

27 April 2018

Office of the Deputy Vice-  
Chancellor (Academic)  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor  
(Academic)  
Professor Joanne Wright  
PhD ANU, MLitt Aberdeen, Joint  
Honours Kent

CRICOS PROVIDER NUMBER 00025B

Senator Chris Ketter  
Chair  
Senate Economics References Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

email: [economics.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:economics.sen@aph.gov.au)

Dear Senator Ketter

### **Inquiry into the indicators of, and impact of, regional inequality in Australia**

The University of Queensland welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate inquiry into the indicators of, and impact of, regional inequality in Australia.

UQ also provided submissions to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (headed by Emeritus Professor John Halsey) in September 2017 and provided feedback on the Draft Program Guidelines for the Australian Government's Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships Scheme, in June 2017. Copies of both submissions are enclosed and these comments may be helpful to inform this inquiry.

UQ is strongly committed to providing equitable access to university education for high-achieving students, irrespective of background. Diversity and inclusion are key components of the UQ Strategic Plan 2018–2021 (<https://about.uq.edu.au/strategic-plan>) and we have set internal targets to increase the proportion of UQ students from regional/remote backgrounds.

We provide the following brief comments in response to the Terms of Reference, focusing particularly on access to education and building human capital.

Our research suggests that academic ability may not be a barrier to accessing higher education for students from regional/remote backgrounds. For example, when considering the 2013-2017 cohort of applicants applying to UQ through QTAC<sup>1</sup>, our analysis indicated that regional/remote students had offer rates which were approximately the same as offer rates for applicants from major cities (39.2% compared with 42.5%). However their acceptance rates (69.9% compared with 81.4%) and total enrolment rates<sup>2</sup> (73.1% compared with 78.2%) were significantly lower.

In comparing the academic performance of regional/ remote students to other students in 2016, it was found that the success rate (that is, the proportion of study load passed) for regional/remote students compared to other students was 102% for regional students

<sup>1</sup> Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre

<sup>2</sup> Total enrolment rate combines the initial enrolment rate and the enrolment rate after deferral.

and 100% for remote students, indicating that students from regional/remote backgrounds perform as well as students from other backgrounds.

Our experience suggests that access is possibly more likely to be constrained for financial reasons, for example around the costs of living away from family support arrangements and availability of government funding.

There are a number of support measures which might be considered, such as linking HECS debt to programs, not years, of study.

Our internal data<sup>3</sup> also suggest students are strongly motivated to undertake tertiary study in order to find employment. Consequently, for a sizable proportion of students, measures which can accelerate their studies (such as trimesters or Recognised Prior Learning) are important. Alternatively, some students prefer to spread their academic workload in order to balance competing family and work priorities.

Universities could therefore be encouraged to provide greater flexibility in the delivery of learning. It may be useful for universities to re-think the shape and structure of their programs and curriculum in order to provide 'bite-sized pieces' or modules which can be completed to suit the student's lifestyle and work, particularly for students who would like to continue to be based in a regional/remote location. This might mean dividing an existing course/subject into 4 modules where the instruction is provided in a fortnight intensive mode or weekend only. Another alternative might be micro-credentials, which can be aggregated into a program of study equivalent to an AQF level 8 graduate certificates. We note a number of universities are thinking along these lines.

UQ is also implementing measures to improve further support access to higher education for regional/remote students. As well as the existing rural background sub-quota for medicine programs (<https://future-students.uq.edu.au/apply/doctor-of-medicine/special-entry-programs/rural-background-sub-quota>), in 2018 UQ introduced a bonus rank scheme for rural background students applying for undergraduate programs in allied health (such as nursing, physiotherapy, and pharmacy) and veterinary science (<https://future-students.uq.edu.au/apply/doctor-of-medicine/special-entry-programs/rural-access-scheme>).

The Rural Access Scheme is one mechanism to help attract and select students from a rural background into nominated programs and recognizes the importance for graduates in professional practice to work in rural communities. This scheme also aligns with government initiatives. The intended outcome of this scheme is that a number of rural applicants would shift to a more competitive OP/rank for selection. It is not envisaged that this will have a significantly negative impact upon the quality of students at the University (note the abovementioned research into academic ability).

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<sup>3</sup> We conducted an extensive survey of students in late 2015 to inform development of our UQ Student Strategy, launched in 2016. The report on consultation outcomes is available at <https://student-strategy.uq.edu.au/background>; see page 9 of the summary report.

I trust these few comments will be useful to the Committee's deliberations. If you require any further information or clarification, please contact my office (email [REDACTED] or telephone [REDACTED])

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Professor Joanne Wright  
**Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)**

Encl.

- UQ submission to the *Draft Program Guidelines: Rural and Regional Scholarships* 14 June 2017
- UQ submission to the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*, 11 September 2017

14 June 2017

Vicki Ratliff  
Director  
Student Inclusion – Indigenous and Equity  
Governance, Quality and Access Branch  
Higher Education Group  
Department of Education and Training  
[REDACTED]

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Dear Ms Ratliff

**Draft Program Guidelines: Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships**

We write in response to email correspondence of 23 May 2017 seeking comment on the Department's draft *Program Guidelines for Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships* and provide the following feedback.

The University of Queensland endorses the proposal as having potential to improve accessibility of quality university education for all students capable of undertaking tertiary study, provided eligibility and selection are transparent and fair. The \$500 internship placement subsidy and the ability to undertake a student exchange strongly align with UQ's goals of broadening co-curricular experiences for our students in order to develop their enterprise skills.

It should be noted that Go8 is also developing a Go8 Rural and Regional Student Scholarship Support initiative so care is needed to ensure these various scholarship schemes align to support students rather than duplicate efforts. Further comments regarding specific aspects of the draft guidelines are listed below.

**Selection Process (Section 3)**

We note the Scholarship Support Organisation (SSO) will be a "third party organisation contracted by the Department of Education and Training to administer the Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships" and presume that Providers will not be expected to participate in the selection process or manage any other aspect of these scholarships, given universities will not be able to adapt the selection criteria to their student cohorts or receive funding to administer the program.

The guidelines do not indicate whether applicants will be able to nominate more than one eligible course of study. Some consideration may also need to be given to aligning scholarship application timelines to University/TAC deadlines.

Section 3.3 should be clarified, from "Only one application per applicant will be assessed..." to "Only one application per applicant per offer round will be assessed..." given the guidelines state that unsuccessful applicants will be eligible to apply in subsequent round/s.

Section 3.4 should indicate whether applicants who are in the process of applying for Australian citizenship are eligible to apply, given the process of applying for citizenship can take some time. It would be helpful if provision could be made for citizenship to be confirmed prior to payment for successful applicants who will become citizens after they commence studies but who will not meet the citizenship requirement at the time of application.

#### **Eligibility Criteria (Section 4)**

Section 4.1 could be strengthened by indicating whether the applicant will be required to have lived in a regional or remote area for a minimum period of time or to have completed schooling in a regional or remote area, which could help to avoid 'gaming the system'.

Section 4.2 could be clarified in a number of areas:

- **Field of study:** It would be more helpful for scholarship applicants if they could access a pre-approved list of STEM courses/programs from the Study Assist website, rather than confirm the ASCED field of study for their course with the HE Provider, only to have the SSO determine that a course is not STEM if it does not contain a majority of STEM units.
- **Commencement period:** Setting 01 July as the final date for commencement seems to favour applicants commencing in semester 1 and would disadvantage students commencing in the second half of the year.
- **Mode of study:** The guidelines do not indicate whether other external study is allowed, provided the students is resident in Australia for the period of study nor how this will be monitored.

#### **Internship (Section 5)**

We would suggest that the additional \$1,000 be used in support of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) which can incorporate placements and internships as this will more clearly link and prioritise the learning aspect of the student's work experience (ideally, this should be linked to their curriculum). Payment for an internship may raise questions around the employment status of the student (in particular if it is regarded as payment for employment and/or provides employment at no cost to the host organisation) and may not comply with provisions of the Fair Work Act. We also note the Australian Tax Office recently issued a technical discussion paper about the tax-exempt status of scholarships.

#### **Selection Criteria (Section 6)**

The guidelines could be clarified in a number of areas here as well:

- **Criterion 1 (financial need)** does not indicate whether this would be a yes/no (50 points or none), or if different points would be awarded based on level of need.
- **Criteria 2 and 3** are quite subjective and there would need to be a requirement, perhaps in the signed declaration, that the capability and significance statements are attested as the applicant's own words.
- For **Criterion 2**, more objective measures such as school results and grade point average of further studies would be more transparent, with adequate provision made for any educational disadvantage that may have impacted on past achievements. It should also be noted that past achievements will be very different for a school leaver applying for a Bachelor program compared to a graduate applying for doctoral studies and the guidelines will need to ensure equality of access for applicants with no prior tertiary study. If there are to be separate quotas for different levels of study, this needs to be clearly indicated in the guidelines.
- Under **Other Considerations**, it is not clear how areas of high unemployment will be assessed and whether unemployment levels will be rated on a sliding scale, so that areas with unemployment rates above, say, 30% will receive more marks than an area with unemployment rates of 10%.
- Further, under **Other Considerations**, a 'declared intention' to undertake an internship in awarding additional marks, if the internship is not able to proceed, then has that applicant gained an advantage over other, equally-qualified applicants?

### **Scholarship Recipients (Section 7)**

The guidelines could indicate whether students will be able to seek deferment or interruption of these scholarships and whether recipients will be able to make a case for retaining their scholarship should they fail to meet ongoing eligibility requirements due to extenuating circumstances.

The intent of the statement "The Scholarship Agreement will also specify whether internship payments will apply" is unclear, given all scholarship recipients should be presumed to be eligible provided they meet requirements.

It would be useful to clarify the timing of processes for checking ongoing eligibility (participation reports, ongoing need and so on), and the method of calculating adequate progress (presumably, this will be weighted on the basis of the EFTSL for each unit of study and excluding units from which students withdrew without academic penalty).

The timing of internship payments should also be carefully considered, especially for placement providers, as students may not complete their first placement attempt and the second attempt may be with another placement provider.

It is very helpful that students who win Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships will be able to receive financial support from other sources. It would be useful to clarify that recipients will be eligible for other support/scholarships funded from ISSP (Indigenous Student Success Programme) or HEPPP (Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program).

### **Program Roles and Responsibilities (Section 8)**

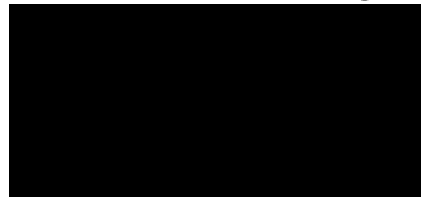
We note the scholarship agreement will be between SSO and scholarship recipient, but the guidelines are not clear whether there is a relationship between HE provider and SSO, noting in particular, if there is need for proactive support and/or remedial action where the student is not considered to be making adequate progress.

We thank the Department for the opportunity to review its draft Guidelines for the Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships Program and trust these few comments will be useful. Let us know if we can provide any additional information.

Yours sincerely



Professor Joanne Wright  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)



Professor Iain Watson  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (External Engagement)

11 September 2017

Emeritus Professor John Halsey  
Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education

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CRICOS PROVIDER NUMBER 00025B  
D17/70854

Dear Emeritus Professor Halsey

The University of Queensland endorses the Go8 submission to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education and provides the following additional responses to specific questions in the July 2017 discussion paper.

As the first university established in Queensland, we strive to live up to expectations as The University of Queensland (UQ) and to support students across the State. Almost 15% (or around one in seven) of our domestic students are from a rural or isolated area (as defined by the Australian Government, according to the students' permanent home address). As you are no doubt also aware, UQ has a major regional campus at Gatton, which is situated in the Lockyer Valley and enrolls slightly more than 2,000 students (just over 1,600 EFTSLs).

We have worked over the years to develop strong ties in our communities, through the work of our staff and outreach to student groups. A small number of these initiatives and activities is profiled very briefly below, in response to specific questions raised in your discussion paper.

#### 6.2.4 What innovative approaches could be taken to support a high quality teaching workforce for regional, rural and remote school communities?

- UQx has been working with the Brisbane School of Distance Education and the IMPACT Centre to make use of UQx MOOCs in Science, Philosophy and Critical Thinking programs being offered online to schools around Queensland.
- UQ has partnered with the Princess Alexandra Hospital to provide a range of health outreach services to patients in rural and remote Queensland using telehealth technology (<https://coh.centre.uq.edu.au/service-area/pah-telehealth-centre>); since opening in 2012, approximately 12,000 consultations have taken place, to more than 46 sites around Queensland from 23 different specialities and among its benefits, we would include the ability to empower and upskill people working and living in those communities.
- Our Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences has received funding from the Department of Health to establish a University Department of Rural Health (UDRH), a joint initiative with USQ, Darling Downs and South West Hospital and Health Service, which will have a focus on providing placement opportunities for students in rural locations, upskilling the current workforce to supervise student placements, and increasing the number of students with a rural background in our health programs.
- UQ's Rural Clinical School provides high quality medical education and training experiences for students in rural and regional areas, with the main teaching sites being located at Bundaberg, Hervey Bay, Rockhampton, and Toowoomba, providing learning resources and facilities that support and facilitate face-to-face, bedside and online learning. Recently published research suggests that a rural background and

undertaking training in a rural area make it more likely that medical graduates will go on to work in a rural area (<https://www.uq.edu.au/news/article/2017/07/medical-students-more-likely-go-rural%E2%80%99-background-and-training-combination>).

6.4.2 What motivates regional, rural and remote students to succeed and how can they be supported to realise their aspirations?

6.6.4 What gaps need to be addressed to help students transition successfully to further study, training or work?

6.7.2 What could be done to expand the opportunities available to regional, rural and remote students to access high quality education?

Failure to identify as a university student has been identified as a key impediment to access to, retention in, and completion of degree programs at university for students from underrepresented groups. UQ has launched a number of initiatives aimed at building aspiration towards undertaking tertiary studies, providing a realistic understanding of what “going to university” involves, supporting familiarization with being on-campus, and building academic capabilities and confidence.

UQ is also a member of the Queensland widening participation consortium and works in collaboration with other Queensland universities, focussing on the Ipswich and Lockyer District. In 2016, our staff delivered 174 engagement activities to 13 schools in the Ipswich and Lockyer District, with more than 8,000 students participating.

Our research also indicates that financial stressors are a significant factor for many of our students. In the 2016 SES, 13.9% of UQ students reported that they had considered leaving; just under a quarter (23.3%) of domestic students selected financial difficulties as the reason. To address this issue, we provide a number of scholarship schemes including UQ-Link, which is awarded to all commencing students who have been assessed as eligible for the scheme. In 2017, 627 students (249 new students and 378 continuing students) received scholarship support through the UQ-Link program. Expanding financial support to more regional and remote students to assist with relocation costs and day-to-day living expenses would be helpful.

Activities with a regional/remote focus include:

- UQ Young Achievers Program (YAP) is aimed at building tertiary aspirations of low SES students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds who are enrolled in state secondary schools in the Ipswich, Logan, Brisbane South, Toowoomba, the Darling Downs, and the South West, Wide Bay and Bundaberg regions of Queensland. Students in Year 10 are nominated for the Program by their School Principals. Since its establishment, 799 students (including 220 students currently in Years 11 and 12) have benefited and just over 58% of these have completed their secondary schooling and accepted the offer of a place at UQ, another university, or a TAFE college.
- InspireU is a tertiary aspiration building program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth, delivered in collaboration with community and industry partners, and involves a series of residential camps themed around the professional disciplines of Engineering, Science, Law, Business, and Health Sciences, as well as interactive workshops and regular communications from program coordinators and ‘catch up’ sessions. In 2016, 102 students participated in the program, across 78 schools.
- Deadly Choices Pathways to Success is an aspiration building program that provides mentoring, guidance and educational support for Indigenous youth, focussing on three key content areas (developing life skills, leadership and education) and involves both personalised and small group learning support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in junior secondary schooling, with a particular focus on students in Years 9 and 10.



- Enhanced Studies Program offers online university level courses to Year 12 students.
- Rural clinical schools engage students in a variety of initiatives including “doctor for a day” (hosting around 36 students every year) in the Hervey Bay area, a scenario-based work experience program (up to 75 students each year) and the inaugural ASPIRE2Medicine (around 35 students from 15 different secondary schools) in the Toowoomba region, and ExperienceMedicine@UQ (more than 100 students over the last two years) in the Rockhampton area.
- FEAST program is a residential camp held at our Gatton campus to showcase careers in agriculture and vet science.
- UQ Outreach encompasses UQ Experience Days, on-campus experiences, in-school activities (including a school visit to Mt Isa made in conjunction with the Brisbane Broncos), Sport Experience Days, and the Young Scholars Program.
- UQ Critical Thinking includes academic preparation programs such as the Enhanced Studies course WRIT1999 Effective Thinking and Writing for low SES Year 11 students and the QCS Booster program for low SES students and teachers (involves mentoring and tutoring students in developing strategies for the Queensland Core Skills Test).
- Other outreach activities include programs for parents and Professional Development for teachers. We know that parental support is crucial, so the Program for Parents workshops are designed to help family members and carers understand what students are learning in their Critical Thinking classes and how they can better support their learning and inquiry at home. The teacher professional development involves delivering CPD in Critical Thinking Pedagogy Content Knowledge or “Teaching for Thinking” to more than 300 teachers from low-ICSEA schools and those participating in the Solid Pathways program.

#### 6.9.2 Are there innovative models of accommodation delivery that could benefit regional, rural and remote tertiary students studying away from home?

UQ is building student residences at its St Lucia campus which will strongly feature cluster apartments of between eight and 12 students (single occupant bedrooms and bathroom facilities, with shared kitchen and living spaces) to support a transition from, typically, living at home and moving to more independent living. We are also including a number of shared rooms in order to offer a wider choice of living arrangements and a range of more affordable price points.

#### 6.8.3 How can schools/teachers in regional, rural and remote areas be supported to meet the individual learning needs of all students?

#### 6.8.4 How can we create and sustain vibrant, high quality learning environments in regional, rural and remote schools?

UQ has established a specialist educational technology unit (UQx) which produces and delivers massive open online courses and small private online courses (respectively, MOOCs and SPOCs). The significant benefit of providing online courses is the ability for students to personalise their learning, for example, by repeating a section that they may not initially understand. We are applying many of the learnings from our production of MOOCs, to adapt into in-class settings (for example, the ‘flipped classroom’ approach where students complete the reading before class in order to participate in more active learning with their peers). In addition, a number of MOOCs feature our research and teaching in regional Australia, including for example,

- [World101x Anthropology of Current World Issues](#) features three modules shot in regional locations where UQ anthropologists have active research projects. Two modules on Indigeneity were shot at Gunningurru near Toowoomba and in the gulf region of Northern Queensland. The third module on unconventional gas mining was shot on the Darling Downs.

- [Sharks! Global Biodiversity, Biology, and Conservation](#) is a collaboration with Cornell University and features UQ's marine research stations on Heron Island and Moreton Bay Research Station on Stradbroke Island.
- [AbleX](#) Intellectual Disability Healthcare series examines the barriers and enablers for people with IDD and their carers to access healthcare, and a number of case studies feature families in regional areas.

In closing, I would like to extend an invitation to the review to visit The University of Queensland Gatton campus to see first-hand UQ's impact in a regional community (both to our students and our staff, and the local community) and to meet with staff leading our widening participation and outreach programs. The Gatton campus has a particular focus on agricultural and animal sciences and is the site of the 3.275 megawatt Gatton Solar Research Facility. At the recent Open Day, we welcomed around 2,600 visitors.

I would also like to note the impact that our research can have in creating more vibrant rural communities which, in turn, impacts on educational opportunity; just two examples of our collaborations are provided here:

<http://www.uq.edu.au/research/impact/stories/the-tree-of-shelf-life/>

<http://www.uq.edu.au/research/impact/stories/indigenous-opportunity-sprouts-from-desert-discovery/>

I trust these few comments will be useful. Please contact my office [REDACTED] if we can provide any additional information.

Yours sincerely

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Professor Joanne Wright  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)