

**Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council  
(RREAC)**



**Higher Education in Rural and Remote Western  
Australia**

**August 2011**



## HIGHER EDUCATION

The Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council (RREAC) was established in 1997 to provide advice to the Minister for Education and the Minister for Training on the education and training needs of rural and remote Western Australian students.

In May 2006, RREAC was restructured and members of parliament were appointed as the Chair and Deputy Chair. The restructured RREAC separated the “voice” of the community and the recipients of education and training services from the “voice” of the providers of those services.

The Council’s members, appointed by Cabinet, include the ministerial endorsed representatives and agents of the community and consumer interests. RREAC secretariat includes a Principal Consultant and an Administrative Assistant, who provide executive and research support to the Council.

In 2010, RREAC was given new terms of reference and directions by the Minister for Education that focus the Council’s attention on three Government priorities.

## MINISTER’S TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Provide advice on how the Government should be addressing the emerging need to have more qualified staff available for rural and remote education settings, such as childcare and early education, in order for the state to meet Council of Australian Government’s new national requirements and standards. (Initiatives such as *Welcome to the Bush*).
2. Provide advice about the future uses of technology in the delivery of education in rural and remote education settings.
3. Following the *Review of Regional Loading*, provide advice regarding access to and provision of higher education in rural and remote settings.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Access to and the Provision of Higher Education in Regional and Remote Settings in Western Australia**

#### **Background**

The report, *Higher Education in Rural and Remote Western Australia*, focusing on access to and the provision of higher education in regional and remote locations identifies and provides an overview of some of the issues, concerns and challenges with regard to the provision of higher education to students in regional and remote areas of Western Australia.

When the restructured Council first met in August 2010, RREAC noted the new terms of reference and directions by the Minister for Education that focus the Council's attention on three Government priorities including access to and the provision of higher education in regional and remote Western Australia.

Over the last six months RREAC has devoted time to researching and gauging opinions on the issues, challenges and developments associated with access to and the provision of higher education in regional and remote WA. In doing this RREAC has:

- drawn on member organisations to provide information;
- consulted with senior executive at the Department of Education Services;
- consulted the state's Regional Development Policy and other relevant research material; and,
- consulted various Commonwealth Government Policies and Consultation papers on higher education provision.

Within the context of the provision and access to higher education, RREAC has a particular interest in the articulation between the school and universities sectors, especially with a view to achieving the objective of increasing aspiration and broadening pathways for students in regional and remote areas.

#### **Current Situation**

Based on RREAC's evidence-based approach to reviewing the current situation with access to and the provision of higher education in regional and remote Western Australia, the Council acknowledges the following:

- There is a consistent view across both the Australian and Western Australian Government that higher education should, amongst other things, provide opportunities for people from all backgrounds to participate to their full potential and where necessary be supported to do so.
- One of the first barriers confronted by universities in WA providing access to higher education in regional and remote locations is the vast size of the state and its sparsely diverse population.
- Participation in university education by regional and remote Western Australians is significantly lower than in the metropolitan area.
- Physical access to university is challenging with a limited number of campuses located in larger regional areas and, in many instances, choices are limited even further by the reality of restricted course provision available.

- There has been a significant increase in the development of online learning environments to complement units offered face-to-face and units offered in a fully online mode.
- The building of partnerships with local communities and providers in other sectors for example Training, to develop institutional cross-collaboration and partnerships across sectors is necessary to develop more flexible and sustainable higher education provision in Western Australia.
- Raising the aspirations of regional and remote students to participate in higher education must be an immediate priority.
- Ensuring that students from rural and remote locations, once engaged in higher education, successfully go on to complete studies requires consideration and support through a range of mechanisms.
- Considerable effort has gone into improving the articulation between the schools and training sectors. Part of this work has been developing “pathways”, providing students with a clear understanding/picture of how studying certain units/courses at school “link” to further training and education beyond school.
- Regional loading (yet to be defined in the context of this paper) must address issues of fairness and equity for both students and universities.

### **Strategic Priorities for the Minister’s Consideration**

The work undertaken by RREAC identified a number of issues in relation to higher education. In line with RREAC’s Terms of Reference, the council has identified strategic priorities that could be applied as a means to address the identified issues and challenges.

The delivery of higher education in the regions is fundamentally linked to regional development.

RREAC recognises the importance of linking the strategic issues identified in this paper to State planning and regional development.

The following strategic priorities are presented for the Minister’s consideration.

#### ***Access / Participation / Choice / Delivery***

1. Strategic planning involving the engagement of key stakeholders (students, providers and industry) in terms of access, participation and choice, supported by Government.
2. A realistic approach where technology plays an important part in educational delivery. RREAC’s position is that there needs to be a physical presence to support technological flexible delivery. This is consistent with the Regional Development Council’s Higher Education Policy for Western Australia.
3. Maximise the use of existing regional infrastructure. RREAC does not see the need for significant expenditure on capital infrastructure but to use public training providers and other facilities where available.
4. Support for the health and well being of regional, rural and remote students attending higher education institutions in Perth in terms of mentoring, network groups etc.

### ***Aspiration / Achievement (Attainment)***

5. Universities participate in developing “Outreach Programs” with the State Government providing funding to support this.
6. Aspirant programs must link into the strategic planning recommended previously.

### ***Pathways to Higher Education***

7. Increasing pathways through collaboration for higher education delivery to address barriers created by distance and thin markets.
8. Strategic and collaborative planning between sectors to enhance precincts and develop stronger pathways between schools, training and higher education.
9. Research is undertaken also to improve articulation arrangements between vocational training providers and universities.
10. Research is undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of education precincts and pathways with questions around the extent to which education precincts and pathways have:
  - impacted on decisions students make to access training and/or university from school; and
  - provided access to university after completing a training course.

### ***Funding***

11. In collaboration with key stakeholders clear and inclusive criteria be developed to determine regional loading and that this regional loading be more flexible in terms of how it can flow to regional education facilities delivering higher education courses
12. Regional and rural students be supported to achieve tertiary qualifications, especially if they need to relocate to the metropolitan or a large regional centre.
13. Funding that better supports flexible learning in terms of the cost of curriculum development, technology infrastructure and student support systems that are required.

### ***Recommendations***

1. That these significant regional issues are advanced through the development of a state plan for higher education and that should one be developed RREAC be represented in any such process.
2. When issues or developments in regional higher education come to the Minister’s notice, that the Minister consider referring these matters to RREAC for provision of further advice to the Minister.
3. The Minister supports RREAC continuing to pursue the issue of higher education good practice to provide ongoing feedback to inform the Minister of emerging issues and developments.

Hon Brian Ellis MLC  
Chair RREAC  
Member for Agricultural Region  
Region

Hon Mia Davies  
Deputy Chair RREAC  
Member for Agricultural

## **BACKGROUND**

This report identifies and provides an overview of some of the issues, concerns and challenges with regard to the provision of higher education to students in regional and remote areas of Western Australia. This report has been prepared to assist RREAC in preparing a briefing for the Minister for Education addressing the second and third terms of reference. The report has a strong focus on the use of technology in the delivery of higher education.

In preparing this report RREAC has focused on the following issues:

1. access / participation / choice / delivery;
2. aspiration / achievement / attainment;
3. pathways to higher education; and,
4. funding.

These issues are consistent with the ones addressed in the recent *Review of Regional Loading* conducted by the Commonwealth of Australian (December 2009)

In addition to the above four issues, and in line with RREAC's brief to provide advice about the future use of technology in the delivery of education, RREAC also focused on the use of on-line delivery as a means of improving access to and participation in higher education by regional and remote residents.

In preparing this report RREAC is cognisant of the:

- The Regional Development Policy Framework: an Action agenda for Regional Development, which was developed in response to an increasing awareness that residents of regional Western Australia do not have equal or equitable access to higher education. The Regional Development Council of Western Australia developed a policy incorporating principles and strategies for higher education. A copy of the final endorsed RDC Policy is attached as Appendix 1 (page 21) and the Review Of Regional Loading - Issues For Regional Provision Issues Paper December 2009 as Appendix 2 (page 25)
- Steering Committee Group that has been established to develop a *Regional Higher Education Policy for Western Australia* and includes members from the Department of Regional Development and Lands, Regional Development Commissions, Training and Workforce Development, Department of Education and the Department of Education Services.

## **CURRENT SITUATION**

Both Federal and State Governments currently focus on reforming higher education. In response to the *Review of Australian Higher Education* (2008) often referred to as the Bradley Review, the Australian Government released *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* (2009) which set a target of 40% of all 25-34 year olds holding a qualification at bachelor level or above by 2025.

*'Higher education is integral to achieving the government's vision of a stronger and fairer Australia. It fuels economic development, productivity and high skilled jobs and supports Australia's role as a middle power and'*

*leader in the region'.* (Transforming Australia's Higher Education System: 2009).

The report goes on to state that Government will continue to have a role in ensuring Australia's skills needs are being met by the higher education system and that funding will be demand driven.

Further to this, the *Background Paper for the Higher Education Base Funding Review*, discusses the participation rates from disadvantaged groups. While acknowledging that an increasing number of students are enrolling in higher education, and absolute numbers of students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds have increased, participation rates for this group have remained static and below what would be expected based on trends in the wider Australian population. Figures indicate that in both 1998 and 2009 only 15% of domestic students from low SES backgrounds were enrolled in higher education. Particularly under-represented were people living in regional areas and Indigenous Australians.

*Since 1998, students from regional and remote areas have consistently accounted for around 19% of the higher education population, despite people from these areas accounting for approximately 31% of the total Australian population.<sup>1</sup> The same trend is for Indigenous students, with around 1% of higher education students coming from an Indigenous background compared to around 2% in the wider population (ABS 2010, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population)*

In Western Australia, the *Regional Development Policy Framework: An Action Agenda for Regional Development* highlights education as one of the six key priority areas.

Priority 4 of the framework states:

*Education training and life-long learning opportunities for all ages and groups are key factors for people choosing to work and live in the regions. It is particularly important that people can access high-quality schooling as well as tertiary and technical education training options.*

*Key outcomes in terms of higher education include:*

- *The closure of the gap in education achievement and participation between regional and metropolitan students.*
- *A broad range of educational options to be available and accessible to students in regional areas.*

Further, the *State Government's Royalties for Regions initiative provides an avenue for pursuing these outcomes. Specifically, the Regional Community Services Fund aims to:*

- *Assist regional communities achieve improved access to a range of community services.*
- *Assist regional communities overcome disadvantages caused by remoteness.*
- *Attract and retain essential regional government employees.*

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<sup>1</sup> Regional and Remote categories are derived from Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs classifications. Rural and isolated categories (1998-2011) are derived from Rural remote metropolitan Areas Classifications.

There is a consistent view across both the Australian and Western Australian Government that higher education should, amongst other things, provide opportunities for all capable people from all backgrounds to participate to their full potential and be supported to do so.

## ISSUES

### 1. ACCESS / PARTICIPATION / CHOICE / DELIVERY

#### *Access / Participation*

Participation in university education by regional and remote Western Australians is significantly lower than in the metropolitan area. Physical access to university is challenging with a limited number of campuses located in larger regional areas. Students relocating to a metropolitan area or large regional centre experience financial hardship and diminished support as they are required to live away from home.

Western Australian universities including the University of Western Australia, Edith Cowan University, Curtin University and the University of Notre Dame Australia, offer limited courses at both the graduate and post graduate levels in larger regional centres. (Refer to Appendix 3 Page 28)

Currently, higher education may be able to be accessed by students in regional and remote areas in a number of ways, including:

- face-to-face delivery in regional and remote locations where they reside;
- face-to-face delivery in a regional and remote location away from where they normally reside;
- face-to-face delivery through attendance at a metropolitan institution; and
- engaging in studies delivered through flexible delivery, which can be on-line, in the home or though telecentres.

Significantly, in many instances, choices are limited even further by the reality of restricted course availability. (Refer to Appendix 4, Page 30)

A need to move from the normal place of residence to access higher education brings with it added pressures including location of suitable accommodation, costs of travel, accommodation and living expenses and various social and emotional impacts of being away from family in a foreign environment. Such factors adversely impinge on rural students increasing the likelihood of failure to complete the course.

In 2009, about 36% of the eligible cohort of school leavers from the south west accepted a place at university, compared to 78% of students from the metropolitan area. The Bradley Report and submissions to the *Review of Regional Loading* identified the lack of tertiary options in regional Australia and the necessity for many students to move to a regional or metropolitan centre with a university, with the associated significant financial and social costs of relocation as contributing factors to the lower participation of regional and remote students in tertiary education.

The *Review of Regional Loading - Issues for Regional Provision* (December 2009) notes many regional students are first generation higher education participants. It is apparent that the delivery of higher education in regional areas would create

participation opportunities for many students who have not previously have participated in higher education.

### **Choice**

One of the first barriers confronted by universities in WA providing access to higher education in regional and remote locations is the vast size of the State and its sparsely diverse population. The unit cost of delivery is impacted by distances and remoteness and low population density. It is estimated that to deliver face-to-face a cohort of 15-20 students<sup>2</sup> are required to be cost effective for the university. With universities depending on economies of scale to minimize costs, low student numbers in regional and remote areas impact on the range of services which can feasibly be offered.

As noted previously, statistical data confirms the under-representation of people in higher education from regional areas compared to that in the metropolitan area. This is particularly evident within the youth sector of rural populations.

Traditionally, a significant number of young people choose to leave regional and remote areas during primary / secondary and upper secondary transition points to continue their high school and further education/higher education in either the metropolitan area or large regional centres. However, the majority of students aspiring to higher education find it difficult to leave their regional or remote locations for a number of reasons including financial cost, family and/or work commitments. Accordingly, their choices are limited, often resulting in a loss of engagement in higher education.

A concern is a third group who are potential candidates for higher education but for a number of reasons do not aspire to enroll at university.

### **Inhibitors**

Research undertaken in 2009 at five Goldfields high schools titled the '*Goldfields Tertiary Education Survey*' revealed 46 percent of students were interested in university. Many students stated they would have to leave the region to attend the course they sought (e.g. law, medicine, journalism, biological sciences etc). Twenty seven percent of students indicated interest in tertiary options if they were available in the Goldfields. Students identified that deterrents to studying outside the region included missing friendships, sports/activities, family support and cost.

Although students can gain entry to university through VET pathways, one of the key inhibitors to participation in higher education is the failure to have the required pre-requisites e.g. university entrance scores. The document '*Workforce Futures for the Goldfields-Esperance Region*' (2008) shows that despite interest in university only 31 percent of the population has finished Year 12 or equivalent in the Goldfields-Esperance region. Ineligibility for university entrance on academic merit is also noted in the Bradley Report and submissions to the *Review of Regional Loading* as a reason for lower regional tertiary participation, particularly from regional low socio-economic sectors.

Additionally less than 10 percent of the population in that region have a bachelor degree. This factor may impact on aspirations and expectations of those in regional and remote areas to participate in higher education. Aspirations for tertiary study are also limited by academic capability as well as knowledge of the personal and financial cost to study beyond the local area compounded by the

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<sup>2</sup> Werner, T. Presentation delivered to RREAC August 2010. Review of regional loading – issues for Regional Provision (2010).

challenges of provision of quality teaching and learning in rural and remote schools.

Statistics indicate there are a large number of external students in Western Australia. This is well illustrated by the Geraldton Universities Centre which acts as an examination centre for such students from the Mid West and has supervised 1280 exams over the period 2007-10 for 19 Australian universities and other organisations such as Rio Tinto, CASA and various TAFE, Industry and private providers.

Broadley (2010) notes that for many young people wanting to follow their dream of a higher education degree, existing support structures embedded within their regional area are highly necessary for successful course completion where the upheaval cost, (emotional and financial) of relocating to the city restricts higher education participation.

#### ***Delivery: On-line – Blended Learning***

The term flexible delivery in this context includes any and all of the following: distance education, external delivery, open education, blended learning, e-learning, mixed mode, technology assisted learning using asynchronous and synchronous tools to communicate with students.

The ability to study online by students in a more flexible mode is evidenced by the success of Open Universities Australia (OUA). This offers students the opportunity to “Open your mind - Studying through Open Universities Australia means not having to worry about time, distance or entry requirements - you can study what you want, when you want”.

OUA is committed to helping you overcome the traditional barriers to university education” (OUA, 2011). For example, Curtin University currently offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses from across the University through OUA. In recent years, there has been a rapid expansion in Curtin’s portfolio of OUA offerings. In 2010, Curtin OUA unit enrolments increased by 67% to more than 32,000 student enrolments making Curtin the largest provider of OAU’s with enrolments continuing to increase. This means that the administration, supports and teaching systems must support a quality student experience. At this stage, students pay a fee to enroll at OUA; however, FEE-HELP is available to eligible students.<sup>3</sup> Currently Curtin University has 11% of all domestic undergraduate students (2173 students out of 19 628) who are regional students accessing university courses (Curtin University Planning and Strategy Office, 2011).

Providing students’ opportunities to learn in a higher education context can be through flexible, online learning that fully utilises the power of web technologies. There has been a significant increase in the development of online learning environments to complement units offered face-to-face and units offered in a fully online mode.

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<sup>3</sup> FEE-HELP is a popular Commonwealth supported loan scheme that allows eligible students to borrow their fees. Just look at the numbers: Over 70% of our students take advantage of FEE-HELP. (<http://www.open.edu.au/public/future-students/financial-assistance/fee-help>)

A report by Jaschik (2009) highlights the US Department of Education meta-analysis conducted in the US that compared effectiveness, in terms of learning, between online and face-to-face teaching. Data indicates that in higher education studies that students in online courses outperformed students in comparative face-to-face classes. The greatest gains were for students taught in blended learning environments. The *author stressed that the differences were not a result of the technologies per se but of the affordances that the technologies provided* and summed up by Lawrence N. Gold, Director of Higher Education at the American Federation of Teachers' who stated "*successful education has always been about engaging students whether it is in an online environment, face to face or in a blended setting and fundamental to that is having staff who are fully supported and engaged in that process as well*" (Jaschik, 2009, online).

Today's students can learn through a wide variety of experiences that include face-to-face activities as well as interactive videos and animations, simulations, and peer support networks where students can work in groups, collaborate, and share their work with an online audience. Many Australian universities are offering more flexible pathways that appeal to the busy student who needs to fit their life around study.

The building of partnerships with local communities and providers in other sectors to develop institutional cross-collaboration and partnerships across sectors is necessary to develop more flexible and sustainable higher education provision in Western Australia. In addition, further exploration and analysis of flexible delivery of higher education courses through the web will be a critical factor in sustaining rural, regional and remote communities, as students are not required to leave their regional location. In regional WA vocational education providers offer a comprehensive 'on the ground' footprint that is ideally situated in terms of geographical spread offering technological and face to face pathways to higher education.

Pathways between vocational training providers and universities are also important to regional students with many offering articulation arrangements into higher education.

The presence of higher education through University campuses at Kalgoorlie, Geraldton, Albany, Northam, Margaret River and Broome are also offering critical support to regional students. Some regional communities are using the Community Resource Centres<sup>4</sup> to offer support and assistance to students working in regional areas, and this is a critical 'local' asset to support higher education activity.

Online delivery will be a significant tool for the future of higher education throughout Western Australia.

As noted by Garrison and Vaughan (2009) Higher Education institutions must address changing expectations associated with the quality of the learning experience and technological innovations. The authors claim that:

*Administration, faculty and students in higher education know there has to be a change in how we design educational experiences. Most recognise that*

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<sup>4</sup> Community Resource Centres are locally owned and operated centres that provide regional communities and their visitors with local access to technology, information and services.

*the convergence of the classroom and communications technology has the potential to transform higher education for the better. However, blended learning is more than enhancing lectures. It represents the transformation of how we approach teaching and learning. It is a complete rethinking and redesign of the education design and the learning experience. Blended learning is a coherent design approach that openly assess and integrates the strengths of face-to-face and online learning to address worthwhile educational goals. When blended learning is well understood and implemented, higher education will be transformed in a way not seen since the expansion of higher education in the late 1940s.*

RREAC commends the work of universities in providing regional campuses. The success of the Combined University centre at Geraldton is noteworthy. Expanding opportunities for regional and rural based people to undertake higher education courses in their own communities would be extremely beneficial to the long term sustainability of regional and rural Western Australia.

The potential for on-line learning outweighs the impediments and these impediments will become less as technology develops (Roberts, 2005). The impediment of relocating for study and leaving support networks is still a real barrier to higher education study. Allowing these aspiring people to study in their communities will certainly increase the likelihood of them remaining for longer periods in their home community thus providing greater support and stability. Opening up greater opportunities and choices will see a greater demand for places in courses for people who feel they cannot leave their family for study. Similarly, older students (e.g. career changers) who often can't attend face to face classes anyway prefer blended learning. As discussed, advances in technology and staff expertise have seen learning on-line become a viable mode of study (Roberts, 2005).

## **Strategic Priorities**

### **Access / Participation / Choice / Delivery**

1. Strategic planning involving the engagement of key stakeholders (students, providers and industry) in terms of access, participation and choice, supported by Government.
2. A realistic approach where technology plays an important part in educational delivery. RREAC's position is that there needs to be a physical presence to support technological flexible delivery. This is consistent with the Regional Development Council's Higher Education Policy for Western Australia.
3. Maximise the use of existing regional infrastructure. RREAC does not see the need for significant expenditure on capital infrastructure but to use TAFE and other facilities where available.
4. Support for the health and well being of regional, rural and remote students attending higher education institutions in Perth in terms of mentoring, network groups etc.

## **2. ASPIRATION / ACHIEVEMENT (ATTAINMENT)**

### **Overview**

Raising the aspirations of regional and remote students to participate in higher education must be an immediate priority. Raising aspirations is a challenge that needs to be tackled over the long term with an understanding that complex sociological issues are involved.

The research literature highlights factors, such as low socio-economic background, cultural differences, lack of family background and values in higher education, as influencing aspiration to higher education. The financial strength of the family coupled with a lack of background in higher education impinges upon capacity to aspire and realization of aspiration. This is particularly so if the added burden of moving away from home to access higher education is necessary.

Regional and remote areas have a perceived lower aspiration level to continue with higher education than their metropolitan counterparts. Factors impacting on aspirations to higher education include school attainment / achievement, family background and cultural values

The aspirations of any one individual to participate in higher education and the capacity to do so may be rooted in performance in high school studies. Access to high quality education in high school settings, complete with a broad range of curriculum offerings, is essential as a stepping-stone to supporting aspirations and capacity to exercise choice. As a result regional students are less likely to aspire to attend university since they often have a lack of exposure to tertiary study as a career pathway and can have difficulty meeting entry requirements.

Governments committed to ensuring that students from regional and remote locations participate in higher education must make provision to defray the disadvantages of distance and remoteness. This may occur through a range of strategies including scholarships, living allowances, taxation breaks for families, assistance to build student accommodation at universities, travel allowances, and differentiated funding to universities for regional and remote students

RREAC has long-standing concerns about a range of issues associated with school education in regional and remote Western Australia as exposed in a range of data. Student performance levels (Lyons et al. 2006); school attendance (Auditor General's Report 2009) and Year 12 completion rates are lower in regional and remote locations than in metropolitan locations. These factors impact on educational attainment and accordingly student expectations and aspirations.

While there is still much work to do, RREAC acknowledges the many focused intervention programs already in place. They include the Murchison Literacy Strategy and those taking place through the National Partnership Program around literacy, numeracy and early childhood and Indigenous education. It is anticipated that these programs will have positive outcomes for student performance, school attendance and engagement in education and this will have a flow on impact of raising aspirations to work, training and higher education.

To supplement the work already happening at the school system, sector and higher education level, RREAC believes that university outreach programs should play a more significant role in raising aspirations to higher education in regional and remote Western Australia. RREAC's recommendations in this area has been influenced by a recent report completed by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), which considers the components that need to be

incorporated into aspirant programs to give students the best chance of success. That is, increasing student entry into higher education (Gale et al 2010).

### ***Outreach programs***

For example, Uni-Reach Griffith University designed a number of Outreach programs targeting Years 8-12 students with low SES / ESL levels. One such program focused on a school visit component where Griffith University students, trained to work as Uni-Reach mentors, visit each school with the Uni-Reach Coordinator on a weekly basis for four weeks in Year 11 and four weeks in Year 12. Mentors provide advice about the requirements of university study, as well as providing assistance with school student assignments and providing career and course information.

Uni-Reach mentors are paid appropriately – recognising that they come from financially disadvantaged backgrounds and that they may forgo other employment opportunities to undertake the mentor role. Positive outcomes of the program include:

- the building of close relationships over a ten year period;
- assisting those students who are relatively motivated and aspiring to university;
- on-going monitoring of students;
- the role of mentors in making university seem real; and
- the development of programs in close consultation with schools demonstrating a deep effort to understand the issues facing schools and their communities.

The report identifies four strategies with 10 characteristics that are needed to develop strong outreach programs. The research has also identified the need for what they termed an “equity orientation” to be present in outreach programs to increase the likelihood of achieving positive outcomes. (Refer to Appendix 5 page 31).

Outreach programs work in a number of ways:

- They provide a university presence in the school.
- Quite often, the outreach program involves the universities working with schools on such things as lifting student performance levels and engaging students in education.
- Often university students are mentoring Year 11 and 12 students who show promise of attaining the requirements to proceed to higher education.

### ***Achievement***

Once engaged in higher education, support mechanisms must be in place to ensure students successfully go on to complete studies. Such support should include but not be limited to:

- student support on campus – pastoral care;
- income support;
- better planned local access and provision;
- accommodation – subsidized, provision of facilities;
- provision of scholarships;
- support for disadvantaged students who are otherwise not eligible for existing schemes e.g. easier access to Youth Allowance;
- higher funding loadings per regionally delivered placement, especially if the students are economically disadvantaged;

- marketing of regional and remote higher education programs;
- access to higher education information;
- on-line provision / blended learning;
- school based programs designed to improve regional and remote students' academic performance; and
- gifted and talented education programs designed with a high equity orientation.

Submissions to the Bradley Review identified that a number of service models are emerging in the regional higher education sector in response to “*servicing thin markets*” and limited “*economies of scale*”. The models, each with its own unique challenges and opportunities include:

- traditional regional campuses with face to face service delivery (e.g. Notre Dame Broome, ECU Bunbury, Curtin / UWA Albany, OUA's);
- flexible delivery and or blended learning making use of improved ICT infrastructure and the NBN (Broadband); and
- collaboration between universities and other sectors whereby higher education providers are making use of purpose-built facilities or schools, VET and community facilities as delivery sites.

### **Strategic Priorities**

#### ***Aspiration / Achievement (Attainment)***

5. Universities participate in developing “Outreach Programs” with the State Government providing funding to support this.
6. Aspirant programs must link into the strategic planning recommended previously.

### **3. PATHWAYS TO HIGHER EDUCATION**

Over the last 10 years considerable effort has been expended on developing “education precincts” in regional areas: for example in Mandurah, Karratha, Margaret River, Bunbury, Esperance, Kalgoorlie and Geraldton. Basically, education precincts involve co-locating senior secondary, training and, in some cases, university services on the same site. The arguments for establishing education precincts were mainly around improving:

- transition from post-secondary education to training and university;
- enabling senior secondary students access to training during their final years of schooling;
- support services to build capacity e.g. health “wrap around model”, career advice etc; and
- efficiencies arising from sharing facilities.

Even where education precincts have not been established, considerable effort has gone into improving the articulation between the schools and training sectors. Part of this work has been developing “pathways”, providing students with a clear understanding/picture of how studying certain units/courses at school “link” to further training and education beyond school. Many pathways also illustrate the articulation between training and university and show students that the ATAR is not the only route to higher education.

Employers have expressed support for the development of pathways, especially in the mining sector, as they can use these as a means to encourage their employees to help develop their skills, knowledge and expertise.

Successful operation of education precincts require:

- A shared governance model and a firm understanding and commitment to the development and implementation of a Memorandum on Understanding on operational and management issues.
- On-going collaborative planning.
- Fostering partnership with key stakeholders.
- Sharing of human and physical resources.

While acknowledging that schools systems and sectors in WA collect Year 12 destination data, RREAC is cognizant of the need for research on the effectiveness of education precincts and pathways.

Articulation between VET and higher education is very difficult and at this stage relies on a VET provider having an individual arrangement with a particular university.

### **Strategic Priorities** ***Pathways to Higher Education***

7. Increasing pathways through collaboration for higher education delivery to address barriers created by distance and thin markets.
8. Strategic and collaborative planning between sectors to enhance precincts and develop stronger pathways between schools, training and higher education.
9. Research is undertaken also to improve articulation arrangements between vocational training providers and universities
10. Research is undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of education precincts and pathways with questions around the extent to which education precincts and pathways have:
  - impacted on decisions students make to access training and/or university from school; and
  - provided access to university after completing a training course.

## **4. FUNDING**

In response to the *Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education, the Australian Government* commissioned a review of base funding levels and cluster funding. The review will provide a report to the Government at the end of October 2011. The *Higher Education Base Funding Review Consultation Paper* (December 2010) states that the current base funding model for universities is the Commonwealth Grant Scheme coupled with student contributions. The model is based on funding the costs of inputs (e.g. cost per student enrolled in different discipline groups) rather than cost per outputs (e.g. graduates) or the cost of outcomes, (e.g. the quality of students' educational experience or the value of the qualification attained). The model also has many features that are the result of incremental policy decisions over decades.

Similarly, the Bradley Review highlighted the complexity of issues that contribute to the challenges of regional education provision in Australia. The Review outlined the challenges associated with the future sustainability and responsiveness of higher education in regional Australia included:

- the increased costs associated with the smaller scale of regional university operations;
- relatively low student numbers;
- a high proportion of students from a low socio-economic background; and
- the difficulty of attracting students to study at regional centres.

In response, the Australian government committed to examining the provision of higher education in regional Australia in particular the appropriateness of regional loadings with the objective of developing options for a new, more logical basis for funding. In May 2011 the Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations released the *Review of Regional Loading: Final Report*. The report articulated that the current purpose of the regional loading is to offset the disparity in costs for regional universities compared to metropolitan universities. However, the report proposes a slight modification so that:

*"The primary purpose of the revised regional loading should be to offset the disparity in costs and revenue for regional higher education campuses compared to metropolitan campuses so that students can access world class education no matter where they live"*

This Report presents a case for support for regional higher education based on three key arguments: external benefits, market shortcomings and equity, outlines the advantages and disadvantages of current regional loading and proposes the design principles and formula for a revised regional loading.

*"The Review proposes that the regional loading formula be revised as follows:*

- *use the Australian Standard Geographic Classification (ASGC) remoteness structure to determine the remoteness of each campus*
- *base regional loading funding on the EFTSL (averaged over three years) eligible for Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) funding at institutions listed on Table A and Table B of the Higher Education Support Act (2003)*
- *provide funding for internal and multi-modal student load at each campus with a minimum 50 EFTSL, with the funding rate dependent on the campus's remoteness under the ASGC remoteness structure, or its replacement*
- *provide funding for half of the external student load for each eligible institution at the funding rate for the institution's headquarters".*

Regional loading must address issues of fairness and equity for both students and universities.

The Federal Government budget delivered on Tuesday 10 May 2011 set aside \$110 million for country campuses and promised to maintain funding for regional infrastructure investment. Regional universities have long argued while city campuses can take advantage of the urban infrastructure surrounding them,

many country universities have to build their own, driving up costs. In recognition of the extra expenses, the budget allocated \$110 million for 'regional loading'.

In summing up, RREAC re-iterates that Western Australian students do not go to university at the same rate as their metropolitan counterparts. In 2009, 1536 Year 12 students from regional areas were offered a higher education place, but only 558 accepted (36)<sup>5</sup>. In contrast, 7510 metropolitan students were offered a place and 5953 accepted (78%). In 2008, the corresponding percentages were 35% and 75% respectively. This in part can be attributed to the higher social and financial costs for students studying in Perth compared with Perth-based students. Werner (2010).

There are inherent inequities in the regional loading formula that further disadvantages Western Australia. In 2009, there was a total of \$31 million available nationally. Western Australia received \$738 086 or 2.4% of the total funding. WA has approximately 9.3% of the national population living in regional or remote areas. Based on these figures, WA should receive approximately \$2.9 million.

### **Strategic Priorities**

#### ***Funding***

11. In collaboration with key stakeholders clear and inclusive criteria be developed to determine regional loading and that this regional loading be more flexible in terms of how it can flow to regional education facilities delivering higher education courses.
12. Regional and rural students be supported to achieve tertiary qualifications, especially if they need to relocate to the metropolitan or a large regional centre.
13. Funding that better supports flexible learning in terms of the cost of curriculum development, technology infrastructure and student support systems that are required.

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<sup>5</sup> TISC data as reported by Werner, T. August 2011.

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## **APPENDIX 1: A Regional Higher Education Policy for Western Australia**

Endorsed by the Regional Development Council at its 10 June 2010 meeting

### **Introduction**

The Regional Development Council has developed this policy, in the absence of State regional higher education policy and in response to an increasing awareness that residents of regional Western Australia do not have equal or equitable access to higher education.

In 2006 an Interdepartmental Committee for the then WA Minister for Education and Training prepared a “Strategy for Higher Education for Regional Residents of Western Australia.” The Strategy was not formally adopted. However, the groundbreaking work of this Committee is formally acknowledged and has informed much of what follows.

Participation in university education by residents of regional Western Australia is significantly lower than in the metropolitan area. Physical access to university is challenging with few campuses located in regional areas. In order to attend metropolitan university campuses regional students experience financial hardship and diminished support, as they are required to live away from home. Regional students are less likely to aspire to attend university since they have a lack of exposure to tertiary study as a career pathway and can have difficulty meeting entry requirements.

### **Principles**

The Regional Development Council believes that all residents of Western Australia should have equity of access to higher education. In order to achieve this vision there are some important principles.

1. The State Government should establish a strategic view of regional delivery of higher education and facilitate its realisation.
2. Improving higher education in regional areas should be approached in a holistic manner with all levels of government and local community stakeholders – including regional development commissions, employers and research bodies – engaging with university authorities in the delivery of higher education.
3. All regions should have a physical university presence.
4. Higher education delivery in regional areas should be compatible with regional development objectives.
  - 4.1. Stakeholders such as local government, regional development commissions, schools, community groups, employers and industry need to be included in discussion and decisions about the focus, level and location of higher education and research facilities, including the ways in which they could support and foster innovation.
  - 4.2. The Business Plans should include detail of existing and planned infrastructure and capacity, justification for particular research centres and undergraduate or postgraduate courses, funding models, administration structure, plans for attraction and retention of staff, ways in which they could collaborate in supporting innovative activities and describe the involvement of the community in ongoing development

- 4.3. There should be a facility in each region where students can be supported in a range of courses offered by one or more higher education institutions. Mutual benefits are available when complementary university research and teaching facilities are established together.
- 5. The costs of delivering quality higher education in regional Western Australia should be supported by targeted government contribution.
- 6. Any State Government support for higher education in regional Western Australia should be predicated on optimum use of local resources and infrastructure, where feasible.
- 7. There should be a continued focus on improving the pathways between schools, TAFEs and universities.
  - 7.1. Government support should focus on the institutions that incur the costs and should recognise the different costs of delivery throughout the state.
  - 7.2. Collaborative and shared use of existing facilities should be encouraged where feasible.
  - 7.3. Community preference for the style and location of the higher education facility should determine the model for each region.
  - 7.4. It is important that existing education facilities, such as secondary schools and TAFEs, be involved in decisions about improving the pathways from school to university.
- 8. Higher education opportunities in the regions should be improved and encourage a flow of city students to regional Western Australia and regional students to the city.
- 9. Educational aspirations and perceptions of attainability should be raised as a precondition to enhancing higher education participation for regional people.
  - 9.1. The flow of regional students to metropolitan campuses should be complemented by a flow of students to regional campuses, from other regions or from the metropolitan area. In some cases, the student might undertake only part of their course at a regional campus. A good example of this is the Rural Clinical School of WA and medicine students in their clinical placement year.
  - 9.2. Participation in higher education by residents of regional Western Australia is much lower than that for metropolitan regions in Australia. Tertiary education aspirations and perceptions of attainability should be raised throughout regional Western Australia.

## **Strategies**

The Regional Development Council believes that to achieve good educational outcomes for residents of regional Western Australia the following strategies are necessary to implement these principles.

### **In collaboration with the Australian Government:**

- 1. Develop programs that encourage participation in higher education by residents of regional Western Australia.
  - 1.1. These programs should promote the benefits of education to all regional groups and especially disadvantaged and underrepresented sections of the community, such as Indigenous, disabled, and minority ethnic groups.

- 1.2. Equitable delivery of and participation in education is important for all Australians. Students who have had access to education of a high level throughout their schooling will be more likely to, and be more able to, participate in higher education.
2. Support providers of higher education in regional Australia with a funding model that properly reflects the higher and differing costs of providing university education in rural Western Australia
  - 2.1. Funding for higher education in Australia is largely the responsibility of the Australian Government. Information and advice should be provided regularly to the Australian Government that describes the requirement for equitable funding of higher education in regional Western Australia.
3. Provide scholarships that support disadvantaged regional students to participate in higher education in regional or metropolitan Australia; and metropolitan students wishing to study at a regional campus
  - 3.1. The Australian Government and individual Universities provide some scholarships and prizes to students in particular categories that alleviate the financial costs of university study.
  - 3.2. It would be appropriate for the Western Australian Government to support disadvantaged students, who are otherwise not eligible or who receive insufficient support from those schemes, and allow them to study at university and to live away from home.
  - 3.3. Metropolitan students should be encouraged to consider study at regional campuses to broaden their experience and to encourage them to consider living and working in the regions after completion of their course.
  - 3.4. Communities and agencies should commit to supplement the range of existing scholarships with private support for additional regional scholarships focussed on regional needs.

**In collaboration with the community and regions:**

4. Encourage each region to develop a business plan for university teaching and research.
  - 4.1. The Business Plans should include detail of existing and planned infrastructure and capacity, justification for particular research centres and undergraduate or postgraduate courses, funding models, administration structure, plans for attraction and retention of staff, and describe the involvement of the community in ongoing development.
  - 4.2. The areas of specialised research and teaching courses should be closely aligned with identified regional industry or community needs.
5. Establish a Fund to support feasible regional higher education Business Plans with matching funds for several years.
  - 5.1. The level of supporting funds would be determined on a range of factors such as regional need, other available support (e.g. Australian Government), and the long-term feasibility of each regional proposal.

**In collaboration with education providers and other agencies:**

6. Maintain and extend the provision of university education and appropriate education pathways to students throughout regional Western Australia offered by universities and TAFE Colleges

- 6.1. There are many models for delivery of higher education. Students are able to access and even gain credit for some university courses with studies at vocational level. Many universities are able to offer access to courses through various forms of distance education.
- 6.2. Recognition of the wide variety of options for university study is important when considering the most appropriate way to provide higher education to residents of regional Western Australia. The provision of face-to-face delivery should be an important component of any regional delivery model.

## **APPENDIX 2: Review of Regional Loading - Issues for Regional Provision Issues Paper December 2009**

26 February 2010

Ms Jennifer Chadwick  
Branch Manager  
Policy and Stakeholder Engagement Branch  
Higher Education group  
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations  
PO Box 9880  
CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601

Dear Ms Chadwick

### **REVIEW OF REGIONAL LOADING - ISSUES FOR REGIONAL PROVISION ISSUES PAPER DECEMBER 2009**

Each of the nine regions in Western Australia contains a State-funded Regional Development Commission. The Commissions are statutory bodies and are broadly charged with overseeing economic and social development within their respective regions. The Commissions are responsible to the Minister for Regional Development and Lands through a Board of Management. The Regional Development Commissions of WA (or RDC's) welcome the opportunity to provide comment on the 'Review of Regional Loading issues paper'.

Clearly, the current system of allocating loadings does not benefit Western Australia with its geographically dispersed population receiving only a small portion, some \$672,456 or 2.7 percent of the national regional loading in 2009. Equitable access to funding, for the regions and their communities, is vital to build a skilled regional workforce through quality, accessible and relevant education and training.

Each of the Regional Development Commissions has an understanding and commitment to the development of a strong education and training sector in their region so as to encourage and promote economic and social activity by attracting investment and retaining a skilled community. In the past, economic growth has been frustrated by skills shortage issues that relate in part to a lack of options for regional education and training. The review of regional loadings provides an opportunity to better serve both regional industry and communities into the future.

### **DISCUSSION POINTS**

Defining regional higher education

- i) How can regional higher education provision be defined so as to distinguish it from metropolitan higher education provision? For example, on what basis should a university or campus be labelled as a regional university/regional campus? What other forms of higher education presence in regional areas should be recognised, e.g. university centres, study centres? Is a physical presence required for purposes of an infrastructure being labelled a regional campus?

The Development Commissions strongly believe that a regional campus should provide a physical presence to students with face-to-face tuition and facilities

available. It is important that young school leavers and mature-aged students in regional centres have access to good face-to-face support and quality teaching. The courses offered regionally should contribute substantially to an accredited course of study.

A regional university or regional campus should be defined to include all higher education providers not located in a statistical district having a population greater than 250,000 people. It is important that support for regional education is not spread thinly between many campuses with low viability in regions of low population, but is focussed on centres and campuses that should be viable and have a tradition of providing higher education.

- ii) Should the definition of 'regional higher education provision' include those higher education students from regional or remote areas who attend a metropolitan higher education institution?

'Regional higher education provision' should not include students from regional areas who study at metropolitan campuses.

However, it is extremely important that regional students should be supported to achieve tertiary qualifications, especially if they have to relocate, since they suffer considerable economic and social hardship relative to metropolitan students with ready access to campuses from their normal home.

We also believe that metropolitan students should be able to access similar levels of support to relocate to regional campuses to study specialist courses.

This support for students should be separate from regional loadings offered to institutions.

#### **Definition of a regional campus for purposes of regional loading**

- iii) How effective are the regional loading eligibility criteria used prior to 2007 in identifying those regional universities and campuses that require assistance to be sustainable in a demand driven system?

The Development Commissions support a model or allocation process that reflects the isolation of the campus (from large cities and from other higher education campuses), and is inversely adjusted (within limits) for the population of the statistical district and the student load at the campus. It would be useful to include some recognition in the model of the strategic purpose of higher education to each region and to the nation.

- iv) What criteria do you recommend be used to define a regional campus so that funding can more effectively respond to the costs of regional higher education provision?

As stated above, a regional university or regional campus should be defined to include all higher education providers not located in a statistical district having a population greater than 250,000 people.

The criteria to further define a regional campus and determine regional loading should include the following:

- the isolation of the population centre (which impacts on cost of living for staff and students; and addresses the participation and equity issue of being able to provide access to higher education to regional students without requiring them to relocate far from home)
- the size of the population centre (which impacts on capacity to attract and retain quality staff)
- the student load at the campus (which impacts of the viability of providing quality education, including an appropriate student community life)
- the identified and strategic need for higher education in the region (including specialist teaching and research centres)
- the existence of and need for appropriate infrastructure

When seeking to recruit and maintain a regional workforce, it is important to recognise that “students who study in regional areas are much more likely to stay in those areas, providing a vital skilled workforce in the regions” (‘Transforming Australia’s higher education system’ (2009) fact sheet).

Regional students, especially those from low SES backgrounds, are less likely to be able to afford or be inclined to leave their familiar networks to participate in a metropolitan university.

#### **Identification of higher education students as being from a ‘regional’ or ‘remote’ location**

- |    |   |
|----|---|
| v) | How effective is the MCEETYA method for classifying metropolitan, regional and remote students (based on home post code) for identifying those higher education students who should be categorised as regional or remote? |
|----|---|

Support for regional students should be provided in two ways: first, through a regional loading program to support regional campuses to offer tertiary options for the local community; and second, through individual support for students who need to relocate to take advantage of other courses or later years of courses only offered in part in their local region. We also believe that this individual support should be offered to “metropolitan” students who choose to study at regional campuses.

The MCEETYA method is effective for determining the level and type of support available directly to regional and remote students. The use of “home postcode” alone is not always reliable, since some remote indigenous students, for example, may use Alice Springs as their postcode but live in a very small, very remote community in Western Australia.

Regional and remote student access to and participation in higher education

#### **Increased access opportunities/Increasing aspiration and participation.**

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| vi)  | How are the access and participation rates for students from regional and remote areas trending in your region or institution?   |
| vii) | In what ways does the proximity of a regional higher education presence affect access and participation rates for regional and remote students? Please provide any evidentiary materials if available. |

Communities in regional WA have a strong interest in higher education. Regional secondary schools and colleges invariably support school students to consider and participate in both vocational and tertiary pathways. Participation in higher education in the regions is typically through the WA Colleges of TAFE and other vocational providers. There are limited tertiary opportunities in the regions other than through distance education or very few university campuses.

For reasons of efficiency, some universities are increasingly focussing on computer and communication technology rather than face-to-face delivery and support and this deters regional students from participating in tertiary education. For example, it is understood that from 2010 Curtin University of Technology is not offering face-to-face delivery and support for many of the courses previously supported in regional centres such as Kalgoorlie.

Many regional students do successfully relocate to metropolitan centres at considerable expense and complete a tertiary qualification. However, many others commence their studies yet return home without completing their degrees because of financial or other difficulties associated with living away from home. Other regional students are unable to consider moving away to study because of family or financial reasons.

Where tertiary (and other) education opportunities in regional Western Australia are not available or have limited availability, families or adults seeking further education leave the region. The State Training Board document 'Workforce Futures for the Goldfields-Esperance Region' published in 2008, highlights this trend stating, "limited options for tertiary study deter families from committing to the region."

- viii) In what ways can higher education institutions, schools and VET providers work more collaboratively in regional and remote areas to improve educational attainment, broaden higher education aspirations and increase young people's awareness of the available career and study opportunities? Please describe any examples of good practice.

In general, there is good collaboration between the various education and training providers and industry in regional WA to improve educational attainment, broaden aspirations and increase educational awareness. This has typically occurred through school VET coordinators or principals, programs (now finalised) such as the Regional Industry Career advisors and Local Community Partnerships, District Education Office initiatives, industry sector associations and industry and other stakeholders including higher education and training institutions.

Typically there are events and programs that target preschool through to tertiary students and include Career Expos and career development forums; mock interviews with industry and high schools; work placement programs; career advisory and counselling services; certificate programs targeting indigenous students; programs for the disengaged; and coordinated information sessions by the various universities.

The imperative for most regions is that a tertiary provider commits to providing face-to-face options for their community. A physical presence in the region with offerings that are relevant to industry and students and marketed to these target groups will improve education attainment along with lifting aspirations and local workforce skill sets. Evidence from Western Australia suggests regional

universities or campuses function optimally where a strong research focus is also evident and such focus reflects local industry and community interests.

With clear industry needs and student interests identified, the coordination of appropriate career advice and quality regional higher education may require a peak body such as a WA Regional Higher Education Council (RHEC). Critical to the success of any activity of the RHEC would be supportive Federal policies and funding for regional education. The various WA Development Commissions are investigating the feasibility of the RHEC concept.

Education service delivery models to enhance regional higher education efficiency and sustainability

- ix) What challenges and opportunities does the Bradley Review recommendation that regional higher education providers improve their outcomes and sustainability through collaboration and partnerships with other providers including VET and schools, offer regional higher education providers in their efforts to provide quality teaching and learning? In your response please provide examples of good practice such as the use of shared infrastructure and resources; co-location; joint delivery; pathways and applications of credit transfer.

The Development Commissions recognise that sharing of resources between VET providers, schools and higher education institutions could be very important in regional areas.

There are strong linkages in the delivery of certificate level courses through schools and the VET sector throughout WA. In some regions there are strong links between the VET sector and universities. For example, in the Goldfields region the Eastern Goldfields College services years eleven and twelve and is co-located with the Curtin University VET campus and the tertiary WA School of Mines (Curtin University). This has created opportunities to share facilities and establish a link between the institutions to encourage higher education choices.

The complementary establishment of specialist research centres in regions, such as the UWA Centre of Excellence in Natural Resource Management adjacent to the UWA Albany Centre, has positive benefits for both centres. Staff within the research centres are able to teach in specialised courses offered through the local campus and thereby increase the viability of the campus and of the research centre.

When the VET campus and a university campus are physically separated in a regional town it is more difficult to obtain advantages from collaboration. However, the costs of co-location (including provision of new infrastructure and reduction of separate identity) can outweigh the benefits from shared infrastructure or resources. Many of the WA Colleges of TAFE do promote pathways to university and the application of credit transfer. Typically the universities are not those that operate in the same region.

- x) What impact are enhancements to the National Broadband Network likely to have on higher education delivery and services in regional areas? Consider issues such as costs, accessibility, integrating services with other providers such as schools and VET, and partnerships with government, industry and business.

The National Broadband Network (NBN) provides an opportunity to supplement the provision of face-to-face education in the regions with high quality online delivery. It is important to recognise that regional students deserve equitable access to an education that is of the same quality as their metropolitan counterparts. Students in regional areas (similar to metropolitan students) have a range of backgrounds and abilities and need good face-to-face support if they are to succeed in higher education.

As reported in the Bradley Review online learning presents many risks for students, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds, and those with negative past learning experiences such as poor participation, English as a second language, poor literacy and numeracy or mental health and social issues. Additionally it can be more difficult to stay motivated without a group of peers, shared learning experiences can be lost and some practical aspects of delivery are unable to be achieved.

The real cost to the regions of the NBN could be an emphasis on e-learning in the place of investment in face-to-face delivery and this could lessen participation in the regions in higher education.

#### Some regional funding model options in a student focused system

- xi) What differences in costs do providers incur in providing quality higher education in regional areas (including in the flexible and blended modes), compared to metropolitan areas? In what ways are regional operations affected by the amount of funding available? What potential is there to access diverse revenue sources? Please provide examples and evidence of additional costs that can be directly attributable to regional provision.

In regional WA it is normal to allow an additional % for construction of buildings. This can be very significant. For example, standard practice in the construction industry is to add 15% to the metropolitan cost of a building in Albany (in the south) and 65% to the cost of a similar building in Karratha (in the Pilbara).

Universities establishing in regional towns also need to acquire land on which to build whereas they often have access to large sites in the metropolitan area. Significant regional loadings need to be placed on staff costs in order to overcome the disincentive for academic staff to locate far from the academic and career benefits of a large metropolitan campus. In order to maintain equitable treatment of the regional staff there are also additional operational costs, such as flights to and from the metropolitan or other campuses of the university so as to access professional development or to meet with colleagues in similar disciplines. Smaller class sizes will also mean that 'per unit' costs are higher in regional areas.

In the Goldfields-Esperance region the local Development Commission is aware that providing appropriate salaries to attract and retain good staff as well as the cost to provide reasonable accommodation, functional and contemporary teaching

facilities and venues significantly increase the disadvantage of local higher education providers.

Some providers incur opportunity costs through not being able to provide critical courses to their students or community when suitably qualified academic staff cannot be recruited or retained.

The lack of student accommodation frequently makes it difficult for regional campuses to expand their student enrolments to non-local students and so impacts on the viability of the campus. For example the long-term strategic plan of the WA School of Mines in Kalgoorlie is hampered by a lack of accommodation for students. The UWA Albany Centre is similarly restricted in its ability to attract out-of-town students to its specialist degree and its short (summer) courses in restoration ecology.

The potential to access diverse revenue sources for regional universities through corporate or local government support or sponsorship is limited. While the WA School of Mines has been successful in attracting corporate support for student scholarships for 2010, this opportunity will not exist for many regions that have a broader spread of small to medium enterprises. Such corporate support for student scholarships supports the students studying at the campus but it is more difficult to encourage corporate or other partners to support the costs of operating a regional campus.

Commercialisation of research is also a source of revenue but needs large-scale investment funding and strong timely returns to enable the earnings from the research to be a major source of funding for operating and developing any regional institution. It is uncommon for a regional area to be able to support the scale of research required to generate such commercial returns.

xii) To what extent are the additional costs of regional higher education attributable to operation in regional and remote areas as distinct from costs resulting from a multi-campus operational model? Please provide any available data to verify your response.

The additional costs of regional higher education are attributable to the;

- additional salary costs of operating regionally;
- additional costs associated with constructing or modifying facilities in higher-cost regional centres;
- higher unit costs through the operation of typically smaller classes;
- additional operational costs through providing equitable access to colleagues and professional development at other, distant campuses; and
- higher costs in providing adequate administration support to smaller campuses.

xiii) What are some elements of a funding model that could be put in place to replace the current regional loading, so that the funding most effectively supports regional higher education provision and targets greatest need? Consider issues such as whether funding should be institutionally or student centred; whether it should be provided through a formula or a competitive grant; or whether funding should be subject to reaching performance targets negotiated with each institution; or any combination of the above

We believe that a funding model that supports regional higher education provision and targets greatest need should be institutionally and student centred. However, where an existing regional higher education facility is not institutionally bound to one university, flexibility should be applied to the funding model. For example, funding could be allocated directly to that facility (e.g. Geraldton University Centre).

Institutions should be compensated for providing higher-cost education at regional campuses. Higher education providers should be required to demonstrate, through local commitment and research, that the provision of particular courses do or will meet demand in that region. Funding should be based on some minimal performance targets, e.g. rates could be calculated on some reasonable minimum and average class size with payments based on actual enrolments. The providers could also be required to demonstrate that they are meeting some minimum demand for higher education in the region, e.g. some proportion of students in the region are choosing to study at the campus. Recognition should be made of the history of the provision of higher education in the region, and of the opportunities to work with other providers and industry.

Regional students should be partially compensated if they have to relocate to study the course of their choice; and such compensation should also be available to metropolitan students who need to relocate to a regional centre to study.

In regional Western Australia there is a sense that education and training has a new energy borne of Federal policies to improve Australia's position relative to other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries and to increase national productivity in the long term. For the regions of Western Australia this is a critical opportunity to build economic and community capacity by attracting or developing sustainable tertiary options.

We look forward to the outcomes of the review of regional loadings and a progressive future for higher education in regional Western Australia.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours faithfully

Bruce Manning  
Chief Executive Officer  
Great Southern Development Commission

On behalf of:  
Gascoyne Development Commission  
Goldfields Esperance Development Commission  
Kimberley Development Commission  
Mid West Development Commission  
Peel Development Commission  
Pilbara Development Commission  
South West Development Commission

## APPENDIX 3 - A Snapshot - Regional Campuses WA

*Edith Cowan University South West Campus (Bunbury)* is the largest university campus outside the metropolitan area. The Campus is part of an educational precinct comprising Edith Cowan University, South West Regional College of TAFE, Manea Senior College and the Bunbury Health Campus, which includes St John of God Hospital and South West Area Health Services. The campus provides a comprehensive range of courses and on-campus accommodation.

*The University of Western Australia* has offered undergraduate programs through the *Albany Centre* since 1999 (Centre for Excellence). The small regional university centre offers a number of courses, including postgraduate study, through flexible delivery including face-to-face tutorials and support from lecturers and student advisers from Perth. Learning is supported with recorded web-based lectures, video-conferencing and on-line access to learning materials. Cross institutional enrolment is available for students enrolled with another university as a distance education student.

*Notre Dame University Broome Campus* provides a supportive environment for all students and an opportunity for non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people to come together and learn about Aboriginal history and culture.

The Campus offers students opportunity to gain a tertiary education in the Kimberley region. Students can study undergraduate courses in Aboriginal Studies, Nursing and Teaching as well as postgraduate courses in Aboriginal Studies and Education. Students have the opportunity to study on the Campus for part of their degree to complement studies undertaken on either the Fremantle or Sydney campuses.

The Campus is also a registered Training Organisation (RTO) and offers a number of Vocational Education and Training courses (VET) in Education and Nursing. These courses provide Indigenous and non-Indigenous students with pathways into Higher Education degree courses.

*Curtin University Western Australian School of Mines (WASM)* in Kalgoorlie offers courses in mining engineering, metallurgical engineering and more. Co-located on the same campus is the Vocational and Education Training Centre (VTEC) that provides students with VTEC qualification in courses including Certificate IV in Training and Assessment; Diploma of Children's services; Diploma of Nursing; Diploma of Occupational Health and Safety; and Advanced Diploma of Occupation Health and Safety.

The *Margaret River Education Campus* is a joint initiative of the Margaret River Senior High School, Department of Education and Training, South West Regional College of TAFE, Curtin University and Edith Cowan University. Within the Campus, Curtin is the lead partner in the Centre for Wine Excellence, which comprises a teaching winery, chemistry laboratories, sensory evaluation and research laboratories, classrooms and resource centre. The Centre provides viticulture and oenology students access to leading vineyards and wineries.

The *Muresk Institute* is Curtin University's school of agribusiness, applied biosciences and environmental biology. However, by the end of 2011 Curtin University will have withdrawn from Muresk. Currently Muresk Institute is re-

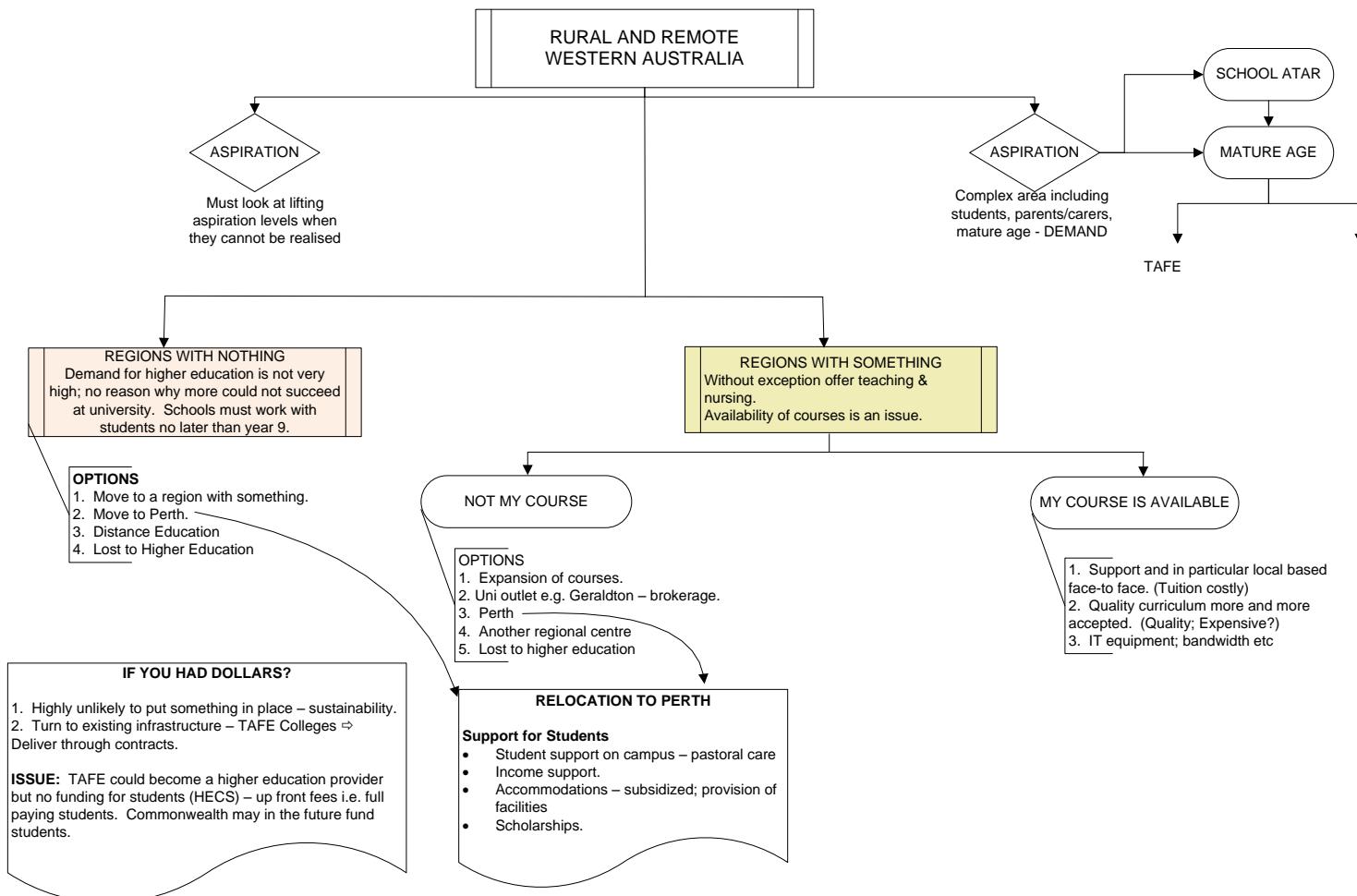
positioning as a dual sector institution to deliver tertiary education through open learning. The new C Y O'Connor Institute will provide vocational and higher education programs in areas such as agriculture, allied health, education and business, with a focus on sustaining regional communities.

*Geraldton University Centre (GUC)* - The GUC was established in 2002 and allows people in the Mid West of Western Australia to live, work and study locally. More than 170 people have graduated from university degree courses in Geraldton since its inception, the majority now working as teachers and nurses in regional WA. The Geraldton Universities Centre currently offers undergraduate courses including Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood), Bachelor Education (Primary) and Bachelor of Science (Nursing). GUC also offers bridging courses for students to gain entrance into university. The GUC is currently negotiating the introduction of new programs for 2011 and 2012 in a range of areas including business, media, engineering, science and law.

The Geraldton Universities Centre's objective is to facilitate, deliver, promote and provide access to university education for people residing in the Mid West. It is the first point of contact for Mid West people seeking information on university study.

The GUC is neither a university nor a campus of a university. Rather, it is an independent, not-for-profit, incorporated body, supporting and delivering university courses in Geraldton on behalf of a range of universities.

## APPENDIX 4 (Aspiration / Choice Analysis Terry Werner)



## **APPENDIX 5: Characteristics: Aspirant Programs**

The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education identified 10 characteristics, four strategies and an equity orientation comprising three perspectives associated with effective pre-Year 11 outreach programs. (Gale et al. 2010: 1).

The 10 characteristics are listed below under the four strategies, namely; *assembling resources, engaging learners, working together and building confidence*.

### ***Assembling resources***

- *People-rich: an approach that requires the development of ongoing relationships between young people and those in a position to offer them ongoing guidance which relates to their situation and capacities.*
- *Financial support and/or incentives; addressed to particular economic constraints of different cohorts, and which combine with other support strategies.*
- *Early, long-term, sustained: an approach to intervention that is designed to work with students in earlier phases of schooling, ideally the primary years, and to continue as they make the transition through the middle years into senior secondary schooling.*

### ***Engaging Learners***

- *Recognition of difference: premised on the perspective that disadvantaged students bring a range of knowledge and learning capacities to formal education that should be recognised and valued as assets.*
- *Enhanced academic curriculum: (including pedagogy) designed to sustain the ongoing quality of everyday lessons throughout schooling and to prepare students for further or higher education.*
- *Research-driven interventions: that engage the research capacities of the university to inform program design, implementation and evaluation, and to support the production and dissemination of knowledge about effective intervention strategies (this characteristic is identified in Section 3).*

### ***Working together***

- *Collaboration: between stakeholders across different sectors and agencies at all stages of program development and enactment.*
- *Cohort-based: an approach that engages with whole classes, or even larger cohorts of young people in a school or region, to change peer cultures as well as supporting individuals.*

### ***Building confidence***

- *Communication and information: about university life and how to get there, using a variety of digital media technologies as well as more traditional means such as brochures or school visits.*

- *Familiarisation/site experiences: through a schedule of university visits designed to both inspire and familiarise young people with higher education and what it means to be a student in that context* (Gale et al. 2010: 3).

Strategies include such things as Assembling Resources; Engaging Learners; Working Together and Building Confidence, and the factors that provide the equity orientation include:

- **Unsettling deficit views** – requires strategies based on positive understanding of historically disadvantaged schools, students and their communities. This means widening university catchments to include working with the most disengaged, hard-to-reach students, rather than simply targeting high-potential candidates or those already proven to be outstanding;
- **Researching ‘local knowledge and negotiating interventions** - This necessarily involves building viable relationships with specific schools and their communities and learning about their understanding of the ‘problem’ as a preliminary step to designing interventions (for example, Access and Success).
- **Building capacity in communities, schools, and universities** - Achieving improved outcomes for disadvantaged students requires building increased capacity in communities, schools, and universities, including increased funding for programs from sources such as state and federal governments and further supplementary funding from individual universities.