



Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities

SUBMISSION BY CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY

AUGUST 2009

LETTER OF SUBMISSION

The Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References
Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

A Question of Choice

The Government has announced plans for the next stage of development of the Australian higher education system by giving students greater choice about where and how they study.

Genuine choice has a range of dimensions. It can include the capacity to choose between various programs based on cost, the proximity of different institutions or the accessibility of competing courses. These might be broadly described as the ‘study’ aspects of choice.

There are also ‘social’ aspects of choice. For example, the choice to live at home while studying; the choice to retain social connections to communities and friends; the choice to attend University with your friends, or; the choice to undertake a program that reflects the values and aspirations of the community to which you belong.

A central theme of this submission is that students in rural and regional Australia do not have genuine choices in their access to higher education and changes to arrangements have the capacity to increase rather than reduce a choice if properly framed within a whole of Government approach.

For a prospective student living in Bathurst they have no choice but to leave home if they wish to study law on-campus. A prospective student in Armidale has no choice but to leave home to study dentistry on-campus. They will incur additional costs in

doing so, as well as endure disconnection from their families, friends and communities.

Charles Sturt University does not suggest that it is feasible for every student in Australia to walk to their local University and undertake whatever program suits their individual goals and aspirations.

While we may accept as a community that the full realisation of choice is not affordable, we must avoid the pretence that compensating some Australians is the same as delivering genuine choice to all Australians.

This can lead to assumptions that narrow the range of policy options that may be considered to address higher education participation in rural and regional Australia or drive public policy in directions that focus on the expansion of options and ignore the question of achievable choices.

If we are to talk about genuine choice in access to higher education, it is important to agree that every Australian should enjoy the opportunity not only to realise their educational needs and aspirations, but should have a comparable range of choices about the way these are realised. Charles Sturt University has spent the last 20 years delivering genuine choice by providing a comprehensive range of nationally accredited programs across multiple regional locations that address the needs and aspirations of our communities.

It is unsatisfactory, from our perspective, that we are unable presently to deliver the same choice we provide our existing university campus communities to other communities across rural and regional Australia.

This is why we have committed to examining how we might ensure the sustainability and enlargement of genuine choice for rural and regional Australians, and how we might bridge the technological divide by significantly improving distance delivery in a way that minimises the impact of the lack of local choice where we do not have the financial resources to do otherwise.

If we simplify the challenge of genuine choice, we risk overlooking the practical, proven and effective opportunities we have today to deliver that choice to as many Australians as possible.

I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to make this submission and look forward to your report.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'I. Goulter', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Professor Ian Goulter
Vice-Chancellor and President
Charles Sturt University

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BACKGROUND TO INQUIRY

On 16 June 2009, the Senate referred the following matter to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee for inquiry:

An assessment of the adequacy of Government measures to provide equitable access to secondary and post-secondary education opportunities to students from rural and regional communities attending metropolitan institutions, and metropolitan students attending regional universities or technical and further education (TAFE) colleges, with particular reference to:

- a. the financial impact on rural and regional students who are attending metropolitan secondary schools, universities or TAFE;
- b. the education alternatives for rural and regional students wanting to study in regional areas;
- c. the implications of current and proposed government measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas;
- d. the short- and long-term impact of current and proposed government policies on regional university and TAFE college enrolments;
- e. the adequacy of government measures to provide for students who are required to leave home for secondary or post-secondary study;
- f. the educational needs of rural and regional students;
- g. the impact of government measures and proposals on rural and regional communities; and
- h. other related matters.

The submission by Charles Sturt University is principally concerned with the participation of rural and regional students in higher education.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN RURAL AND REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

Regional Australia accounts for almost 40% of our nation's population, and the majority of Australia's Indigenous population. Yet young people aged 15-24 years from rural and regional Australia are almost half as likely to be attending university as young people from metropolitan areas. Indigenous young people (18-24 years old) are less than a quarter as likely to be attending university as non-Indigenous people.

The Discussion Paper for the Review of the Australian Higher Education System noted: "The nation's prospects will be determined by the efficient and effective use of all of its resources – particularly its human resources" (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2008, 5).

The Discussion Paper pointed to the role of increased higher education participation in promoting national economic prosperity with Access Economics estimating that "... a combined increase in formal training and in the average length of education will boost both productivity and participation, leading to a lift in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 1.1 per cent by 2040" (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2008, 5).

In addition, the Paper pointed to the broader benefits of higher education in promoting social inclusion, civic participation, volunteerism, reduced crime and healthy lifestyles.

The impact of higher education is multi-layered, operating at a global, national, regional, local and personal level.

Of significance for rural and regional communities, the physical presence of a university campus amplifies these effects in surrounding areas.

This point was made in a 2008 Report for the United Kingdom Government titled *University Challenge: Unlocking Britain's Talent*. It argued that local university provision delivers significant local benefits to surrounding communities and individuals, in particular communities that are disconnected from the national and global economy. It was noted that local higher education provision:

- widens higher education participation and unlocks local talent;
- can help attract and retain skills in an area;
- can be a major component of population growth strategies;
- produces more productive, healthy and highly skilled workers who are quicker to adapt to new tasks and technologies and are themselves a direct source of innovation;
- contributes to economic development and growth in surrounding communities;
- fosters entrepreneurship, leading to growth in a broad range of new and often knowledge intensive businesses and jobs;
- creates knowledge transfers and contributions to high value business sectors (Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills 2008).

In the foreword to the Report, the UK Secretary for Innovation, Universities and Skills argued: “A local, high quality campus can open up the chance of higher education to young people and adults who might otherwise never think of getting a degree” (Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills 2008, 1). The United Kingdom Government has announced plans to establish 20 new university campuses.

If the “nation’s prospects” in a competitive global environment are dependent on the effective use of all of its human resources, as suggested by Bradley, then urgent attention must be paid to the almost 40% of Australians living outside a major metropolitan centre who are not fully participating in higher or other forms of education.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has acknowledged this point, noting that:

OECD countries are .. putting considerable emphasis on meeting regional development goals, by nurturing the unique assets and circumstances of each region, particularly in developing knowledge-based industries. As key sources of knowledge and innovation, higher education

institutions (HEIs) can be central to this process (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2007, 11).

In this environment, no nation can knowingly waste the talent and creative capacity of so many of its people.

In this context, raising rates of higher education participation across all parts of rural and regional, and among Indigenous Australians, can no longer be viewed as a 'rural problem' but rather a 'national opportunity'.

There is growing awareness around the world of the importance of harnessing all the intellectual and creative assets of a nation and for establishing programs that are inclusive of the needs and aspirations of the whole population. The European Union is investing heavily in programs to tap into the rich vein of talent and innovation in its rural and regional communities. The United States President Barack Obama has just begun a Rural Tour of America with his Cabinet recognising that, like Australia, "a healthy American economy depends on a prosperous rural America". Australia cannot allow itself to be left behind the rest of the world.

This will require a change in the mind set by our policy makers and public servants from what has been described as "... government initiatives ... predicated on a deficit model of Australian rurality ... aimed at overcoming or compensating for numerous perceived forms of rural 'disadvantage' ..." (Sher and Sher 1994) quoted in (Department of Education, Science and Training 2004, 28).

This shift has begun, in part, with the Australian Government's commitment to social inclusion. The Government has acknowledged that a "... lack of access to services such as health and education" in particular areas, including rural and regional Australia, leads to and reinforces social exclusion and locational disadvantage (Australian Government 2008). Improving access to health and education services in rural and regional Australia has accordingly and properly been identified as a *Social Inclusion Priority* by the Australian Government.

However, this is not solely about the exclusion of a vast number of Australians from genuine participation in the common wealth, but also the lost opportunity of failing to leverage the significant

capacities of all Australians towards the common good. Both aspects need to be addressed.

The Australian Government has accordingly committed to increasing higher education participation as an investment in our future national prosperity. This is strongly supported. To achieve this 'Education Revolution', the Government has set the ambitious target that 40 per cent of all 25 to 34 year olds will hold a qualification level at bachelor level or above by 2025.

Recognising the historically low levels of participation by students from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds, particularly students from rural and regional and Indigenous backgrounds, the Government has also set a target that 20 per cent of higher education enrolments at the undergraduate level will be of people from a low SES background by 2020. It is estimated that the achievement of these targets will require more than 200,000 additional graduates by 2025, particularly from areas, such as rural and regional Australia, where participation rates lag national levels

The Government has also made the following commitment:

Sustainable higher education provision that is responsive to the specific needs of regional Australia is essential to Australia's social and economic prosperity. Students who study in regional areas are much more likely to stay in those areas, providing a vital skilled workforce in the regions. Institutions have a critical role to play in local communities and economies ... (Gillard, Jobs, Productivity And Fairness - A Foundation For Recovery 2009).

It has acknowledged that universities and campuses in rural and regional areas " ... play a significant role in the economic and social fabric of their communities" and has identified a 'fair deal for Australia's regions' as a priority.

A key challenge for governments, and the university sector, therefore is not only to better understand the factors that have led to significantly lower levels of participation by rural and regional, and Indigenous, Australians but to identify the strategies and programs that are making a genuine difference. New approaches need to be based on the evidence of what works.

ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL STUDENTS

Numerous studies and reports, in Australia and overseas, have established the critical importance of investing in higher education in rural and regional areas not only to outcomes for those communities, but for promoting national social and economic development.

A paper prepared for the Business-Higher Education Roundtable titled *The Role of Universities in the Regions* identified a diverse range of functions performed by universities located in rural and regional areas:

- bringing the knowledge economy to the regions;
- providing educational opportunities for regional populations and areas;
- providing centres of regional and international excellence in research. This research may be directly related to regional economies/needs or it may be in areas not specifically related to regional needs but which are internationally recognised as providing skills, knowledge and experience which are critical to the development of the regions in which they are located;
- widening the employment base of the regions and providing opportunities for employment and retention of graduates in their home region;
- developing the skill base of regions through partnerships, training and professional development, short courses, award courses and research;
- developing with other post-compulsory education providers (schools, VET, TAFE and private providers) comprehensive

and multiple articulated pathways to provide the best possible educational opportunities for students;

- providing a diverse range of courses, consultancy and research to complement regional needs; and
- developing cultures of lifelong learning (Winchester, et al. n.d.).

In addition to their role in educating future professionals and conducting research, universities have a direct social, cultural, environmental and economic impact on their surrounding communities. While this is true of all universities, it is also true that universities in regional locations have a proportionately greater impact on their immediate regions because they are often the largest employer, economic player and cultural institution in the area.

Despite these benefits, higher education remains inaccessible to many rural and regional students due to distance, the cost of study and the perceived value of higher education to those communities. Higher education participation rates are substantially lower in rural and regional areas in comparison to metropolitan communities.

The factors influencing accessibility and participation relate both to the structure of higher education provision in rural and regional Australia, as well as the circumstances of rural and regional students. If Australia is to realise the opportunities that stem from increased higher education participation, it must look to both the systemic and individual factors that inhibit opportunity and choice for rural and regional students.

Charles Sturt University has identified the following factors as relevant to the deliberations of the Committee.

DISTANCE

In combination with a range of other factors, distance from a university campus is one of the major influences on the decisions of rural and regional young people to attend university.

In a study of the decision making of rural and metropolitan students, Professor Richard James found that “ ... educational advantage and disadvantage are the result of a three way intersection of family socioeconomic background, the characteristics of the urban or rural context in which the people

live, and the physical distance from campuses” (James, Participation Disadvantage in Australian Higher Education: An analysis of the effects of geographical location and socioeconomic status 2001, 469).

He found that rural and regional students are “... more likely to perceive “discouraging” inhibitors and barriers, such as cost and losing touch with friends ...” that influence their decision not to go to university, “... while at the same time they are likely to experience lower levels of “encouraging” factors ...” (James, Participation Disadvantage in Australian Higher Education: An analysis of the effects of geographical location and socioeconomic status 2001, 469). He also found that the students that are “... most likely to experience powerful discouraging effects are those of lower socioeconomic [low SES] background who live in rural areas and who lack proximity to a campus” (James, Participation Disadvantage in Australian Higher Education: An analysis of the effects of geographical location and socioeconomic status 2001, 467).

These findings are particularly significant, given the goal of raising higher education participation more generally and among rural and regional, Indigenous and low SES students in particular.

His conclusions are supported by a recent study for the University of Ballarat which found:

The general need for school-leavers to either commute long distances or relocate in order to undertake tertiary study made all post-school decisions that involved further study much more difficult since it necessitated considerable family cost” (Golding, et al. 2007).

Similarly, a study by Gooden on access to higher education for rural and regional students concluded: “Distance is highly significant” (Godden 2007, 10).

The impact of distance on the participation of rural and regional students in higher education was confirmed by a recent Report by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The Report found that between 1996 and 2006 the increase in the proportion of people with post-school qualifications was greatest in Major Cities (from 44% in 1996 to 57% in 2006) and smallest in Very Remote areas (from 30% in 1996 to 36% in 2006) (Australian Bureau of Statistics

2009). The differences, the Report suggests, reflect “... the location of educational institutions, the gains in participation for 20-24 year olds occurred in the more accessible areas” (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009).

While distance from a university campus cannot be disentangled from a range of other influences on the aspirations and choices of rural and regional students, its significance cannot be discounted.

As discussed below, the distance of university campuses from many rural and regional Australians means that almost 40% of rural and regional students have to relocate to attend university, increasing the cost of higher education for students and their families (a strongly linked factor in the choice of rural and regional students of not just where to study, but indeed whether to study).

PROXIMITY

While distance from a university appears to influence decisions by rural and regional students not to attend university, proximity (or closeness) to a university campus appears to have the opposite effect.

The effect of the physical presence of a university campus in rural and regional areas on student participation is demonstrated by a 2004 analysis of participation rates undertaken by Charles Sturt University.

The analysis, using data from the Department of Education, Science and Training National Statistics Collection, found that total number of students enrolled in a university (either in the local area or at another tertiary institution) aged 15 years and above increased with proximity to a university campus (Charles Sturt University 2004):

Location	Campuses	Percentage
Orange	Charles Sturt University	3.5%
Northern Tablelands (Armidale)	University of New England	3.4%
Albury	Charles Sturt University La Trobe University	3.3%
Bathurst	Charles Sturt University	3.2%
Wagga Wagga	Charles Sturt University	3.2%
North Coast	Southern Cross University	2.9%
Dubbo	Charles Sturt University (small campus)	2.9%
Goulburn	Charles Sturt University (small campus – policing only)	2.9%

Cowra/Parkes/Forbes	No campus	2.5%
South Coast/Snowy Mountains	No campus	2.3%
Far West	No campus	2.1%

Higher education participation appears not only to be higher in locations with a university campus than those without, but is also higher in locations where there is a university with a broad range of available courses compared to locations with small or single course campuses. Similar examples are available for other universities.

(Phi09) There are two observations that we can make:

1. the physical presence of a university campus in a regional location has a positive impact on overall participation in higher education in the area surrounding a university campus;
2. the total rate of participation in higher education increases with the breadth of courses available at a local university campus.

The influence of physical presence on educational aspirations can be examined in another way by looking at the differences in participation rates in university and TAFE study between rural and metropolitan areas. A study of school student attitude towards university, TAFE or work as post-school options found that student preferences “... for TAFE or work increase as their distances from major urban centres and university locations increase” (James, TAFE, university or work? The early preferences and choices of students in Years 10, 11 and 12 2000, 17). The study found that the “... patterns in student attitude according to their location probably reveal differences in both the relevance and accessibility of post-secondary education” (James, TAFE, university or work? The early preferences and choices of students in Years 10, 11 and 12 2000, 17)

These findings are similar to the conclusions of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) into rural and urban differences in Australian education which found: “In general, young people living in rural areas have rates of participation in VET that are at least as high as those in urban areas” (Hillman, Marks and McKenzie 2002, 5).

The report suggested three possible reasons for the differences:

- the greater physical presence of TAFEs in rural and regional areas compared with universities;
- the structure of industries in rural and regional areas more likely to provide vocational opportunities;
- stronger community relationships that assist in creating opportunities for young people in activities such as traineeships and apprenticeships (Hillman, Marks and McKenzie 2002, 5).

Charles Sturt University is of the view that the same factors operate where there is a local university presence. The physical presence of a university campus in a rural or regional location influences labour market structure, family and community aspirations and therefore participation in higher education.

LABOUR FORCE STRUCTURE

Universities not only respond to labour force demand by educating professionals for practice in rural and regional Australia, but also contribute directly to the growth of regional labour markets.

A 2006 study by the Western Research Institute looked at the retention of graduate students of Charles Sturt University in rural and regional areas. The study used a Graduate Destination Survey of 7,483 graduate students matched to original enrolment data held by the University. The study found:

- 73% percent of all on-campus graduate students from Charles Sturt University with a regional home location took up initial employment in a regional location;
- 84% of on-campus teacher education graduate students with a regional home location took up initial employment in a regional location;
- 82% of on-campus health graduates with a regional home location took up initial employment in a regional location;
- 76% of on-campus agriculture and environment graduate students with a regional home location took up initial employment in a regional location;
- the percentage of regional graduate students initially employed in a regional location showed a statistically significant upward trend since 1995 increasing at an average rate of 1.3% per year;
- a large proportion of graduate students find their first employment in their original home location – for example, 62%

of students originating from Albury found their first employment in Albury, 59% of students from Wagga Wagga were initially employed in Wagga Wagga, 56% of students from Bathurst were initially employed in Bathurst and 50% of students from Dubbo were initially employed in Dubbo (Western Research Institute 2006).

Numerous studies have shown that educating students in the bush significantly increases the probability of graduates remaining in professional practice in the bush. This results in the flow of new professionals into rural and regional communities, directly stimulating regional labour markets and creating employment opportunities within those communities.

A practical illustration is provided by the recent investment of \$65.1 million by the Federal Government to establish a new dental and oral health program at Charles Sturt University. A study by the Western Research Institute concluded that once fully operational the program would generate 227 additional full-time equivalent jobs in regional areas when flow-on effects of this investment are taken into account. This is in addition to the 906 jobs created during the construction phase (Western Research Institute 2008). The new program has also attracted highly skilled professionals and academics from the United States, Singapore and New Zealand to work in the program. The establishment of five new Community Dental Clinics to support the clinical experience requirements of students will deliver 30,000 patient consultations per annum to rural and regional communities, further stimulating demand in the regional labour market.

Another example can be found in the impact of the establishment of Charles Sturt University's new pharmacy program in Wagga Wagga in 1995 (the program was extended to Orange in 2005):

... between 1995 and 2000 (before the first [Charles Sturt University] pharmacy graduates) an average of 3 metropolitan trained pharmacists located to regional areas in NSW each year. Every year since [Charles Sturt University's] first pharmacy graduates, 35 graduates or more have chosen to practise in rural and regional settings. That is, 117 new pharmacists in inland and rural Australia in just 3 years (Charles Sturt University 2007, 3).

Not only has the supply of pharmacists to rural and regional areas addressed critical labour force shortages, a number of pharmacy graduates from Charles Sturt University have opened new practices in locations that did not have a pharmacy, or purchased and expanded the number of practices in rural and regional communities generating new activity and demand. Similar patterns of activity can be found in all universities in rural and regional Australia.

The cumulative effect of the activities of universities located in rural and regional areas on labour market and economic activity are substantial. The Victorian Parliamentary inquiry cited Australian Government figures that in 2003 universities in regional locations generated approximately 22,000 full-time equivalent jobs (Parliament of Victoria 2009, 134). A 2005 study by the Western Research Institute found conservatively that Charles Sturt University generated 3,100 full-time equivalent jobs in inland New South Wales (Western Research Institute 2005).

In addition to the direct effect of the university's activities, there is a spillover effect generated by the entry of university graduates into regional labour markets. A report by the United Kingdom Government identified a number of examples of how graduate entry into regional markets generates new forms of labour market activity:

Graduate enterprise activities are demonstrably supporting the development of new, often knowledge based companies within the region and increasing job opportunities ... Quantitative outputs include:

- New Ventures (Universities of Newcastle, Northumbria and Sunderland funded via the Tyne & Wear Sub-Regional Partnership) with 31 new businesses and 60 jobs created;
- University of Teesside with 98 graduate start-up businesses, 76 businesses provided with start-up accommodation, 136 new jobs created; and
- University of Durham GLEAM Programme with 114 graduate business start-ups since 1998, 159 new jobs created (Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills 2008, 7).

This is not only important for job creation, but also for knowledge transfer and innovation. Mejia noted the importance of graduates to bringing innovation to industry by reference to the Silicon Valley:

While the transfer of technology takes many forms, the most common form is the education and technical know-how that students take with them when they graduate. That form is overlooked in discussions about Silicon Valley and start-ups. But, it is one that probably has the greatest fiscal and social impact on the broader economy because a lot of bright young people are being put to work to create value for existing companies by improving existing products and creating new ones” (Mejia 2001, 6).

An important factor influencing a school leaver’s decision to attend university is there are jobs in their area that require a university qualification. Universities in rural and regional areas contribute to the growth of professional labour markets in surrounding areas and create the context in which higher education becomes a legitimate choice for rural and regional students.

AWARENESS AND ASPIRATION

A second important role played by universities in rural and regional areas is broadening the awareness of the opportunities higher education makes available to students.

As major stakeholders in rural and regional communities, universities engage in a range of activities with students, parents, early childhood centres, schools, TAFEs, sporting bodies, media, local government and other institutions. For example, Charles Sturt University: runs science schools for higher school students; operates the HSC Online web site with the NSW Board of Studies; attends school career fairs and high school speech nights; places student teachers in early childhood centres, primary and secondary schools, and; delivers courses in cooperation with TAFE in smaller regional centres.

Day to day engagement between communities and universities located in rural and regional areas builds understanding and awareness of the opportunities presented by university study. A 2004 Report on the factors influencing student aspirations and expectations in regional Australia commented:

The presence of TAFE colleges and nearby university campuses – the investment in career markets and expositions – the dedication demonstrated particularly by regional universities in mentoring ‘out-of-town’ students and students from the bush, all featured as strategies that sustained students in their quest to broaden their visions and pursue their ambitions (Alloway, et al. 2004, 252)

While expanding the awareness of school students and families about the value of higher education is important, we would caution that this is not the product of a single event. While careers fairs and similar types of activities can be an important part of an overall strategy, Charles Sturt University is of the view that they must be reinforced through day to day engagement in a diversity of settings. This may be a result of seeing a story about the university on TV, talking to a nursing student on clinical practice while visiting the doctor, being taught by an in-service teacher in a school, accessing the University’s HSC support web site or attending a university play or seminar.

The scope of engagement is affected by the range of courses available in a particular location. As suggested above, the level of participation is higher in locations where there is a broad range of courses. The capacity for a university to engage prospective students and their families is more limited where the university does not have academics, professionals, students and graduates in specific disciplines or courses. This may reflect the lower levels of participation in rural and regional locations with more limited university course offerings.

This negative effect of a limited course profile was highlighted in a report for the Department of Education, Science and Training:

A significant set of issues raised by focus groups revolved around the small scale of rural economies, and the consequent limited range of careers which students saw modelled in their communities. This meant that there was little contact with some occupations and professions, and that the opportunities for working in these more diverse fields were not available if students envisaged working in their community (Department of Education, Science and Training 2004, 208).

PRESENCE

The importance of vibrant university campuses located in regional areas was reiterated in the Victorian Parliament *Report of Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education*:

For a proportion of prospective students in non-metropolitan areas, proximity to a university campus is a strong influence not only on the choice of where to study, but also on decisions about whether to study at all. In particular, many mature age students have work and family commitments that make it difficult or impossible to move to the city. Mr Col Sharp, Director, Planning and Audit, Charles Sturt University, observed that there appear to be two types of student in the university's catchment areas: mobile students with a strong interest in a specific field of study, and a group that is tied to the local area and instead chooses their preferred course from locally available options (Parliament of Victoria 2009, 143).

Local access to higher education not only makes available a high quality education at a comparatively lower cost, it has a range of spillover effects on the regional labour market and the aspiration to attend university. As noted by the Victorian Parliament, the "...aspiration to go to university is a critical prerequisite to participation in higher education" (Parliament of Victoria 2009, 69).

Higher participation rates for students with a local university campus suggest that there is a positive correlation between the presence of a university campus and levels of higher education participation.

COST

The perception of cost and the burden this will place on family finances have been identified as "... major concerns for many rural students and many from lower socioeconomic backgrounds ... [and] are serious inhibitors or barriers for rural school students" (James, Participation Disadvantage in Australian Higher Education: An analysis of the effects of geographical location and socioeconomic status 2001, 469-70).

In 2007 Charles Sturt University, with Monash University, the University of Western Australia and The Foundation for Young

Australians, funded a study titled *Regional Young People and Youth Allowance: Access to Tertiary Education* (Godden 2007).

The study found that regional young people “ have high expenses when studying away from home – which all participants describe as the biggest challenge, and affects participation and choices. Regional families are extremely financially burdened with the expenses, particularly when they are ineligible for Youth Allowance” (Godden 2007, 10).

A study by John Polesel found that a major factor in the rates of deferral of university commencement among rural and regional students was the cost of accessing higher education. His study found evidence of a rising trend in deferral rates among rural and regional students, with rates growing more rapidly than in metropolitan areas of Victoria and Queensland (Polesel 2009, 88-89).

Polesel found that the “...higher deferral rates evident amongst non-metropolitan students may be influenced by the impact of socio-economic status on the decisions taken by this group of school completers, particularly as this relates to the costs of living away from home, course fees and costs of travel ...” (Polesel 2009, 91)

Importantly, his survey found that around 40 per cent of the students who had deferred an offer of a university place did not subsequently take up that place because they could not support themselves due to the cost of study:

Financial pressure on their family, concern regarding HECS debts and the costs of travel were all nominated by about one-quarter of the respondents, and also reflect the continuing importance of financial barriers to the participation of non-metropolitan youth in education and training. The need to qualify for Youth Allowance and only being able to get into a fee-paying course were also among the financial reasons cited. In all, approximately two-thirds (66.4 per cent) of those not in education or training nominated at least one of these financial barriers as a reason for not being in education or training in 2008. Other related barriers that were nominated included the perception that study would require them to leave home or that their preferred course was not offered locally—each

accounting for over three in ten respondents (Polesel 2009, 97-98) .

A study of post-school choices similarly observed:

Despite the comparatively low appeal of VET, these courses are acknowledged to be highly accessible—entry is seen as less restricted than university entry—and relatively inexpensive. University is considered to be a far more costly option, and there is evidence of young people who may hold ambitions to attend university but are hindered by a financial obstacle. Young people are conscious of the rising cost of university fees, and rural students in particular, who would need to leave home to attend university, are concerned about the additional costs of accommodation and living in a city (James, TAFE, university or work? The early preferences and choices of students in Years 10, 11 and 12 2000, 36)

Cost has been identified by Charles Sturt University as one of the major factors in the decision making of rural and regional students about whether to go to university and which university they attend.

Here it is important to recognise again that young people often have to relocate to attend university, which imposes significant additional costs associated with accommodation, travel and living that are not experienced by students who live at home or within close proximity to a university.

Godden found that the annual living costs for a rural or regional young person studying away from home was between \$15,000 and \$20,000, plus relocation and start-up costs of \$3,000 to \$6,000 (Godden 2007, 10).

This point is reinforced by a 1999 study for the Department of Education, Science and Training which found that, from a metropolitan area only 4 per cent had to move to go to university, while almost 40 per cent of rural and regional students had to move (Department of Education, Science and Training 2003, 12). For students in metropolitan areas 70 per cent lived within 10 kilometres of a university campus, more than 90 per cent lived within *less than* 50 kilometres and only one per cent *more than* 50 kilometres. By comparison, for students in rural and regional

areas, only 16 per cent lived within 10 kilometres of a university campus and 51 per cent lived *more than* 50 kilometres away (Department of Education, Science and Training 2003, 5).

Despite the often more challenging financial circumstances of families in rural and regional Australia, particularly farming families who are ‘asset rich and cash poor’, rural and regional students are proportionately more likely to have to bear significant additional costs to attend university than students in metropolitan areas.

It is important to note that this is not simply an issue of rural and regional young people moving to metropolitan universities. There has been considerable public focus on the costs for rural and regional students to attend university, with suggestions that these students might be offered some form of ‘Mobility Scholarship’ to attend metropolitan universities. This is a simplistic response.

The issue of distance and cost arises for many rural and regional students regardless of the location of the university. This is because of what Bradley termed the “haphazard” distribution of university campuses across rural and regional Australia (Commonwealth of Australia 2009, 109).

For example, a student from Broken Hill wanting to study dentistry would have to travel a longer distance to attend the Orange Campus of Charles Sturt University (870 kilometres) compared with studying at the University of Adelaide in a metropolitan area (511 kilometres). A student from Armidale wanting to study veterinary science would have to travel 465 kilometres to the University of Queensland in Brisbane or 853 kilometres to Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga. Whether a student chooses to attend a university in a regional or metropolitan area, they are often unable to live at home while studying.

The key issue for rural and regional students is not “distance from”, but simply “distance”. While 93 per cent of metropolitan students live within commuter distance of their university (25 kilometres), the same is only true for 30 per cent of rural and regional students. In the vast majority of cases, rural and regional students do not have a “choice” to go to university and live at home. Therefore, rural and regional students and their families do not have the “choice” not to pay the additional costs of study. These circumstances need to be recognised.

ACCOMMODATION

Arising from the above, rural and regional young people who leave home for tertiary education must find affordable and accessible accommodation. The provision of on-campus supported accommodation is particularly important, given the high number of first generation, low SES and Indigenous students attending universities in rural and regional areas.

Charles Sturt University has found that students who live on-campus during their study are more likely to complete their course successfully than students who do not. In 2005, students at Charles Sturt University who were living on-campus in supported accommodation were less likely to drop out of their studies than students who lived off-campus (around 3% drop out compared to 15% for students not living in on-campus accommodation) (Charles Sturt University 2008, 25).

The provision of on-campus accommodation is also an important way of reducing the cost of living away from home for students and providing confidence for families in sending their children away to university. Charles Sturt University's residential fees are in the lowest 25 per cent of all Australian universities and have been structured to maximise access for students. Unlike some university residences where students are required to pay for 52 weeks accommodation (including mid-semester breaks), Charles Sturt University students can opt for a 30 week accommodation package that allows them to return home during breaks, maintain important links with their local communities and reduce their total living costs of study. This means that Charles Sturt University residential services do not make the same return as similar accommodation services elsewhere. However, to do so would increase the costs therefore raising more barriers for rural and regional participation.

Charles Sturt University currently has around 2400 on-campus University supported beds for students across its campuses – less than 40% of student demand. Based on projected demand, the University has a current shortfall of around 3,600 beds to accommodate students needing assistance. The shortage of residential accommodation is a common experience for many rural and regional universities.

While the former Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarships, and the new Relocation Scholarships, are important in assisting students to meet the cost of accommodation, it is critical that universities have an adequate supply of accommodation to meet demand. Scholarships are of limited value to increasing participation, or retaining students, if there is no suitable accommodation for students in which to live. The lack of an adequate supply, particularly for universities in rural and regional areas, limits the capacity for some students to exercise genuine choice in going to university.

Universities in regional areas face a number of challenges in providing critical supported accommodation for students. While there has been a shift to outsourcing of student accommodation to private developers in some universities to defray more of the cost of accommodation to students, to maintain fee levels at reasonable levels many universities in rural and regional areas must often support the cost of maintaining and growing on-campus accommodation through self-financing or borrowings.

COURSE AVAILABILITY

A 2003 study for the Department of Education, Science and Training found that a major factor in the decision of rural and regional students to locate to a metropolitan university was the lack of available programs in rural and regional locations. For example, the study found that rural and regional students were substantially more likely to move from a rural or regional area to study disciplines such as dentistry, medicine, built environment, languages, engineering, mathematics, pharmacy and veterinary science (Department of Education, Science and Training 2003, 14-15). The need to move location reflected the lack of availability of these disciplines outside of metropolitan Australia.

The study concluded:

The analysis suggests that students move to study subjects, such as medicine and dentistry, that are offered at relatively few campuses. They also move to campuses that have recognised expertise in particular subjects. For non-metropolitan students a further factor is the concentration of subjects in metropolitan campuses. For example, well over 90 per cent of commencing places in economics in 1999 were in city campuses. Overall it would appear that

the decision to move is not so much about access but about access to particular courses (Blakers, et al. 2003, 6).

The success of a university campus is not predicated solely on a physical presence, but the relevance of the course mix to the needs and aspirations of students. This is true for both metropolitan and regionally located universities. The point was made by the Victorian Parliament in its recent inquiry into the geographic differences in higher education participation:

Although some regional campuses have a reasonably comprehensive range of courses, the narrow choice of courses in comparison to metropolitan areas was highlighted by many participants. Universities are less likely to offer expensive or specialised courses, such as law, engineering or science, in regional areas ... Therefore, for many students who live in a regional community with a university, it is still necessary to relocate to access an appropriate course. For prospective students who are not able or willing to relocate, decisions about participation can hinge on whether there is local access to the desired course.

Professor Ross Chambers, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic, Charles Sturt University, argued that success in regional provision and raising participation rates in regional areas rests heavily on the programs offered. Professor Chambers attributed much of the university's success in attracting a large proportion of students from the catchment areas to its appealing course profile, which includes a comprehensive range of health science courses, other professional programs, and environmental sciences programs tied to local needs. Courses that match areas of workforce need also help to attract students who want to make realistic vocational choices about their area of study. Professor Chambers argued that rather than offering what is 'cheap and easy', regional universities must offer programs that interest students (Parliament of Victoria 2009, 144).

Since the 2003 study, a number of universities have invested in the development of new programs in dentistry (Charles Sturt University, James Cook University), veterinary science (Charles Sturt University, James Cook University), pharmacy (Charles Sturt

University, James Cook University) and engineering (University of Southern Queensland, Central Queensland University, Ballarat University). Unsurprisingly, these courses are attracting significant numbers of applicants from rural and regional areas.

In 2009, for example, Charles Sturt University received more than 700 applications from across regional and metropolitan Australia for 60 available places in its dental science program and continues to see expanding demand for places in veterinary science, pharmacy, physiotherapy and a range of other disciplines. Reflecting its mission, Charles Sturt University has a number of schemes to prioritise entry to these courses of rural and regional students, with more than 75% of Charles Sturt University on-campus students generally coming from a rural or regional location.

While recent initiatives to expand course profile and give local students greater choice in location of study are a positive step, the uneven distribution of university campuses across rural and regional Australia means that not all courses are consistently available in all areas.

One of the objectives of the proposal by Charles Sturt University to form a new national University in regional Australia was to expand the range of courses available across existing university campuses in rural and regional areas by better use of existing university campuses, expansion of open learning offerings and greater coordination with TAFE. As noted by Bradley in the *Review of Australian Higher Education*:

The pattern of regional provision is uneven. In some regional towns a number of universities operate while in others there is no provision. This suggests that the pattern of regional provision is based on history and local political considerations rather than a rigorous process of analysis of need and development of a sustainable and cost-effective service in response (Commonwealth of Australia 2009, 109).

The Review concluded that a new national University, bringing together a number of existing providers, would “... provide a viable solution to the current and emerging problems it sees in regional provision” (Commonwealth of Australia 2009, 113)

Despite the early conclusion of the Feasibility Study into the formation of a new national University, there remain a range of obstacles to the development and delivery of genuine educational choices to rural and regional students in Australia:

- a lack of routinely gathered and accurate regional labour force data that reflects the different workforce needs of different regional areas;
- a lack of coordination between agencies involved in regional development and universities, and a lack of integration between labour force needs and course planning;
- the lack of a clear and transparent framework for funding course development (as a result new course development tends to be *ad hoc* or influenced by political considerations);
- a shift to a quasi-market system that means universities are expected to fund new course development based on identified labour force demand from their resources (failing to recognise the significantly different financial capacities of universities and the cost of some disciplines to offer) while in other cases highly restrictive market practices prevent or inhibit universities from developing new courses (most notably medicine) despite critical labour force shortages.

Numerous studies have shown that student choice about where to study is primarily influenced by the location of the course they want to study. There is strong evidence that when courses are available in rural and regional areas, local students will often choose to study locally and metropolitan students will relocate to regional areas for study. For example, Charles Sturt University has more than 2,500 metropolitan origin students on its regional campuses and more than 6,000 students in total studying from States and Territories outside NSW. The result is a lower level of overall higher education participation and a pattern of migration of young people from rural and regional communities in professional disciplines that are in critical shortage.

PAID EMPLOYMENT

A survey by Universities Australia found an increased trend for students to be engaged in employment in order to meet the basic costs of study.

The survey found that:

- the typical Australian student in 2006 was undertaking considerable paid work during semester: 70.6 per cent of full-time undergraduates reported working during semester, on average these students were working 14.8 hours per week. 79.2 per cent of full-time postgraduate research students and 73.7 of full-time postgraduate coursework students worked during semester, working an average of 11.3 and 20.3 hours per week respectively”
- One in every six (14.5 per cent) of the full-time undergraduate students who were working during semester was working more than 20 hours per week, as were over one third (38.2 per cent) of full-time postgraduate coursework students. Overall, more than one-third of the nation’s full-time university students (35.2 per cent) were working at least 13 hours per week during semester. Similar reckoning for part-time students shows that 41.8 per cent of all part-time students were working at least 38 hours per week – in effect, full-time paid employment.
- Many students indicated they undertook substantial hours of work simply to afford basic necessities, transport, textbooks and other study materials. A large proportion of these students reported that this work had a significant detrimental effect on their studies and limited their opportunities to benefit from the full university experience: 40.2 per cent of full-time undergraduate students, and over 50 per cent of all part-time students believed the work they were doing was having an adverse effect on their studies; 22.7 per cent of full-time undergraduate students and 37.4 per cent of part-time undergraduate students regularly missed classes because they needed to attend employment, as did around one quarter of all postgraduate students.
- One in eight students (12.8 per cent) indicated they regularly went without food or other necessities because they could not afford them. For Indigenous students, the comparable figure was much higher, at 25.4 per cent.
- 47.8 per cent of full-time undergraduate students had annual budgets that were in deficit. Around half of the students surveyed indicated they often worried about their finances – among the Indigenous students, 72.5 per cent

reported their financial situation was often a source of worry for them... (James, Bexley, et al. 2007, 2)

The survey did not provide comparative data for students in rural and regional areas and this is an important area for future research.

Nonetheless, Charles Sturt University's experience suggests that a large proportion of rural and regional students have to work in order to meet the cost of study and living away from home. Regional labour markets have higher rates of unemployment and lower rates of labour force participation than metropolitan centres, increasing the challenge for rural and regional students to find stable work over the course of their studies.

This is supported by Australian Bureau of Statistics data that shows that, in the majority of States and Territories, capital cities have lower unemployment rates and higher participation rates than the balance of the State (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008). A study on rural and regional students in Victoria who deferred their place reinforces this view, with 40 per cent not activating their university place because "... they could not support themselves and that the costs of study are a barrier" (Polesel 2009, 97).

Paid employment is critical for students who are ineligible for other reasons for government income support. The lack of available work opportunities in rural and regional communities acts as a barrier to higher education participation.

INCOME SUPPORT

Government income support is critical to the ability of students, including rural and regional students, to participate equally in higher education opportunities for the reasons provided above.

The three main student income support programs are Youth Allowance (for students up to the age of 25 years), Austudy (for students aged over 25) and ABSTUDY (for Indigenous students). Additional benefits are also available to eligible recipients.

Despite the importance of these schemes, a 2006 survey of student finances by Universities Australia found that the proportion of students receiving government income support between 2000 and 2006 declined significantly. It found that "... while 42 per cent of undergraduates received either Austudy or Youth Allowance in

2000, in 2006 only 35.2 per cent of full-time undergraduates received income from these schemes – a decrease of 17 per cent over 2000 levels” (James, Bexley, et al. 2007, 12).

The Australian Government moved to address the situation for young people in the 2009-10 Budget by changing the eligibility criteria to expand the number of young people able to obtain Youth Allowance by around 68,000 extra people. The Government states that the changes will also result in around 34,600 students receiving a higher rate of payment under the Youth Allowance Scheme. (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2009, 1).

Of particular importance, the changes will modify the eligibility of rural and regional students by amending the threshold for the Parental Income Test. From 1 January 2010 “... rural and regional students with parents earning up to \$42 559 will receive the maximum rate of payment (up from the current threshold of \$32 800)” (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2009, 1). The cut out points will also change for different types of families.

One of the difficulties in interpreting the impact of these changes for rural and regional students and their families is the lack of data breaking down rates of eligibility for rural and regional students under the former and new criteria. Despite this, it is well known that average household incomes are lower in rural and regional areas and this would suggest that more rural and regional students will be eligible under the new criteria. In light of the significant financial challenges facing rural and regional young people, these changes are an important step forward.

Under the current rules, rural and regional students may also establish eligibility for Youth Allowance if they are ‘independent’ from their parents. A student can establish ‘independence’ if they had been out of school for at least 18 months and in that time had earned approximately \$19,500 in 2009. A young person was also classified as independent if they had worked at least 30 hours per week for at least 18 months of the previous two years.

The Government has proposed to tighten these rules with effect from 1 January 2010 because of concerns that high income families have been using the independence test as a way to obtain income support that should be reserved for more needy students. Charles

Sturt University supports the view that income support should be targeted to students in greatest need. Under the new rules, to establish independence students work at least 30 hours per week for at least 18 months of the previous two years after leaving school.

Two concerns have been raised about the implementation of the new rules:

- (1) students who left school in 2008 and commenced work under the current rules in the expectation that they would become eligible for Youth Allowance will now have to work for a significantly longer period in order to qualify;
- (2) rural and regional students will be disadvantaged because the more limited availability of work in local areas means that students will be unable to meet the criteria.

With respect to the first issue, Charles Sturt University believes that consideration should be given to 'grandfathering' the new criteria for students who have commenced a 'gap year'.

In relation to changes to the independence test, Charles Sturt University is of the view that the Government needs to take into account the circumstances of rural and regional students as outlined above in determining eligibility criteria for income support.

A QUESTION OF CHOICE

The need for income support for rural and regional students is accentuated by the 'uneven' geographic distribution of university campuses in rural and regional Australia and the limited availability of courses in many rural and regional locations in areas of critical labour force demand.

A longer term solution is for the Government to address the factors that lead to reliance on income support by rural and regional students by supporting measures to expand the accessibility of higher education opportunity more evenly across rural and regional Australia.

This is not necessarily about building new campuses, but sustaining the presence we have and working more closely with TAFE and others to expand accessibility and providing genuine student choice across regional communities. A national broadband network will help, but is not sufficient on its own to improve access and participation. Both geographic and cultural lines of sights to the opportunity and accessibility of higher education are required.

As suggested this is not simply an argument about social inclusion.

More than 50% of Australia's export wealth is generated from the trade in commodities produced largely in rural and regional areas. Around 60% of Australia's land mass is engaged in agricultural production, while 65% of Australia's continental water supplies are managed by farmers.

With the challenges of climate change, food security, water security and bio-security, skilling regional populations to improve water management, sustain bio-diversity and enhance farming and mining practices is critical to national social and economic well being. It is as important as engaging regional populations with

research that can be translated into sustainable practice on the ground.

Ultimately, the creation of strong and growing labour markets in rural and regional area is required to address the systemic issues identified in this submission. Universities, alongside Government, business and community, have a significant role to play.

The challenges and opportunities of rural and regional Australia are multi-faceted and require a range of approaches that address underlying causes, while providing appropriate support during a transition to a more stable and prosperous future.

ABOUT CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY

Charles Sturt University is headquartered in Bathurst in central western New South Wales, and operates university campuses serving inland New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and Victoria including Albury-Wodonga, Bathurst, Canberra, Dubbo, Goulburn, Orange and Wagga Wagga. The University operates university centres with TAFE in Griffith and Deniliquin, and runs a range of integrated pathway programs with vocational education and training providers throughout New South Wales, the ACT and Victoria.

It is by far the largest provider of open learning in Australia and enrolls more than 6,000 students from outside of NSW, making it a truly national university. It also operates Study Centres in Sydney, Melbourne and specialist centres in Parramatta and Manly.

It is the largest provider of educational programs in agriculture, education, theology, library science and policing and has the broadest range of undergraduate programs of any university located in rural and regional Australia including disciplines such as dentistry, veterinary science, pharmacy, medical imaging, medical science, physiotherapy, midwifery and spatial science.

It was the first foreign university to be accredited to operate in Ontario, Canada, and has a rapidly growing campus in Burlington which is situated inland about an hour from the Canadian/United States border. It operates substantial offshore teaching programs with leading universities and institutions in China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Cambodia and Switzerland.

It conducts substantial research in food security, water security, environmental science and management, agricultural innovation, rural and regional policy, public and contextual theology and public philosophy and ethics and has research and teaching links to some of the world's leading universities in Europe and the United States.

Charles Sturt University sees its role as being a world-class educational and research institute based in rural and regional Australia.

Its programs and activities have a significant direct and spillover effect on the communities of rural and regional Australia.

RURAL AND REGIONAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Retaining skilled professionals is critical to the provision of essential services and the amenity in rural and regional Australia. The loss of skilled professionals has a domino effect across inland communities and their economies. In critical areas such as health services, it can lead to a systemic loss of professional services and support structures essential to community sustainability and growth. This is why Charles Sturt University places such importance on the training of professionals for practice in rural and regional Australia across all our fields of endeavour.

It is also why Charles Sturt University targets the recruitment of rural and regional students to its on-campus programs with 75% of all our on-campus students come from a rural or regional home location. The impact of our location is marked in terms of our retention of graduates in rural and regional Australia. A study by the Western Research Institute on the destination of on-campus graduates after completing their professional studies found that 73% of graduates from Charles Sturt University who were originally from a regional home location took up initial employment in a regional location. As important, 28% of on-campus graduates from Charles Sturt University with a metropolitan home location took up initial employment in a regional location (Western Research Institute 2006).

Our capacity to retain graduates in practice in inland and rural Australia peaks in the critical area of agricultural science and management with 88% of agriculture and environment graduates with a regional home location taking up employment in a regional location and 44% of graduates with a metropolitan home location taking up employment in a regional location (Western Research Institute 2006).

Similarly, more than 70% of health graduates with a regional home location took up employment in a regional location and more than 20% of graduates with a metropolitan home location took up

employment in a regional location (Western Research Institute 2006).

Since 1995, the percentage of regional students initially employed in a regional location has grown at an average rate of 1.3% per annum (Western Research Institute 2006).

RURAL AND REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In a study by the Western Research Institute, it was found that the economic impact of Charles Sturt University expenditure, combined with the expenditure of staff, non-local and international students, on the regions surrounding its four main campuses was \$264 million in gross regional product, \$164 million in household income and over 3,100 full-time equivalent jobs (FTE) when flow on effects are taken into account (Western Research Institute 2005).

To put these findings into perspective, Charles Sturt University and international and non-local students attending the University generate the equivalent of 9% of Wagga Wagga's employment in the Murrumbidgee statistical division; the equivalent of 12% of Bathurst's employment in the Central West statistical division; and the equivalent of 3% of Albury-Wodonga's employment in the Murray and Ovens-Murray statistical divisions (Western Research Institute 2005).

These findings do not take account of Charles Sturt University's facilities and campuses in Orange, Canberra or Goulburn. To look at the contribution of Charles Sturt University to the economies and employment in our rural and regional communities in another way, in a recent study on the economic impact of the establishment of two new programs by Charles Sturt University (dentistry and oral health), the Western Research Institute found that the construction phase of the project will generate \$52.6 million in gross regional product, \$24.7 million in household income and 906 FTE jobs when flow on effects are taken into account. (Western Research Institute 2008).

Once the programs are fully operational, it is estimated that they will generate annually \$12.3 million in gross regional product, \$8.27 million in household income, 227 FTE jobs and bring more than 200 new students to our inland campuses when flow-on effects are taken into account (Western Research Institute 2008).

This does not take account of the economic, social and health benefits flowing from the training and graduation of a new generation of dentists and oral health workers for the sustainability and growth of our communities, nor the effect of a state-of-the-art facility in encouraging existing health practitioners to remain in inland Australia.

RURAL AND REGIONAL SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Charles Sturt University contributes to the artistic, cultural and social development of our communities, within the limits of its resources, across a broad range of fields.

Charles Sturt University annually grants more than \$500,000 to community organisations to promote artistic and cultural activities in inland Australia. Charles Sturt University has been a long time contributor to the Mitchell Conservatorium, the Macquarie Philharmonic, Orana Conservatorium, Murray Conservatorium, Riverina Conservatorium of Music, and more recently the Orange Regional Conservatorium, supporting the aspirations of our young musicians across inland NSW.

As the broadcaster of National Radio News, Charles Sturt University offers a subscription news service for rural and regional radio stations across Australia using its own resources and the services of Australian Associated Press and Sky News Australia. As the license holder for 2MCE, Charles Sturt University provides a community radio service to central western NSW and provides members of the community and students with the opportunity to learn about broadcasting.

Charles Sturt University is also a principal stakeholder and major contributor to the work of the Australian Minerals and Fossils Museum in Bathurst (the Somerville Collection). In cooperation with Bathurst Regional Council, the Australian Museum and NSW Ministry for the Arts, Charles Sturt University spearheaded the establishment of this major museum collection in inland NSW which is now recognised as one of the most important mineral collections in Australia.

Through our support of the Riverina Theatre Company in Wagga Wagga and the operation of the Ponton Theatre in Bathurst, Charles Sturt University supports the development of the performing arts and theatre across inland NSW. Through our

financial and in-kind support of Arts Out West, Charles Sturt University assists the promotion of regional arts and culture.

To help to meet the health needs of our communities in areas of critical shortage, Charles Sturt University has established a range of primary health clinics that are accessible to our communities. Charles Sturt University has established an Allied Health Clinic in Albury-Wodonga (including a Podiatry and a Diabetic and Cardiovascular Screening service), a Functional Rehabilitation Clinic in Bathurst and is establishing Dental and Oral Health Clinics in Albury-Wodonga, Bathurst, Dubbo, Orange and Wagga Wagga to provide health services to our inland communities in critical areas of need.

RURAL AND REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Charles Sturt University is a broad-spectrum University. As the major provider of educational and research opportunities to our inland communities, Charles Sturt University is committed to providing a full range of programs that meet their needs and the aspirations.

Charles Sturt University's mission extends to all our inland communities, as well as our immediate campus towns.

For example, to address higher education participation rates in communities outside our major campus towns, Charles Sturt University has committed to the development of a *Rural and Remote Strategy*. Participation rates in higher education in the western regions of NSW are significantly below NSW State averages. In a 2004 study by Charles Sturt University, using the services of the Spatial Data Analysis Network and data from the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training National Statistics Collection, it was found that total participation in higher education in NSW was 4.3%.

For Charles Sturt University's inland communities, however, higher education participation rates are significantly lower and continue to decline the further you move away from regional centres where Charles Sturt University has its major campuses.

Through our commitment to the operation of distributed campuses across major inland centres, Charles Sturt University has significantly increased access to and participation in higher

education across our inland communities over the last two decades.

In just the last 10 years, Charles Sturt University has opened new campuses in Dubbo and Orange and relocated its Albury-Wodonga campus to a larger environmental showcase site in the suburb of Thurgoona to further enhance local access to higher education opportunities to inland communities. Through our extensive distance education programs, adult learners and students from remote communities are able to access high quality educational services locally.

Access to, and participation in, higher education is critical to the social and economic development of our inland communities and to the development of individuals. While multi-campus universities located in rural areas have made a significant contribution to higher education participation over the last two decades, Charles Sturt University acknowledges there is a need to continue to extend our reach to other inland communities where participation rates remain low.

Charles Sturt University has already initiated a number of programs to begin to address access and participation outside our campus towns including: collaboration with Riverina Institute of TAFE to provide study centres in TAFE facilities in Griffith (Business, Nursing) and Deniliquin (Social Welfare/Social Work); creation of scholarships and enabling programs targeted at rural and remote communities to address some of the financial barriers to access and participation.

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