monash University Gippsland Student Union
Mr Sean Murphy	Education Vice-President	Monash University Gippsland Student Union
Mr Ian Whitehead	Former School Principal	

---

**Bairnsdale, 20 May 2008**

---

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Mr Steve Kozlowski	Chief Executive Officer	East Gippsland Shire Council
Mr Bruce Graham	Director, Strategic Development	Wellington Shire Council
Mr Donald Anderson	Consultant	Wellington Shire Council

*Inquiry into Geographical Differences in Participation in Higher Education in Victoria*

---

Mr Peter Burslem	Chairperson	Gippsland East LLEN
Dr Linda Wilkinson	Executive Officer	Gippsland East LLEN
Mr John Ireland	Coordinator, School Focused Youth Service	Gippsland Lakes Community Health
Ms Jacinta Crealy	Coordinator, Reconnect Program	Gippsland Lakes Community Health
Ms Traci Wilson-Brown	Parent	
Ms Margie Barton	Parent	
Ms Tam Linsen	Parent	
Mr Robert Boucher	Principal	Swifts Creek Secondary College
Mr Craig Sutherland	Principal	Lakes Entrance Secondary College
Mr Andrew Symons	Post-compulsory Programs Coordinator	Lakes Entrance Secondary College
Ms Frances Haldane	Senior Campus Principal	Bairnsdale Secondary College
Ms Sue Monahu	Careers Officer	Bairnsdale Secondary College
Ms Leanne Healey	Managed Individual Pathways Coordinator	Maffra Secondary College
Ms Kate Hodge	Later Years Manager	Maffra Secondary College
Mr Tony Barton	Careers Coordinator	Orbost Secondary College
Ms Judy Taylor	Careers Coordinator	Catholic College Sale
Ms Hannah Barry	School Captain and Year 12 Student	Bairnsdale Secondary College
Mr Harry Barton	School Captain and Year 12 Student	Bairnsdale Secondary College
Ms Emma McKenzie	Year 12 Student	Bairnsdale Secondary College
Ms Sarah Gixti	Second Year Student, Bachelor of Commerce, Bairnsdale Campus	RMIT University
Mr Patrick Haylock	Deferred Student	
Ms Pip Ericson	Deferred Student	

---

**Robinvale, 2 June 2008**

---

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Mr Dennis Hovenden	Chief Executive Officer	Swan Hill Rural City Council
Ms Rosanne Kava	Chief Executive Officer	Gannawarra Shire Council
Ms Kerrie Hare	Community Relations Officer and Media Manager	Gannawarra Shire Council

Mr Max Tolson	Horticulture Relations Manager	Timbercorp
Mr Glenn Stewart	Executive Officer	Murray Mallee LLEN
Mr Shane Kelly	Acting Principal	Swan Hill College
Mr Rob Johnson	Careers Pathways Manager	Swan Hill College
Ms Sophie Ryan	Year 11 Student	Swan Hill College
Mr Lachlan Mitchell	Year 9 Student	Swan Hill College
Ms Fiona Harley	Manager	Chances for Children
	Deputy Executive Director	Mallee Family Care
Ms Catherine Timpano	Student, Bendigo Campus	La Trobe University
Mr Kevin Lee	Principal	Robinvale Secondary College
Mr Peter Carnegie	Careers Coordinator	Robinvale Secondary College
Mr Scott Ilsley	Year 11 Coordinator and College Council Representative	Robinvale Secondary College
Ms Dianne Vandenberg	Teacher and Welfare Coordinator	Robinvale Secondary College
Ms Xana Hoyle-Holdsworth	School Captain and Year 12 Student	Robinvale Secondary College
Mr Matthew Cimino	School Captain and Year 12 Student	Robinvale Secondary College
Mr Kent Farrell	Executive Director, Mildura Campus	La Trobe University
Mr Lawrence Moser	Indigenous Community Engagement Broker, Loddon Mallee Region	Aboriginal Affairs Victoria
Ms Sue Connelly	Koorie Educator	Swan Hill North Primary School
Mr Brendan Kennedy	Koorie Liaison Officer, Robinvale Campus	Sunraysia Institute of TAFE
Ms Deborah Quin	Regional Migration Coordinator	Swan Hill Rural City Council
Ms Jenny Grigg	Manager, Rural Business	Sunraysia Institute of TAFE
Mr Ray Cadmore	Pathways Coordinator	Sunraysia Institute of TAFE
Ms Tania Pearce	Manager, Student Services and Residences	Sunraysia Institute of TAFE

---

**Ouyen, 3 June 2008**

---

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Mr Malcolm Goldsworthy	Acting Principal	Ouyen Secondary College
Ms Cheryl Torpey	Careers Coordinator	Ouyen Secondary College
Mr Peter Vallance	Year 12 Student	Ouyen Secondary College
Ms Chelsea Manley	Year 12 Student	Ouyen Secondary College
Mr Dominic Leach	Year 12 Student	Ouyen Secondary College
Ms Cheyenne Johns	Year 12 Student	Ouyen Secondary College
Ms Deri Singleton	Year 9 Student	Ouyen Secondary College
Mr Ryan Monaghan	Year 11 Student	Ouyen Secondary College
Mr Joel Monaghan	Year 8 Student	Ouyen Secondary College
Mr Kyle Gallichan	Year 8 Student	Ouyen Secondary College
Ms Kimberly Fidge	Year 8 Student	Ouyen Secondary College
Mr Joab Mead	Year 8 Student	Ouyen Secondary College
Cr Vernon Knight	Deputy Mayor	Mildura Rural City Council
Mr Gary Simpson	Chair	Northern Mallee LLEN
Mr George Stone	Interim Executive Officer	Northern Mallee LLEN
Dr John Russell	Director	Mildura Regional Clinical School
Mrs Hilary Thiele	Principal	Murrayville Community College
Ms Patricia Nunan	Principal	Werrimull P-12 School
Mr Mark Wilson	Chair	Ouyen Inc
Mr Steve Vallance	Representative	Ouyen Inc
Ms Sue Sly	Parent	
Ms Dianne Monaghan	Parent	

---

**Lilydale, 17 July 2008**

---

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Ms Alison Cran	Director, Social and Economic Development	Yarra Ranges Shire Council
Mr Nick White	Executive Officer, Social Planning and Development	Yarra Ranges Shire Council
Mr Lou Sbalchiero	Community Development Officer	Yarra Ranges Shire Council
Ms Loren Miller	Community Development Coordinator, Youth Services	Yarra Ranges Shire Council
Mr Aaron Gray	Year 12 Student and Young Leader Program Participant	Billanook Secondary College

Mr Jack Jonson	VCAL Student and Young Leader Program Participant	Morrison House
Ms Kat Billington	Year 12 Student and Young Leader Program Participant	Upper Yarra Secondary College
Professor Kay Lipson	Dean, Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale Campus	Swinburne University of Technology
Ms Sharon Rice	Director, Centre for Engagement in Vocational Learning, TAFE Division	Swinburne University of Technology
Ms Heather Hickson	Executive Officer	Eastern Industry Education Partnership
Ms Vanessa Virgato	Career and Transition Coordinator	Eastern Industry Education Partnership
Ms Sally Brennan	Chief Executive Officer	Upper Yarra Community House
Ms Sue Costello	VCAL Coordinator	Upper Yarra Community House
Ms Helene Rooks	VCAL Coordinator	Morrison House
Mr Leon Bishop	Principal	Lilydale High School
Ms Johanna Walker	Assistant Principal	Lilydale High School
Dr Michael McNamara	Principal	Croydon Secondary College
Mr Graeme Bailey	Acting Principal	Lilydale Heights Secondary College
Mr Simon Reid	Principal	Mooroolbark College
Mr Michael Hill	Principal	Upper Yarra Secondary College
Mrs Anne Tacey	Managed Individual Pathways, Careers and VET Coordinator	Healesville High School
Mr Michael Horn	Senior Manager, Research and Policy Centre	Brotherhood of St Laurence

---

**Melbourne, 23 July 2008**


---

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Mr George McLean	General Manager, Youth Transitions Division	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria)
Dr Sara Glover	Manager, Data and Evaluation	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria)
Dr David Woodhouse	Executive Director	Australian Universities Quality Agency
Mr Stuart Hamilton	Chief Executive Officer	Open Universities Australia

Ms Janet Baker	Manager, Policy and Projects	Open Universities Australia
Ms Bronwyn Stubbs	Principal	Distance Education Centre Victoria
Mr Shaun Robson	Acting Executive Officer	Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria
Mr Eddie Micallef	Deputy Chair	Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria

---

**Sunshine, 12 August 2008**

---

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Ms Lynda Steele	Principal, North Campus	Sunshine College
Mr Gordon Cameron	Managed Individual Pathways Coordinator	Sunshine College
Ms Marg O'Shea	Careers Coordinator	Copperfield College
Ms Rachael Elliot	Year 11 Student	Sunshine College
Mr Adam Meyers	Year 11 Student	Sunshine College
Mr Daniel Nguyen	Year 12 Student	Sunshine College
Mr Jorje Marijona	Year 12 Student	Sunshine College
Mr Daniel Viviers	Year 11 VCAL Student	Copperfield College
Ms Isata Tontoe	Year 11 Student	Sunshine College
Mr Thuong Lam	Year 12 Student	Sunshine College
Ms Kate Steckyj	Year 12 Student	Copperfield College
Dr Merryn Davies	Co-director, Access and Success	Victoria University
Mr Tony Edwards	Project Manager, Access and Success	Victoria University
Dr Emma Curtin	Liaison Officer, Making VU Project	Victoria University
Ms Jenny Halat	Acting Manager, Parent Information Program	Victoria University
Ms Marie Weiss	Student Counsellor, Counselling Service, Parent Information Program	Victoria University
Ms Elizabeth Kianidis	Student Counsellor, Counselling Service, Parent Information Program	Victoria University
Ms Glenda Norwood	Administrative Officer, Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Region	Victoria University
Mr Ben Perry	Student	Victoria University
Ms Stacey Powell	Student	Victoria University

Ms Amanda Colahan	Student	Victoria University
Ms Jo Molley	Student	Victoria University
Ms Laura Davis	Student	Victoria University
Mr Isaac Lewis	TAFE Student	RMIT University
Ms Soo-Lin Quek	Manager, Policy and Research	Centre for Multicultural Youth
Ms Noemi Garcia	Coordinator, Case Management	Centre for Multicultural Youth
Ms Nyadol Nyuon	Student, Bachelor of Arts	Victoria University
Ms Helen Worlidge	Executive Director	Western Chances
Mr Zion Abatayo	Scholarship Recipient and Student	Melbourne University
Mr Michael Tran	Scholarship Recipient and Year 11 Student	Sunshine College
Ms Phuong Le	Scholarship Recipient and Year 11 Student	Sunshine College
Ms Kausar Alim	Scholarship Recipient and Year 11 Student	Sunshine College

---

**Benalla, 3 March 2009**

---

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Mrs Sue Oakley	Assistant Principal and VET Coordinator, Senior School	Benalla College
Mrs Ann Forster	VCE Teacher, Careers Coordinator and Work Education Coordinator, Senior School	Benalla College
Ms Melanie Levy	VCE Graduate 2008, Sport and Recreation Trainee	Benalla College
Ms Jasmine Billingsley	School Captain	Benalla College
Mr Patrick Marple	School Captain	Benalla College
Ms Ann Heywood	Executive Manager, Social Planning	Rural City of Wangaratta
Ms Anne Trickey	Executive Officer	Careers Connection
Dr Lin Crase	Director, Albury-Wodonga Campus	La Trobe University
Ms Elizabeth Lavender	Executive Director, Shepparton Campus	La Trobe University
Dr Andrew Harvey	Acting Executive Director, Bendigo Campus	La Trobe University
Professor Ross Chambers	Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic	Charles Sturt University
Mr Col Sharp	Director, Planning and Audit	Charles Sturt University

*Inquiry into Geographical Differences in Participation in Higher Education in Victoria*

---

Mr Phil Guthrie	Manager	Academy of Sport, Health and Education
Ms Tui Crumpen	Manager, Goulburn Valley Partnerships	Academy of Sport, Health and Education
Ms Jeanne Norling	Divisional Manager, Service Industries	Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE
Ms Balvinder Kaur	Manager, Multicultural Education Centre	Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE

---

**Melbourne (Telstra Executive Briefing Centre), 23 March 2009**

---

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Ms Rachael Moore	Student	RMIT University
Ms Bridget McKenzie	Graduate	Gippsland Community Leadership Program
Professor Bill Adam	Acting Head, School of Rural Health	The University of Melbourne
Mr Howard Filer	Account Director, Victorian State Education, Enterprise and Government	Telstra

---

**Melbourne, 30 March 2009**

---

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Professor David Battersby	Vice-Chancellor	University of Ballarat
Professor Rodger Eade	Director, Office of the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor	Victoria University
Professor Merran Evans	Pro Vice-Chancellor, Planning and Quality	Monash University
Dr Kerry Ferguson	Pro Vice-Chancellor, Equity and Student Services	La Trobe University
Professor Elizabeth Harman	Vice-Chancellor	Victoria University
Professor Joyce Kirk	Pro Vice-Chancellor, Students	RMIT University
Professor John McCallum	Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor	Victoria University
Ms Carmel Murphy	Deputy Principal, Office of Admissions	The University of Melbourne
Mr Chris Sheargold	Associate Vice-Chancellor, Melbourne Campus	Australian Catholic University
Professor Sally Walker	Vice-Chancellor	Deakin University



# Appendix D

---

## Interstate investigations

---

### Meetings—Canberra, 17 June 2008

---

Name	Position	Organisation
Mr Matt Davies	Acting Group Manager, Strategic Analysis and Evaluation Group	Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
Dr Caroline Perkins	Branch Manager, Equity and Structural Reform Branch, Higher Education Group	Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
Mr Jason Coutts	Branch Manager, Policy and Analysis Branch, Higher Education Group	Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
Ms Marg Sykes	Branch Manager, Enterprise and Career Development Branch	Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
Ms Shirley Douglas	Branch Manager, Capital and Rural Programs Branch	Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
Mr Murray Kimber	Branch Manager, Income Support for Students Branch	Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
Mr Tony Greer	Group Manager, Indigenous Education Group	Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

### Public Hearings—Canberra, 17 June 2008

---

Name	Position	Organisation
Mr Michael Gallagher	Executive Director	Group of Eight
Mr Tim Payne	Deputy Executive Director	Group of Eight
Dr Glenn Withers	Chief Executive Officer	Universities Australia

Ms Keely Dreghorn	Policy Officer	Universities Australia
Mr Tim Beckett	Registrar	Australian National University Student Services
Ms Jamila Rizvi	President	Australian National University Students' Association
Ms Madeleine Firth	Vice-President	Australian National University Students' Association
Ms Kacey Lam	Representative	Australian National University Students' Association
Ms Kate Ottrey	Representative	Australian National University Students' Association
Ms Glenys London	Academic Director	University of Canberra

---

**Meetings—Geraldton, 28 April 2009**

---

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Ms Meredith Wills	Director	Geraldton Universities Centre
	Member	Geraldton University Access Group
Dr Mort Harslett	Academic Course Coordinator, Curtin Centre for Regional Education	Geraldton Universities Centre
Mr Simon Forrest	Sessional Lecturer, Education, Curtin University of Technology	Geraldton Universities Centre
	Member	Geraldton University Access Group
	Manager, Aboriginal Education, Mid West District Education Office	Department of Education and Training (Western Australia)
Mr Peter Hanrahan	Sessional Lecturer, Education, Curtin University of Technology	Geraldton Universities Centre
	Teacher	Strathalbyn Christian College
Mr Simon Keemink	Sessional Lecturer, Education, Curtin University of Technology	Geraldton Universities Centre
	Teacher	Geraldton Senior College

Ms Di Miller	Sessional Lecturer, Education, Curtin University of Technology	Geraldton Universities Centre
	Deputy Principal	Bluff Point Primary School
Ms Jacquie Correy	Sessional Lecturer, University Preparation Course, Edith Cowan University	Geraldton Universities Centre
Ms Wendy Sekuloff	Sessional Lecturer, University Preparation Course, Edith Cowan University	Geraldton Universities Centre
	Mathematics Teacher	Geraldton Senior College
Mr Wayne Hosking	Director	Geraldton University Access Group
	Chief Executive Officer	Geraldton Fisherman's Cooperative
Cr Janette Brennan	Secretary	Geraldton University Access Group
	Councillor	City of Geraldton
Mr Steve Douglas	Member	Geraldton University Access Group
	Chief Executive Officer	Mid West Development Commission
Ms Priscilla Clayton	Member	Geraldton University Access Group
	ASKAP Regional Manager	CSIRO Australian National Telescope Facility

---

**Civic Reception—Geraldton, 28 April 2009**

---

Hosted by Cr Ian Carpenter, Mayor, City of Geraldton-Greenough.

---

**School Visit—Geraldton Senior College, 29 April 2009**

---

Name	Position	Organisation
Mr Gary Simmons	Principal	Geraldton Senior College
Ms Beryl Harslett	Deputy Principal	Geraldton Senior College
Ms Alana Carson	Director, Curriculum Development	Geraldton Senior College
Mr Tony Nikola	Manager, Career and Vocational Education	Geraldton Senior College
Ms Hazel Snell	Career and Transition Counsellor	Geraldton Senior College
Ms Brodie Drage	Year 12 Student	Geraldton Senior College
Mr Brett Patience	Year 12 Student	Geraldton Senior College

Ms Ashlan Harris	Year 12 Student	Geraldton Senior College
Ms Taylor Banton	Year 12 Student	Geraldton Senior College
Ms Claire Parker	Year 12 Student	Geraldton Senior College
Ms Kirsten Colum	Year 12 Student	Geraldton Senior College
Ms Caroline Drogue	Parent and College Council Member	Geraldton Senior College
Ms Felicity Rutherford	President, Parents and Carers	Geraldton Senior College

---

**Meetings—Geraldton, 29 April 2009**

---

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Mr Simon Forrest	Sessional Lecturer, Education, Curtin University of Technology	Geraldton Universities Centre
	Member	Geraldton University Access Group
	Manager, Aboriginal Education, Mid West District Education Office	Department of Education and Training (Western Australia)
Mr Bert Beevers	Member	Geraldton University Access Group
	Managing Director	Central West TAFE
Ms Roni Gray Forrest	Student Support Officer	Kurongkurl Katitjin, Edith Cowan University
Mr Les O'Neill	Graduate Student 2005, Bachelor of Business	Kurongkurl Katitjin, Edith Cowan University
Ms Melinda Adshead	Undergraduate Student, Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Education), Curtin University of Technology	Geraldton Universities Centre
Ms Rowena Arthurs	Graduate Student 2007, Bachelor of Science (Nursing), Curtin University of Technology	Geraldton Universities Centre
Ms Carissa Brown	Undergraduate Student, Bachelor of Education (Primary), Curtin University of Technology	Geraldton Universities Centre
Ms Donna McVee	Undergraduate Student, Bachelor of Education (Primary), Curtin University of Technology	Geraldton Universities Centre

Appendix D—Interstate investigations

Mr Shane Paxa	Postgraduate Student, Graduate Diploma in Education (Secondary), Curtin University of Technology	Geraldton Universities Centre
Ms Chloe Walker	Student, University Preparation Course, Edith Cowan University	Geraldton Universities Centre
Ms Janelle Wright	Undergraduate Student, Bachelor of Education (Primary), Curtin University of Technology	Geraldton Universities Centre
Ms Corrine Lynch	Undergraduate Student, Bachelor of Creative Industries, Edith Cowan University	Geraldton Universities Centre

**Meetings—Perth, 30 April 2009**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Professor Jeanette Hackett	Vice-Chancellor	Curtin University of Technology
Professor Robyn Quin	Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education	Curtin University of Technology
	Board Member	Geraldton Universities Centre
Mrs Jane McMeikan	Director, External Relations	Curtin University of Technology
Professor Arshad Omari	Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic	Edith Cowan University
	Board Member	Geraldton Universities Centre
Professor Alan Robson	Vice-Chancellor	University of Western Australia
Professor Jane Long	Pro Vice-Chancellor, Teaching and Learning	University of Western Australia
	Board Member	Geraldton Universities Centre
Mr Terry Werner	Director of Higher Education and Legislative Review	Office of Higher Education, Department of Education Services (Western Australia)
	Board Member	Geraldton Universities Centre



# Appendix E

---

## International investigations

The Committee undertook international investigations in Finland, Scotland and Canada during the period 25 August to 5 September 2008. During these investigations, the Committee conducted meetings for two separate parliamentary inquiries: Inquiry into Effective Strategies for Teacher Professional Learning; and Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education.

### HELSINKI, 25 August 2008

---

#### Ministry of Education

---

Mr Ikka Turunen, Special Government Advisor, Division for Higher Education and Science  
Ms Marja-Liisa Niemi, Counsellor of Education, Division for Higher Education and Science

---

#### Finnish National Board of Education

---

Ms Ritva Jakku-Sihvonen, Director of Quality Assurance and Monitoring, Finnish National Board of Education

---

#### Education and Culture Committee, Parliament of Finland

---

Ms Raija Vahasalo MP, Chair  
Ms Sanna Lauslahti MP, Committee Member  
Ms Ulrica Gabrielsson, Researcher  
Mr Kaj Laine, Committee Counsel

---

#### National Union of University Students in Finland

---

Mr Tuomas Telkkä, President  
Mr Juhana Harju, Educational Officer  
Mr Tuure Pitkänen, Executive Board Member

---

#### Trade Union of Education in Finland

---

Ms Marjatta Melto, Special Advisor

### HELSINKI, 26 August 2008

---

#### Kallahti Comprehensive School

---

Mr Timo Heikkinen, Principal

---

**University of Helsinki**

---

Professor Hannele Niemi, Vice Rector  
Mr Markus Laitinen, Head of International Affairs  
Ms Martha Norrback, International Affairs

---

---

**Finnish Council of University Rectors**

---

Professor Krista Varantola, Chair  
Dr Liisa Savunen, Secretary General

---

---

**Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council**

---

Professor Riitta Pyykko, Chair  
Dr Helka Kekäläinen, Secretary General

---

**EDINBURGH, 28 August 2008**

---

---

**General Teaching Council for Scotland**

---

Mr Tom Hamilton, Director of Educational Policy  
Mr John Anderson, Head of Professional Practice

---

---

**CPD Scotland**

---

Mr Con Morris, National CPD Team Adviser  
Mr Jim Keegans, National CPD Team Adviser

---

---

**Learning and Teaching Scotland**

---

Mr Bernard McLeary, Chief Executive  
Professor Kay Livingston, Head of International Education

---

---

**Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee  
Scottish Parliament**

---

Ms Karen Whitefield MSP, Convenor  
Mr Nick Hawthorne, Senior Assistant Clerk

---

---

**Universities Scotland**

---

Dr Jim O'Brien, Director of the Centre for Educational Leadership, University of Edinburgh  
Mr Peter Syme, Director of the Open University in Scotland  
Dr Michael Osborne, Director, Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, Glasgow  
Caledonian University  
Dr Aileen Kennedy, Associate Dean, Initial Teacher Education, Strathclyde University  
Professor Ted Cowan, Director of Dumfries Campus, University of Glasgow  
Mr Robin McAlpine, Public Affairs Manager, Universities Scotland



---

**UHI Millennium Institute**

---

Professor Robert J. Cormack, Principal

---

**Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning**

---

Ms Fiona Hyslop MSP, Cabinet Secretary

Mr Colin MacLean, Director of Schools

---

**EDINBURGH, 29 August 2008**

---

---

**Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate**

---

Mr Phillip Rycroft, Director General for Education and Lifelong Learning

Mr Tim Simons, Head of International Team, Schools Directorate

---

**HM Inspectorate of Education**

---

Mr Graham Donaldson, HM Chief Inspector

---

**Scottish Funding Council**

---

Mr John Kemp, Interim Director, Learning Policy and Strategy

---

**Scottish Wider Access Regional Forums**

---

Ms Margaret Dundas, National Coordinator for Widening Participation

---

**Equality Forward**

---

Ms Linda McLeod, Interim Director

---

**MONTREAL, 2 September 2008**

---

---

**Conference of Rectors and Principals of Quebec**

---

Mr Daniel Zizian, Director General

Mr Réginald Lacroix, Associate Director General

Mr Jacques Frémont, President, Committee of Academic Affairs and Provost and Vice Rector (Academic Affairs), University of Montreal

Mr Michael Laurier, Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Montreal

---

**Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation**

---

Mr Norman Riddell, Executive Director and CEO

Mr Yves Pelletier, Manager, Pilot Projects

Ms Diana Wickham, Executive Officer, Development

Mr Joseph Berger, Policy and Research Officer

Mr Noel Baldwin, Policy and Research Officer

---

**McGill University**

---

Dr Hélène Perrault, Dean, Faculty of Education

Dr Elizabeth Wood, Associate Dean, Academic Affairs

Dr Spencer Boudreau, Associate Dean, Teaching, Learning and Students

Dr Lynn Butler-Kisber, Associate Professor and Director, Centre for Educational Leadership

**QUEBEC, 3 September 2008**

---

**Ministry of Education, Recreation and Sport**

---

Ms Diane Gagnon, Director of International and Canadian Affairs

Ms Julie Bissonnette, Advisor, Division of International and Canadian Affairs

Mr Christian Ragusich, Director of College Education

Mr Jean-François Noël, Advisor, Division of University Education and Research

Ms Marie-Josée Larocque, Director of Teacher Professional Learning

---

**Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation**

---

Ms Nicole Boutin, President

Ms Josée Turcotte, Secretary General

Ms Judith Stymest, President, Advisory Committee on Financial Aid

Mr Paul Vigneau, Secretary, Advisory Committee on Financial Aid

---

**University of Quebec**

---

Mr Daniel Coderre, Vice President Academic and Research

Mr Pierre Lefrançois, Director of Studies and Research

Mr Denis Marchand, Director of Institutional Research

**TORONTO, 4 September 2008**

---

**Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities**

---

The Hon John Milloy, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities

Ms Marie-Lison Fougère, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy and Programs Division

---

**Ontario Ministry of Education**

---

The Hon Kathleen Wynne, Minister of Education

Deputy Minister Steve Marshall

Mr Paul Anthony, Director, Teaching Policy and Standards Branch

Ms Rebecca Cossar, Education Officer, Teaching Policy and Standards Branch

Ms Patricia Manson, Senior Executive Officer, Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat

**TORONTO, 5 September 2008**

---

**Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario**

---

Mr Ken Norrie, Vice-President, Research

Ms Fiona Deller, Research Director

Ms Laura Butler, Director, Corporate Services

Mr Bob Glass, Acting Director, Executive Services

---

**Ontario College of Teachers**

---

Mr Don Cattani, Chair

Mr Brian McGowan, Registrar and Chief Executive Officer

Ms Janis Leonard, Manager of Accreditation

Ms Michelle Longlade, Director, Standards of Practice and Accreditation

Ms Margaret Aube, Project Leader, Teacher Qualifications

Ms Kathy Anstett, External Relations Officer

---

**Ontario Principals' Council**

---

Ms Laura Hodgins, President

Mr Mike Benson, Executive Director

---

**Ontario Teachers' Federation**

---

Mr George (Joe) Lamoreux, President

Ms Lindy Amato, Director of Professional Affairs

Ms Rhonda Kimberley-Young, Secretary-Treasurer

Ms Siria Szkurhan, Manager, Professional Development Project



# Appendix F

## Postcodes comprising regions and local areas in Committee analysis

### Metropolitan

Region	Local Area	Postcodes
Metro Central	Melbourne	3000, 3002, 3003, 3005, 3006, 3008, 3010, 3050, 3051, 3052, 3053, 3001, 8002, 8004, 8008
	Port Phillip	3004, 3182, 3183, 3184, 3205, 3206, 3207
	Yarra	3054, 3065, 3066, 3067, 3068, 3121
Metro East	Knox	3152, 3153, 3154, 3155, 3156, 3178, 3179, 3180, 3176
	Manningham	3105, 3106, 3107, 3108, 3109, 3111, 3113, 3114, 3115
	Maroondah	3134, 3135, 3136
	Whitehorse	3125, 3127, 3128, 3129, 3130, 3131, 3132, 3133, 3151
Metro North	Banyule	3079, 3081, 3084, 3085, 3087, 3088, 3093, 3094
	Darebin	3070, 3071, 3072, 3073, 3078, 3086
	Moreland	3044, 3046, 3055, 3056, 3057, 3058, 3060
Metro South-East	Bayside	3186, 3187, 3188, 3190, 3191, 3193
	Boroondara	3101, 3102, 3103, 3104, 3122, 3123, 3124, 3126, 3146, 3147
	Glen Eira	3161, 3162, 3163, 3165, 3185, 3204
	Stonnington	3141, 3142, 3143, 3144, 3145, 3181
Metro South	Casey	3177, 3802, 3803, 3804, 3805, 3806, 3975, 3976, 3977, 3978, 3980
	Frankston	3198, 3199, 3200, 3201, 3910
	Greater Dandenong	3171, 3172, 3173, 3174, 3175, 3164
	Kingston	3169, 3189, 3192, 3194, 3195, 3196, 3197, 3202
	Monash	3148, 3149, 3150, 3166, 3167, 3168, 3170, 3800
Metro West	Brimbank	3020, 3021, 3022, 3023, 3036, 3038
	Hobsons Bay	3015, 3016, 3018, 3025, 3028
	Maribyrnong	3011, 3012, 3013, 3019
	Moonee Valley	3031, 3032, 3033, 3034, 3039, 3040, 3041, 3042

## Interface

Local Area	Postcodes
Cardinia	3781, 3782, 3783, 3807, 3808, 3809, 3810, 3812, 3813, 3814, 3815, 3981
Hume	3043, 3045, 3047, 3048, 3049, 3059, 3061, 3062, 3064, 3428, 3429, 3063
Melton	3037, 3335, 3337, 3338, 3427
Mornington Peninsula	3911, 3912, 3913, 3915, 3916, 3918, 3919, 3920, 3926, 3927, 3928, 3929, 3930, 3931, 3933, 3934, 3936, 3937, 3938, 3939, 3940, 3941, 3942, 3943, 3944
Nillumbik	3089, 3090, 3091, 3095, 3096, 3097, 3099, 3759, 3761, 3760
Whittlesea	3074, 3075, 3076, 3082, 3083, 3750, 3752, 3753, 3754, 3757, 3751, 3755, 3074, 3075, 3076, 3082, 3083, 3750, 3752, 3753, 3754, 3757, 3751, 3755
Wyndham	3024, 3026, 3027, 3029, 3030, 3211
Yarra Ranges	3116, 3137, 3138, 3139, 3140, 3158, 3159, 3160, 3765, 3766, 3767, 3770, 3775, 3777, 3785, 3787, 3788, 3789, 3791, 3792, 3793, 3795, 3796, 3797, 3799

## Non-metropolitan

Region	Local Area	Postcodes
Barwon	Colac Otway	3233, 3236, 3238, 3239, 3242, 3243, 3249, 3250, 3251, 3322, 3254
	Golden Plains	3321, 3328, 3330, 3331, 3332, 3333, 3351, 3360
	Greater Geelong	3212, 3214, 3215, 3216, 3217, 3218, 3219, 3220, 3221, 3222, 3223, 3224, 3226, 3227
	Queenscliffe	3225
	Surf Coast	3228, 3230, 3231, 3232, 3235, 3240, 3241
Central Highlands	Ararat	3375, 3377, 3379, 3469, 3378
	Ballarat	3350, 3352, 3355, 3356, 3357, 3353, 3354
	Hepburn	3363, 3364, 3370, 3458, 3460, 3461
	Moorabool	3334, 3340, 3341, 3342, 3345
	Pyrenees	3373, 3384, 3467, 3468
East Gippsland	East Gippsland	3865, 3875, 3878, 3880, 3882, 3885, 3886, 3887, 3888, 3889, 3890, 3891, 3892, 3895, 3896, 3898, 3900, 3902, 3904, 3909, 3841, 3864, 3903
	Wellington	3847, 3850, 3851, 3852, 3857, 3858, 3859, 3860, 3862, 3874, 3971, 3853, 3873
Gippsland	Bass Coast	3922, 3923, 3925, 3984, 3991, 3992, 3995, 3996, 3979, 3990
	Baw Baw	3816, 3818, 3820, 3821, 3822, 3823, 3824, 3831, 3832, 3833, 3835
	Latrobe	3825, 3840, 3842, 3844, 3854, 3856, 3869, 3870
	South Gippsland	3871, 3945, 3946, 3950, 3951, 3953, 3956, 3958, 3959, 3960, 3962, 3964, 3965, 3966, 3987, 3988, 3957
Goulburn	Benalla	3670, 3672, 3673, 3725, 3726
	Campaspe	3559, 3561, 3562, 3563, 3564, 3566, 3612, 3620, 3621, 3622, 3623, 3624, 3565
	Greater Shepparton	3610, 3614, 3616, 3618, 3629, 3630, 3631, 3633, 3634, 3646, 3617, 3619, 3632
	Mansfield	3720, 3722, 3723, 3715, 3724
	Mitchell	3521, 3522, 3658, 3659, 3660, 3662, 3756, 3758, 3764, 3661, 3762

Appendix F— Postcodes comprising regions and local areas in Committee analysis

Region	Local Area	Postcodes
	Moira	3635, 3636, 3637, 3638, 3639, 3640, 3641, 3644, 3649, 3727, 3728, 3730
	Murrindindi	3711, 3712, 3713, 3714, 3717, 3719, 3763, 3778, 3779, 3718
	Strathbogie	3608, 3664, 3665, 3666, 3669, 3663
Loddon	Central Goldfields	3371, 3464, 3465, 3472, 3475
	Greater Bendigo	3515, 3523, 3550, 3551, 3555, 3556, 3557, 3558, 3570, 3552
	Loddon	3516, 3517, 3518, 3520, 3537, 3571, 3573, 3575, 3576
	Macedon Ranges	3431, 3434, 3435, 3437, 3438, 3440, 3441, 3442, 3444, 3446, 3430, 3432, 3433
	Mount Alexander	3447, 3448, 3450, 3451, 3453, 3462, 3463, 3447, 3448, 3450, 3451, 3453, 3462, 3463
Mallee	Buloke	3480, 3482, 3483, 3525, 3527, 3529, 3530, 3531, 3533
	Gannawarra	3540, 3542, 3567, 3568, 3579, 3580, 3581
	Mildura	3490, 3494, 3496, 3498, 3500, 3501, 3505, 3507, 3509, 3512, 3489, 3502, 3506
	Swan Hill	3544, 3546, 3549, 3584, 3585, 3586, 3588, 3589, 3590, 3591, 3594, 3595, 3597, 3599
Ovens Murray	Alpine	3697, 3698, 3699, 3737, 3738, 3739, 3740, 3741, 3744
	Indigo	3683, 3685, 3687, 3688, 3695, 3747, 3749
	Towong	3700, 3701, 3705, 3707, 3709, 3708
	Wangaratta	3675, 3677, 3678, 3682, 3732, 3733, 3735, 3746, 3676
	Wodonga	3690, 3691, 3694, 3689
Western District	Corangamite	3260, 3264, 3266, 3268, 3269, 3323, 3324, 3325, 3361, 3267
	Glenelg	3285, 3292, 3303, 3304, 3305, 3310, 3311, 3312, 3309
	Moyne	3265, 3270, 3271, 3272, 3274, 3275, 3276, 3278, 3279, 3282, 3283, 3284, 3286, 3287, 3273
	Southern Grampians	3289, 3293, 3294, 3300, 3301, 3302, 3314, 3315, 3407
	Warrnambool	3277, 3280, 3281
Wimmera	Hindmarsh	3414, 3418, 3423, 3424
	Horsham	3400, 3401, 3409, 3402
	Northern Grampians	3380, 3381, 3387, 3478
	West Wimmera	3317, 3318, 3319, 3412, 3413, 3419, 3420
	Yarriambiack	3388, 3390, 3391, 3392, 3393, 3395, 3396, 3485, 3487, 3491, 3488





# References

---

- Aboriginal Affairs Victoria. *Improving the lives of Indigenous Victorians: Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework*. Melbourne: Department for Victorian Communities, 2006.
- Anderson, D. S. and A. E. Vervoorn. *Access to Privilege: Patterns of Participation in Australian Post-Secondary Education*. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1983.
- The Asquith Group. *Review of Managed Individual Pathways in Government Schools: Final Report*. Kew: The Asquith Group, 2005.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. Information Paper, *An Introduction to Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) 2006*, Cat. no. 2039.0. Canberra: ABS, 2008.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. 'Indigenous Status by Age by Sex.' Table, *2006 Census of Population and Housing: Victoria (State)*, Cat. no. 2068.0. Canberra: ABS, 2007.
- Australian Council for Educational Research. *Attracting, Engaging and Retaining: New Conversations About Learning: Australasian Student Engagement Report, Australasian Survey of Student Engagement*. Camberwell: ACER, 2008.
- Australian Government. *Powering Ideas: An Innovation Agenda for the 21st Century*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009.
- Australian Government. *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009.
- Australian Government, *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Fact Sheets 1–24. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009.
- Australian Government. *Universities, Innovation and Education Revolution*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009.
- Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. *Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund: 2008 Funding Round*. Canberra: DEEWR, 2008.
- Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2006*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2008.
- Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. *The Impact of Voluntary Student Unionism on Services, Amenities and Representation for Australian University Students: Summary Report*. Canberra: DEEWR, 2008.
- Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. *Information for Commonwealth Support Students 2009*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2008.
- Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. *Review of Australian Higher Education: Discussion Paper; June 2008*. Canberra: DEEWR, 2008.

- Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report*. Canberra: DEEWR, 2008.
- Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. *Selected Higher Education Statistics*. Canberra: DEEWR, 2008.
- Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. *Undergraduate Applications, Offers and Acceptances 2008*. Canberra: DEEWR, 2008.
- Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. *Victoria Equity Performance Indicators 2002 to 2006*. Canberra: DEEWR, 2006.
- Australian Government Department of Employment, Education and Training and the National Board of Employment, Education and Training. *A Fair Chance for All: National and Institutional Planning for Equity in Higher Education: A Discussion Paper*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1990.
- Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board. *Australian Qualifications Framework Implementation Handbook*, 4th ed. Carlton South: AQF Advisory Board, 2007.
- Australian Qualifications Framework Council. *AQF National Policy and Guidelines on Credit Arrangements: Final Draft*. Adelaide: AQF Council, 2009.
- Australian Qualifications Framework Council. *Strengthening the AQF: A Proposal; Consultation Paper*. Adelaide: AQF Council, 2009.
- Australian Universities Quality Agency. *Report of an Audit of Deakin University*. Melbourne: AUQA, 2005.
- Australian Universities Quality Agency. *Report of an Audit of Swinburne University of Technology*. Melbourne: AUQA, 2008.
- Australian Universities Quality Agency. *Report of an Audit of the University of Newcastle*. Melbourne: AUQA, 2008.
- Australian Universities Quality Agency. *Report of an Audit of Victoria University*. Melbourne: AUQA, 2006.
- Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee. *Universities and their Students: Principles for the Provision of Education by Australian Universities*. Canberra: AVCC, 2002.
- Beavis, Adrian, David Curtis and Niola Curtis. *What do students know about work? Senior secondary students' perceptions of the world of work*. Sydney: The Smith Family, 2005.
- Bedson, Lois and Daniel Perkins. *A positive influence: Equipping parents to support young people's career transitions; Evaluation of the PACTS program*. Fitzroy: Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2006.
- Berger, Joseph. *The Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada*, 3rd ed. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2007.
- Birch, Elisa Rose and Paul W. Miller. 'Tertiary Entrance Scores: can we do better?' *Educational Research and Perspectives* 34, no. 2 (2007): 1–23.
- Blakers, Ross, Anthea Bill, Maureen Maclachlan and Tom Karmel. *Mobility: Why do University Students Move?* Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2003.
- Bryce, Jennifer, Michelle Anderson, Tracey Frigo and Phillip McKenzie. *Australian Young People, their families and post-school plans: a research review*. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2007.

- Burke, Gerald. 'Assessing education and training requirements against uncertain labour force trends.' Paper presented at the Australian Council for Educational Research Annual Research Conference, Brisbane, 12 August 2008.
- Cambridge Assessment and the Australian Council for Educational Research. *Initial Report on Phase Two of the uniTEST Validity Study*. N.p.: Cambridge Assessment and ACER, 2006.
- Cardak, Buly and Chris Ryan. *Why are high ability individuals from poor backgrounds under-represented at university?* Discussion Paper A06.04. Melbourne: School of Business, La Trobe University, 2007.
- Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, for Universities Australia. *Participation and Equity: A review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people*. Melbourne: CSHE, 2008.
- Centrelink. *Youth Payment Rates 20 March–30 June 2009*. Canberra: Australian Government, 2009.
- Considine, Gillian, Ian Watson and Richard Hall. *Who's missing out? Access and equity in vocational education and training*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2005.
- Curtis, David D. and Julie McMillan. *School Non-completers: Profiles and Initial Destinations*. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 54. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2008.
- Cutler & Company Pty Ltd, for the Australian Government Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research. *Venturous Australia: Building strength in innovation*. North Melbourne: Cutler & Company Pty Ltd, 2008.
- Davies, John, Thomas Weko, Lillemor Kim and Erik Thulstrup. *Thematic Review of Tertiary Education: Finland*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006.
- Deakin University. *Can my wallet afford it? A guide to the cost of studying at university 2007*. Geelong: Deakin University, 2007.
- Deakin University, 'Deakin at your Doorstep – new Associate Degree program: Major Boost for Deakin's Warrnambool Campus,' Media Release, 12 December 2008.
- Deakin University, South West Institute of TAFE, Gordon Institute of TAFE and Box Hill Institute of TAFE. *Credit Matrix Trial Project: Final Report*. Geelong: Deakin University, 2008.
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria). *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development*. Melbourne: DEECD, 2008.
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria). *Provision of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program in Victorian Government Schools: Guidelines*. Melbourne: DEECD, 2008.
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria). *Summary Statistics for Victorian Schools: February 2007*. Melbourne: DEECD, 2007.
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria). *Summary Statistics for Victorian Schools: March 2009*. Melbourne: DEECD, 2009.
- Department of Education and Training (Victoria). *Higher Education in Victoria: Opportunities for 2005 and Beyond*. Melbourne: DET, 2005.
- Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria). *Innovation: Victoria's Future*. Melbourne: DIIRD, 2008.

*Inquiry into Geographical Differences in Participation in Higher Education in Victoria*

- Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (Victoria). *Securing Jobs for your Future – Skills for Victoria*. Melbourne: DIIRD, 2008.
- Department of Planning and Community Development (Victoria). *Indigenous Data Mapping – Census 2006*. Melbourne: DPCD, 2009.
- Department of Planning and Community Development (Victoria). *Victorian Government Indigenous Affairs Report 2007/08*. Melbourne: DPCD, 2009.
- Dobson, Ian R. and Eric Skuja. 'Secondary Schooling, Tertiary Entry Ranks and University Performance.' *People and Place* 13, no. 1 (2005): 53–62.
- Education and Training Committee, Parliament of Victoria. *Report on the inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning*. Melbourne: Parliament of Victoria, 2009.
- Edwards, Daniel. *Chances for Children Mentor Program Process Evaluation Report*. Melbourne: Centre for Population and Urban Research, Monash University, 2007.
- Edwards, Daniel. 'Keeping it local: geographical patterns of university attendance.' *Australian Universities Review* 51, no. 1 (2009): 61–70.
- Edwards, Daniel. 'The vocational fate of government secondary schools.' *People and Place* 15, no. 2 (2007): 1–11.
- Edwards, Daniel. 'What happens when supply lags behind demand? Disadvantaged students and the ever-increasing competition for university places.' *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 30, no. 1 (2008): 3–13.
- Foley, Paul. *The socio-economic status of vocational education and training students in Australia*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2007.
- Fullarton, Sue. *VET in Schools: Participation and Pathways*. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 21. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2001.
- Fullarton, Sue, Maurice Walker, John Ainley and Kylie Hillman. *Patterns of Participation in Year 12*. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 33. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2003.
- Geraldton University Access Group. *Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education*. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008.
- Godden, Naomi. *Regional Young People and Youth Allowance: Access to Tertiary Education*. Wagga Wagga: Centre for Rural Social Research, 2007.
- Grubb, Norton, Hanna Marit Jahr, Josef Neumuller and Simon Field. *Equity in Education Thematic Review: Finland; Country Note*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005.
- Indigenous Department, National Union of Students. *Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education*. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008.
- Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council. *Improving Indigenous Outcomes and Enhancing Indigenous Culture and Knowledge in Australian Higher Education*. Report to the Minister for Education, Science and Training. Canberra: Australian Government, 2006.
- Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council. *Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education*. Canberra: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008.

- James, Richard. 'Social equity in a mass, globalised higher education environment: the unresolved issue of widening access to university.' Faculty of Education Dean's Lecture Series, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 18 September 2008.
- James, Richard. *Socioeconomic Background and Higher Education Participation: An analysis of school students' aspirations and expectations*. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002.
- James, Richard, Gabrielle Baldwin and Craig McInnis. *Which University? The factors influencing the choices of prospective undergraduates*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1999.
- James, Richard, Emmaline Bexley, Marcia Devlin and Simon Marginson. *Australian University Student Finances 2006: Final report of a national survey of students in public universities*. Canberra: Universities Australia, 2007.
- James, Richard, Johanna Wyn, Gabrielle Baldwin, Gary Hepworth, Craig McInnis and Andrew Stephanou. *Rural and Isolated School Students and their Higher Education Choices: A re-examination of student location, socioeconomic background, and educational advantage and disadvantage*. Commissioned Report 62. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1999.
- Jones, Roger G. *Education Participation and Outcomes by Geographic Location*. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 26. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2002.
- Kantanis, Tanya. 'The role of social transition in students' adjustment to the first year of university.' *Journal of Institutional Research* 9, no. 1(2000): 100–110.
- Karmel, Tom. 'Reflections on the tertiary education sector in Australia.' Paper presented at the LH Martin Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Management Conference, Melbourne, 27–28 November 2008.
- Kirby, Peter. *Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria: Final Report*. Melbourne: Department of Education, Employment and Training (Victoria), 2000.
- Koorie Education Strategy Branch, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria). *Wannik: Learning Together – Journey to Our Future; Education Strategy for Koorie Students*. Melbourne, DEECD, 2008.
- Krause, Kerri-Lee. 'Transition to and through the first year: strategies to enhance the student experience.' Keynote presentation to the Inaugural Vice-Chancellor's Learning and Teaching Colloquium 2006, University of the Sunshine Coast, Sippy Downs, 31 May 2006.
- Krause, Kerri-Lee, Robyn Hartley, Richard James and Craig McInnis. *The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from a Decade of National Studies*. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005.
- Lamb, Stephen and Suzanne Rice. *Effective Strategies to Increase School Completion Report*. Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), 2008.
- Lamb, Stephen and Margaret Vickers. *Variations in VET Provision across Australian Schools and Their Effects on Student Outcomes*. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 48. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2006.

- Lamb, Stephen, Anne Walstab, Richard Teese, Margaret Vickers and Russ Rumberger. *Staying on at school: Improving student retention in Australia*. Brisbane: Department of Education and the Arts (Queensland), 2004.
- Lane, Joe. *Indigenous Participation in University Education*. St Leonards, New South Wales: The Centre for Independent Studies, 2009.
- Levy, Stuart and Julie Murray. 'Tertiary Entrance Scores Need Not Determine Academic Success: An analysis of student performance in an equity and access program.' *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 27, no. 1 (March 2005): 129–141.
- Long, Michael, Fran Ferrier and Margaret Heagney. *Stay, play or give it away? Students continuing, changing or leaving university study in first year*. Melbourne: Centre for the Economics of Education and Training, 2006.
- Marks, Gary N. *Completing University: Characteristics and Outcomes of Completing and Non-completing Students*. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 51. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2007.
- Marks, Gary N. 'School sector differences in tertiary entrance: Improving the educational outcomes of government schools.' *Australian Social Monitor* 7, no. 2 (2004), 43–47.
- Marks, Gary. *The measurement of socioeconomic status and social class in the LSAY project*. Technical Paper 14. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 1999.
- Marks, Gary N. *Unmet Demand? Characteristics and Activities of University Applicants Not Offered a Place*. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 46. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2005.
- Marks, Gary, Nicole Fleming, Michael Long and Julie McMillan. *Patterns of participation in year 12 and higher education in Australia: Trends and issues*. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 17. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2000.
- Marks, Gary N., Julie McMillan and Kylie Hillman. *Tertiary Entrance Performance: The Role of Student Background and School Factors*. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 22. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2001.
- McMillan, Julie. *Course Change and Attrition from Higher Education*. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 39. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2005.
- McWha, James. *Community engagement: a case study looking at the evolution of the University of Adelaide's experience*. Presentation to the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Higher Education Summit, Sydney, 4 April 2008.
- Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research. *Poverty Lines: Australia; March Quarter 2009*. Melbourne: MIAESR, 2009.
- Ministerial Council on Education, Employment Training and Youth Affairs. *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. Melbourne: MCEETYA, 2008.
- Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. *National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy: Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy*. Melbourne: MCEETYA, 2008.

- Office for Education Policy and Innovation, Department of Education (Victoria). *Local Learning and Employment Networks: A Victorian Government Initiative*. Melbourne: Department of Education, 2007.
- Office for Planning, Strategy and Coordination, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria). *The On Track Survey 2008: LLEN reports*. Melbourne: State of Victoria, 2008.
- Office of Housing, Department of Human Services (Victoria). *Bond Loan Scheme Policy & Procedure Manual: Version 7.0 October 2008*, section 1. Melbourne: DHS, 2008).
- Office of Training and Tertiary Education. *Victoria's Vocational Education and Training Statistics: A Pocket Guide*. 2007 ed. Melbourne: Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, 2007.
- Pascoe, Robert, Avril McClelland and Barry McGaw. *Perspectives on Selection Methods for Entry into Higher Education in Australia*. Commissioned Report 55. Canberra: Higher Education Council, 1997.
- Payne, Alicia and Richard Percival. *What price the clever country? The costs of tertiary education in Australia*. AMP.NATSEM Income and Wealth Report 21. Sydney: AMP Limited, 2008.
- Perkins, Miki. 'International Baccalaureate students set to go.' *The Age*, 5 January 2009.
- PhillipsKPA for the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training. *Giving Credit Where Credit is Due: A National Study to Improve Outcomes in Credit Transfer and Articulation from Vocational and Technical Education to Higher Education; Final Report*. N.p.: PhillipsKPA Pty Ltd, 2006.
- Polesel, John. *Deferring a University Offer in Regional Victoria (interim report)*. Melbourne: Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc, 2008.
- Polesel, John. 'The Development of Vocational Programs in Secondary Schools in Victoria and the European Tradition.' *International Studies in Educational Inequality, Theory and Policy*, vol. 3, *Inequality: Educational Theory and Public Policy*. Edited by Richard Teese, Stephen Lamb and Marie Duru-Bellat. Dordrecht: Springer, 2007.
- Polesel, John. 'Vocational education and training in schools in Victoria: An appraisal six years down the track.' *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* 53, no. 2 (2001): 325–329.
- Polesel, John and Richard Teese. *VET in Schools Pathways: The 2006 Year 12 Cohort*. Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), 2007.
- Polesel, John, Sue Helme, Merryn Davies, Richard Teese, Tanya Nicholas and Margaret Vickers. *VET in Schools: A post-compulsory education perspective*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2004.
- Queensland University of Technology. *QUT Equity Scholarship Impact Survey and Attrition Report 2007*. Brisbane: QUT, 2007.
- RMIT University. *RMIT Schools Network Access Program Report 2003/04*. Melbourne: Academic Registrar, RMIT University, 2004.
- Robertson, Francis, Judith Sloan and Neil Bardsley. *The Impact of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS)*. Evaluation and Investigations Program. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1990.
- Rothman, Sheldon and Kylie Hillman. *Career Advice in Australian Secondary Schools: Use and Usefulness*. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 53. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2008.

## *Inquiry into Geographical Differences in Participation in Higher Education in Victoria*

- Rothman, Sheldon, Kylie Hillman, Phillip McKenzie and Gary Marks. *The On Track Survey 2008: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria; Statewide Report*. Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009.
- Rothman, Sheldon and Julie McMillan. *Influences on Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy*. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 36. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2003.
- Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. *Learning for All: The report of the SFEFC/SHEFC widening participation review group*. Edinburgh: SHEFC, 2005.
- Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. *Participation in Higher Education in Scotland*. Edinburgh: SHEFC, 1998.
- Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee. *Student Income Support*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2005.
- Snashall-Woodhams, Elise. 'Record Tertiary Access.' *The Guardian* (Swan Hill), 3 June 2009.
- Social Research and Demonstration Corporation. *Future to Discover: Pilot Project; Early Implementation Report*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2007.
- Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision. *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2009*. Canberra: Productivity Commission, 2009.
- Stella, Antony and David Woodhouse. *Serving the Cause of Indigenous Issues: Thematic Analysis of the Institutional Audit Reports of AUQA*. Melbourne: Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2006.
- Stewart, Anne. Outreach and social inclusion: Outreach for social cohesion. Paper presented at the Forum on Higher Education and Social Exclusion, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 16 July 2008.
- Teacher Supply and Demand Reference Group. *Teacher Supply and Demand Report 2007*. Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2007.
- Teese, Richard, Kira Clarke and John Polesel. *The On Track Survey 2007 Statewide Report: The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria*. Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), 2007.
- Thomson, Sue. *Pathways from School to Further Education or Work: Examining the Consequences of Year 12 Course Choices*. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 42. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2005.
- Thomson, Sue and Lisa De Bortoli. *Exploring Scientific Literacy: How Australia measures up. The PISA 2006 survey of students' scientific, reading and mathematical literacy skills*. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2008.
- Tomazin, Farrah and Carol Nader. 'Views split of what Kooris need to make the grade.' *The Age*, 21 April 2009.
- Trounson, Andrew. 'Dual sector forges ahead.' *The Australian*, 27 May 2009.
- Universities Australia. *Advancing Equity and Participation in Australian Higher Education: Action to address participation and equity levels in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people*. Canberra: Universities Australia, 2008.



- University of Newcastle. *Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education*. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008.
- Valimaa, Jussi, ed. *Finnish Higher Education in Transition: Perspectives on massification and globalisation*. Jyvaskyla: Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyvaskyla, 2001.
- Vickers, Margaret, Stephen Lamb and John Hinkley. *Student workers in high school and beyond: The effects of part-time employment on participation in education, training and work*. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 30. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research, 2003.
- Victorian Auditor-General's Office. *Literacy and Numeracy Achievement*, Victorian Auditor-General's Report. Melbourne: VAGO, 2009.
- Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. *Senior Secondary Certificate Statistical Information 2008*. Melbourne: VCAA, 2009.
- Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. *VCAL Information Sheet: The VCAL: An Introduction*. Melbourne: VCAA, 2008.
- Victorian Government. 'Growing Victoria Together Progress Report'. Appendix to *Service Delivery*, Victorian State Budget Paper 2008–09 No. 3. Melbourne: Department of Treasury and Finance (Victoria), 2009.
- Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority. *Discussion Paper: Determining Credit Transfer Arrangements from VET to Higher Education*. Melbourne: VRQA, 2008.
- Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority. *The Credit Matrix: Building the Bridges*. Melbourne: VRQA, 2008.
- Victorian TAFE Association. *Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education*. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008.
- Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre. *ENTER into Tertiary Study: A Guide to the Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank*. Melbourne: VTAC, 2004.
- Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre. *Special Entry Access Schemes: SEAS*. Melbourne: VTAC, 2008.
- Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre. *VTAC Guide 2009: A guide to tertiary courses*. Melbourne: VTAC, 2008.
- Walker, Karen. 'Aiming high: Australian school leavers' career aspirations and implications for career development practice.' *Australian Journal of Career Development* 15, no. 2 (2006): 53–60.
- Walker, Karen, Nola Alloway, Leanne Dalley-Trim and Annette Patterson. 'Counsellor practices and student perspectives: perceptions of career counselling in Australian secondary schools.' *Australian Journal of Career Development* 15, no. 1 (2006): 37–45.
- Walstab, Anne and Stephen Lamb. *On Track Longitudinal 2007 Results*. Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2007.
- Western Research Institute. *Economic Impact of the University of Ballarat*. Bathurst: Western Research Institute, 2007.
- Wheelahan, Leesa. 'What kind of access does VET provide to higher education for low SES students? Not a lot.' Paper presented to the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education Launch and Forum, University of South Australia, Adelaide, 25–26 February 2009.

## Websites

---

- Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria. 'Indigenous Housing Report.' AHBV.  
<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~ahbv/homelessnessreport/report3.htm>.
- Australian Catholic University. 'Student Loan Scheme.' ACU National.  
[http://www.acu.edu.au/apply\\_and\\_enrol/fees\\_and\\_charges/australian\\_students/student\\_loan\\_scheme/](http://www.acu.edu.au/apply_and_enrol/fees_and_charges/australian_students/student_loan_scheme/).
- Australian Council for Educational Research. 'uniTEST – Four universities take part in a national student aptitude test trial.' ACER.  
<http://www.acer.edu.au/1/index.php/news-item/unitest>.
- Australian Council for Educational Research. 'uniTEST: Research.' uniTEST.  
[http://unitest.acer.edu.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogcategory&id=26&Itemid=51](http://unitest.acer.edu.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=26&Itemid=51).
- Australian Government. 'Support for higher education institutions.' Backing Australia's Future. [http://www.backingaustraliasfuture.gov.au/policy\\_paper/2.htm#2\\_4](http://www.backingaustraliasfuture.gov.au/policy_paper/2.htm#2_4).
- Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. 'History of ABSTUDY.' DEEWR.  
[http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/Indigenous\\_education/publications\\_resources/abstudy/foreword/](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/Indigenous_education/publications_resources/abstudy/foreword/).
- Australian Government Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research. 'Review of the National Innovation System Fact Sheet.' DIISR.  
<http://www.innovation.gov.au/Section/AboutDIISR/FactSheets/Pages/ReviewoftheNationalInnovationSystemFactSheet.aspx>.
- Australian Scholarships Group. 'ASG University Costs Calculator.' ASG.  
[http://www.asg.com.au/uni\\_calc.asp](http://www.asg.com.au/uni_calc.asp).
- Centrelink. 'Income and assets tests for Youth Allowance.' Centrelink.  
[http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/ya\\_iat.htm#assets](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/ya_iat.htm#assets).
- Centrelink. 'Independence test for Youth Allowance.' Centrelink.  
[http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/ya\\_independent.htm](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/ya_independent.htm).
- Centrelink. 'Newstart Allowance: Payment rates.' Centrelink.  
[http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/newstart\\_rates.htm](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/newstart_rates.htm).
- Centrelink. 'Parental income test.' Centrelink.  
[http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/parent\\_income\\_iat.htm](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/parent_income_iat.htm).
- Centrelink. 'Payment rates for Age Pension.' Centrelink.  
[http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/age\\_rates.htm](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/age_rates.htm).
- Centrelink. 'Personal income test.' Centrelink.  
<http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/chartda.htm>.
- Chances for Children. 'Mentoring.' Chances for Children.  
<http://www.chancesforchildren.com.au/mentor.htm>.
- Deakin University. 'Advanced Standing (credit transfer) Search.' Deakin University.  
<http://www.deakin.edu.au/courses/advanced-standing/search.php>.
- Deakin University. 'Information about online and off-campus study.' Deakin University.  
<http://www.deakin.edu.au/future-students/online-offcampus-studies/index.php>.
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria). '2008 Career Education Scholarship and Industry Placement Programs.' DEECD.  
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/news/newsalerts/scholarships2008.htm>.

- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria). 'Curriculum Planning Guidelines – Phase 2: Planning and Resourcing; Whole school – responding to student diversity.' DEECD.  
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/curriculum/preptoyear10/guidelines/phase2/ws/respondstuddiv.htm>.
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria). 'Frequently Asked Questions.' Local Learning and Employment Networks.  
<http://www.lle.n.vic.gov.au/what/faq.asp#H2N10072>.
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria). 'Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs).' DEECD.  
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/sensecyouth/careertrans/mips/default.htm>.
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria). 'Teacher Supply and Demand Initiatives.' DEECD.  
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/careers/teach/demand.htm>.
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria). 'Vocational Education and Training in Schools.' DEECD.  
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/sensecyouth/qualsprograms/vet.htm>.
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria). 'Youth Guarantee – Frequently Asked Questions'. DEECD.  
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/sensecyouth/delivery/youthguarantee-fs.htm>.
- Department of Human Services (Victoria). 'InTrain scholarships.' DHS.  
<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/operations/careers/employment-programs/Indigenous-scholarships/intrain-scholarships2>.
- Department of Local Government and Regional Development (Western Australia). 'WA Telecentre Network.' DLGRD.  
<http://www.dlgrd.wa.gov.au/RegionDev/Telecentres.asp>.
- East Gippsland Institute of TAFE. 'Bachelor of Commerce – RMIT.' East Gippsland Institute of TAFE.  
<http://www.egtafe.vic.edu.au/apps/coursenavigator/course.asp?courseid=472>.
- Ellis, Kate, MP, Australian Government Minister for Youth. 'Rebuilding Student Support Services in Our Universities.' Media Release, 3 November 2008. Ministers' Media Centre, Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio.  
[http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Ellis/Media/Releases/Pages/Article\\_081130\\_112847.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Ellis/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_081130_112847.aspx).
- International Baccalaureate. 'Theory of Knowledge.' IB.  
<http://www.ibo.org/diploma/curriculum/core/knowledge/index.cfm>
- La Trobe University. 'General Achievement Test.' La Trobe University.  
<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/study/apply/undergraduate-study/general-achievement-test>.
- La Trobe University. 'Student loans.' La Trobe University.  
<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/study/fees-scholarships/student-loans>.
- Learning Network Queensland. 'Services and Facilities.' LNQ.  
<http://www.lnq.net.au/servicesFacilities.aspx>.
- Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation (Victoria). 'Victoria's New Plan for Higher Education.' Jobs Media Release 2 April 2009. The Premier of Victoria.  
<http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/minister-for-skills-workforce-participation/victorias-new-plan-for-higher-education.html>.

- Monash University. 'Monash trials use of GAT for middle band selection.' Monash University. <http://www.monash.edu.au/news/newline/story/1241>.
- Monash University. 'Monash University Scholarships for Excellence and Equity.' Monash University. <http://www.adm.monash.edu/scholarships/opportunities/excellence-equity.html>.
- Monash University. 'Non-Award Pathways Scheme.' Monash University. <http://arts.monash.edu.au/cais/support/nonaward.php>.
- Monash University. 'Off-campus learning.' Monash University. <http://www.monash.edu.au/offcampus/>.
- O'Connor, Brendan, MP, Australian Government Minister for Workforce Participation. 'TAFE meets Parliament Skills Innovation 2020 forum.' Speech, 16 September 2008. Ministers' Media Centre, Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio. [http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/OConnor/Media/Speeches/Pages/Article\\_081009\\_091942.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/OConnor/Media/Speeches/Pages/Article_081009_091942.aspx).
- Pathways to Education. 'Results.' Pathways to Education. <http://www.pathwaystoeducation.ca/results.html>.
- Pathways to Education. 'Results: The Boston Consulting Group Assessment (2007).' Pathways to Education, <http://www.pathwaystoeducation.ca/boston.html>.
- RMIT University. 'Commerce – Bachelor of Commerce.' RMIT. <http://rmit.org.au/browse;ID=BP181>.
- RMIT University. 'Hamilton: Bachelor of Nursing.' RMIT. <http://www.rmit.edu.au/hamilton/nursing>.
- RMIT University. 'Nursing – Bachelor of Nursing.' RMIT. <http://www.rmit.edu.au/programs/bp032>.
- Skills Victoria. 'Universities.' Skills Victoria. <http://www.skills.vic.gov.au/corporate/providers/universities>.
- Student Finance England. 'Student Loan Rates 2008/09.' Directgov. [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/StudentFinance/Applyingfortheirsttime/DG\\_171551](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/StudentFinance/Applyingfortheirsttime/DG_171551).
- Swinburne University of Technology. 'Pathways: TAFE to University.' Swinburne University of Technology. <http://www.future.swinburne.edu.au/pathways/programs/>.
- UK Government. 'Money for university: a parent's guide.' Directgov. [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Schoolslearninganddevelopment/Optionsafterschool/DG\\_071144](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Schoolslearninganddevelopment/Optionsafterschool/DG_071144).
- University of New England. 'Regional Access Centres.' UNE. <http://www.une.edu.au/ac/othercentres/>.
- University of Ballarat. 'Financial Assistance and Student Loans.' UB. [http://www.ballarat.edu.au/fdp/operations/student\\_loans.shtml](http://www.ballarat.edu.au/fdp/operations/student_loans.shtml).
- Victoria University. 'Co-operation to close the gap in Indigenous higher education.' VU. [http://www.vu.edu.au/About\\_VU/Media\\_Releases/Co-operation\\_to\\_close\\_the\\_gap\\_in\\_Indigenous\\_higher\\_education/indexdl\\_94870.aspx](http://www.vu.edu.au/About_VU/Media_Releases/Co-operation_to_close_the_gap_in_Indigenous_higher_education/indexdl_94870.aspx).
- Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated and Office of Training and Tertiary Education (Victoria). 'Wurreker Strategy.' Wurreker Strategy. <http://www.wurrekerstrategy.org.au/general/strategy.html>.

- Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. 'Where to now? Guide to the VCE, VCAL and Apprenticeships & Traineeships for 2010: About the VCE.' VCAA.  
<http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vce/publications/wheretowhere/aboutvce.htm>.
- Victorian Government. 'Secondary Schools.' Live in Victoria.  
<http://www.liveinvictoria.vic.gov.au/living-in-victoria/education-and-childcare/secondary-schools>.
- Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority. 'About the Credit Matrix.' VRQA.  
<http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/cmatrix/about.htm>.
- Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority. 'Higher Education.' VRQA.  
<http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/higher/default.htm>.
- Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority. 'The Credit Matrix newsletter: September 2008.' VRQA.  
<http://www.vision6.com.au/em/message/email/view.php?id=357233&u=14894>.
- Victorian TAFE Association. 'What is Competency Based Training and Assessment?'  
Victorian TAFE Association.  
[http://www.vta.vic.edu.au/?Name=VET\\_Introduction\\_to\\_the\\_Australian\\_Training\\_System](http://www.vta.vic.edu.au/?Name=VET_Introduction_to_the_Australian_Training_System).