

## Collaborative development of a university presence in regional South Australia

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### Abstract

In 2005 the University of South Australia's (UniSA's) Centre for Regional Engagement (CRE) introduced on-campus education to Mount Gambier, South Australia's largest regional city. The work of a stakeholder steering committee enabled the establishment of the University's Mount Gambier Regional Centre (MGRC), which depended on cooperation with TAFE SA for shared facilities, and with other regional organisations. The MGRC provides an example of innovation through partnerships, as encouraged by the Bradley Review, and use of a blend of face-to-face and video-conferenced course delivery. Findings of a longitudinal study, and growing numbers of students enrolling, confirm that the MGRC has effectively established its teaching and community engagement functions. Demonstrated benefits of its establishment include capacity-building, contributing to the region's social capital, retaining people who may otherwise have moved away to study, and providing new career opportunities. In accordance with study findings and university strategy, the MGRC is now focusing on expanding local research projects and partnerships, on which to base long-term integration into this region. This will be discussed in the light of Bradley Review recommendations and some resultant policy changes.

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### Introduction

The Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education ("Bradley Review") (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2008) placed scrutiny on regional higher education, with a range of concerns about viability as well as acknowledgement of sound innovative models, which have primarily involved universities and TAFE colleges. Recommendations focused on funding and funding conditions, the examination of the feasibility of a new national university for regional areas, and the need for consultation with stakeholders about future planning. The overall implications were that, in order to attract funding, regional higher education provision needed to be sustainable, flexible and responsive to community needs, and that there needed to be "flexible and collaborative delivery arrangements in partnership with other providers such as TAFE" (DEEWR, 2008, p. 112).

For those who have experience of regional university campuses, the advantages are clear: the fact that students are able to study locally means that they are more likely to remain as contributing graduates; generally smaller classes facilitate ease of interaction with academic and professional staff, so that students are less likely to feel lost and anonymous; and financially the situation has been less stressful for students who are able to avoid living away from home in another city.

Nevertheless, some disadvantages cannot be discounted: lower student numbers restrict the numbers of program and course options that can be offered; it is difficult to attract specialist staff from elsewhere; and rural and regional students that defer their university entry for financial reasons, in order to earn enough to be independent students, commonly do not take up their places (UniSA, 2009b).

In this article we consider the current challenges facing regional campuses, engaging with some of the recommendations of the Bradley Review (DEEWR, 2008). In particular, we describe a case study of a new university presence in a regional South Australian city, drawing on the findings of a longitudinal study that followed the first student cohort in order to investigate the impact of the new centre on the students, staff and region. The project is a further example of a collaborative relationship between university and TAFE.

This development was managed from a UniSA existing regional site, located at Whyalla in the north-west of South Australia. In 2005, when regional and community engagement had become strategic priorities of UniSA, the Whyalla Campus functions were expanded through the creation of a specialist unit, the Centre for Regional Engagement (CRE). This centre was charged with undertaking regional engagement projects across the state and, in particular, with responding to community demand for a university presence in the Limestone Coast region in the south-east of the state (Pullin & Munn, 2006). The staff and infrastructure of the fledgling organisation were initially all centred at Whyalla, and the case study demonstrates a change in that dependency over time. Key goals were that the Mount Gambier development be “financially responsible and socially responsive” (Pullin & Munn, 2006, p. 189).

The article looks ahead to future developments envisaged and needed in order to maximise the contribution of this university outreach and truly embed it into its community.

### ***Current challenges for regional campuses***

Newly introduced policies and funding models resulting from the Bradley Review aimed at supporting rural and regional students do not necessarily support enrolments in regional campuses, and can create more competition for places within universities with metropolitan and regional campuses. Changes in student income support from April 2010 particularly benefit young students who have to move away from home to study, including rural and regional students (DEEWR, 2010). Youth allowances can include a student start-up scholarship and relocation scholarship, and there are increased parental income thresholds for rural and regional students living away from home. That relocation will often be to the capital cities, where there is greater diversity of course offerings and the lure of city living, attractive to many young people. For many rural school leavers, entry to a metropolitan university is their “ticket out of town”, providing broader horizons and employment opportunities (Alloway, Gilbert, Gilbert, & Muspratt, 2004, p. 123). Some students who live near regional campuses can now gain

greater financial benefit by re-locating to the city than by studying locally, depending on individual family and accommodation circumstances.

Another enticement to metropolitan campuses can be relocation scholarships which are provided by universities to meet students' financial costs and the university's equity targets such as those provided by UniSA as part of its RURAL RECONNECT Five-Step Participation Model, "a five-year pilot project designed to encourage greater participation, retention and achievement of rural and remote students in higher education" (UniSA, 2009a, p. 2). All of this is positive for young, potentially mobile students. However, mature students for whom travel and relocation are not options, due to employment, personal commitments and financial constraints, and for whom distance education options are not appealing, remain in need of local university facilities and resources. While it is commendable that universities recognise the adjustments faced by students who have had to move to the city to study and the need to support them (Hicks, Johnston, & Hipp, 1998), this should not detract from supporting those who choose or need to stay in their rural/regional location. Declining enrolments threaten their access. It has been shown that for some rural school leavers, too, "staying within the comfort zone afforded by family and community outweighed considerations of the career options available within those communities" (Alloway et al., 2004, p. 128). Regional communities need higher education programs that match the employment available in the region, and the CRE seeks to provide programs targeted to its rural and regional community (UniSA, 2009b).

The Bradley Review discusses the situation of "thin markets such as regional areas, where demand may be finite or declining, and limited to particular qualifications" (DEEWR, 2008, p. 111). The report provides an example which applies to the case study discussed in this paper, in noting that

... a regional community may have both a shortage of registered nurses and a viable feeder group of enrolled nurses with the experience and capability to undertake further education. Travel to a metropolitan campus may not be an option for many of these potential students due to family commitments and financial constraints. (DEEWR, 2008, p. 111)

The Bradley Review refers to "diseconomies of scale" related to declining youth population in most non-metropolitan areas, and the need for "more innovative, sustainable and responsive models of tertiary education provision" in the future (DEEWR, 2008, p. 13). The model of higher education delivery described in this article involved the establishment of a "regional centre" without the full costs of providing a campus (DEEWR, 2008, p. 111). In 2010, the focus is on ensuring that the regional centre is sustainable and on building long-term integration into the region through expanded local research projects and partnerships, as foreshadowed by Pullin and Munn (2006) and in accordance with the Bradley Review recognition of the importance of sustainability, flexibility and innovation.

It is apparent that regional universities and metropolitan-based universities with regional campuses need to be responsive to their "thin" markets, so that qualified and skilled workforces are built up and innovativeness and community capacity are enhanced. This requires flexibility and responsiveness to regional needs by the university divisions/schools as a whole, to support the teaching of "new" regional programs where needed.

In seeking these outcomes, it is also vital that effective marketing of programs available at the regional sites is conducted, so that residents of each region are fully

aware of the higher education options open to them. While this may appear self-evident, it has been a limitation that the MGRC has not always been well represented in UniSA and even CRE marketing. As well as strengthening information channels between universities and local schools and building relationships through collaborative activities, it is important for regional personnel to use all available marketing opportunities. In addition to university open days and careers expositions, university representation at agricultural shows and field days can potentially reach a wider audience, as can imaginative use of print and electronic media. In all this, collaborative endeavours with other sections of the university are crucial: at times it appears that various campuses of the one institution are competing with each other for new students. There is a need for proactive relationship-building and support from central university structures with regard to both provision and marketing of programs. Robinson (2009, p. 114) has identified that

In situations where a regional campus is part of an institution with its base in a metropolitan area it is likely that the needs of the (usually larger) metropolitan campuses will hold sway, with the needs of regional engagement relegated to a more minor role.

Such circumstances give credence to the suggestion of the Bradley Review (DEEWR, 2008, p. 113), that the feasibility of a separate regional Australian university be explored.

### **Case study**

In 2005 UniSA established a new university presence in Mount Gambier, the largest regional city in South Australia (Pullin, 2007). No on-campus university education had previously been provided there.

While Mount Gambier is South Australia's largest city outside of the capital, Adelaide, its population is only 25,000 (32,000 including the surrounding area that it supports), much smaller than many provincial cities in the more populous eastern states. It is situated in the south-east of the state in the Limestone Coast Region, half-way between Adelaide and the Victorian capital, Melbourne. Other towns in the region include Naracoorte, Millicent and Penola (in the area known as the Coonawarra). The region's population is approximately 65,000 and growing. It has a wealth of natural resources, not least being its Blue Lake and extensive underground aquifers. Key industries are agriculture, viticulture, forestry, lobster fishing, manufacturing and retail trade, with other employment connected with construction, education, health and community services, and tourism (City of Mount Gambier, 2008; Limestone Coast Regional Development Board, 2010). Australian-born people comprise 86% of the population of the Limestone Coast; just 1.2% are Aboriginal. Some post-war migrants arrived from Europe, particularly the Netherlands and Italy, although the majority were from the United Kingdom and later New Zealand. In recent years there has been a small increase in cultural and linguistic diversity, with new residents from South Africa, Asia and the Pacific. There are low levels of unemployment, widely varying income levels and relatively low levels of school achievement and post-school qualifications (DFEEST, 2008). The Mount Gambier Council is working to improve its education participation and aspires to have Mount Gambier named and known as a learning city ("Mount Gambier: City for students", 2009).

Late in 2004 the Mount Gambier University Steering Committee was established and, following intensive lobbying, forty full-time equivalent on-campus university places were funded for the Mount Gambier region. These places were allocated

across the discipline areas of business, social work and nursing in line with the programs being offered from the Whyalla Campus of the CRE. Sixty-eight students enrolled initially, with some places redistributed from Whyalla. All students were enrolled as internal (on-campus) students under the conditions of funding.

The new regional centre at Mount Gambier was located on the site of the local TAFE campus and was the result of considerable collaboration between the Steering Committee, TAFE SA Regional, Tenison Woods College – a local Catholic school – local government and the Regional Development Board. The computer pools and nursing skills laboratory were shared with TAFE, the science laboratory was accessed on a weekly sessional basis at Tenison Woods College, and facilities for printing and the cafeteria were also shared with TAFE. Student counselling was provided by a local service agency.

Program and course delivery was coordinated by CRE Whyalla staff and followed a model of video-conferenced lectures and face-to-face tutorials. Initially, lectures were delivered from the Whyalla campus with local sessional staff employed to conduct the tutorials in Mount Gambier. However, permanent staff have been employed at the Mount Gambier Regional Centre (MGRC) in each of the discipline areas and hence lectures are now often video-conferenced from Mount Gambier to students located at Whyalla. In early 2006, a UniSA-funded building development created several new classroom and office spaces, including a new computer pool, larger reception area, an expanded nursing skills laboratory and a larger multi-purpose lecture/video-conferencing facility. Stage 2 of the development completed for the beginning of the 2008 academic year included a science laboratory and new office accommodation for permanent and sessional staff.

A team of CRE researchers undertook to follow the first cohort of students studying through the new MGRC, surveying them during their first year of undergraduate study, again in their third year, and recently as graduates. Focus groups with staff, students and stakeholders were also conducted early in the course of the study, which aimed to explore the impact of the MGRC on the region and on the students and staff involved. The action-research nature of the study made it possible to identify and implement needed improvements to the learning and teaching context and then assess the outcome of such changes. Data from the earlier stages have shown many benefits of the MGRC's establishment, which have been reported elsewhere (Ellis, Wilkinson, & Sawyer, 2008, 2009; Sawyer, Ellis, & Wilkinson, 2007; Wilkinson & Ellis, 2006). These benefits included: capacity-building, contributing to the region's social capital, and retaining people who may otherwise have moved away to study. For individuals, the chance to study and teach without leaving the region has given new career opportunities. Some have said that, without the MGRC, they would not have considered enrolling in higher education.

The third stage of the longitudinal study consisted of a postal survey of graduates in 2009. As well as surveying graduates from the 2005 cohort, we also included all Mount Gambier Regional Centre students who had graduated. The 13 responses included 4 from the 2006 cohort. The response rate was 33.3%, possibly higher, as it cannot be ascertained whether all 39 graduates received the survey. Almost all respondents agreed or strongly agreed (the others giving a neutral response) that their MGRC studies had provided a good foundation for their current work, enhanced their ability to contribute to the community, and that they would recommend that others seriously consider the MGRC opportunities available. Over

half had increased motivation for further study. They highlighted the contributions that the MGRC was making to the community and region, particularly in enabling people to study there without leaving family, friends and employment; retaining people and skills; and addressing skills shortages. Participants also provided some suggestions for further university community engagement and research activities. The coded responses allowed tracking of respondents over the three phases of the study; for further details and exemplars see Ellis, Watkinson and Sawyer (2010). Nine (69.2%) of the respondents were the first in their family to attend university. Eleven (84.6%) of the respondents were still employed in the local region, up to two years after graduation.

We see the MGRC as an example of “innovative local solutions through a range of flexible and collaborative delivery arrangements in partnership with other providers” (DEEWR, 2008, p. xx). This involved the CRE, with its headquarters 400 kilometres north-west of Adelaide, also operating in a region as far south-east of the state capital, using a blend of face-to-face and video-conferenced course delivery. The MGRC has depended very much on cooperation with TAFE SA for shared facilities, particularly in the early stages, and with other regional organisations, and on a groundswell of community support and steering committee work prior to the launch of the MGRC. Student feedback has confirmed that the MGRC has effectively met their needs, as well as other community and organisational needs. Community consultations have also affirmed the venture. The nursing and social work programs have become the primary source of graduates for employment in health and community services, and the business and accountancy graduates are valued by local business. There is also community interest in further programs such as teaching and engineering. A foundation studies program is firmly established as a successful feeder program for this university and others, raising local student aspirations and achievement.

### **Developing scholarship**

This regional centre was established to meet some local skills shortages in nursing, social work and accountancy/business, and in response to community efforts over many years. The focus in the first few years has been to firmly establish the teaching functions with the recruitment of a small staff of lecturers, mostly with doctoral qualifications, and local tutors. This has reaped benefits in growth of enrolments and funding, with 185 on-campus students enrolled in 2010, and staff also teaching distance students enrolled through metropolitan campuses. With the vocational nature of courses and the lack of a tradition of a university presence, a scholarship culture within local residents and the tutor group has been slow to develop. Tutors are interested in imparting their vocational knowledge and in remaining at least part time in their profession. While it is beneficial that their skills are current and they provide links between university and employing organisations, their role in research and university community engagement is very limited.

The small cohort of local permanent staff, who in most cases were recruited from outside the community, has taken time to build community links, and to begin to establish research partnerships. From the outset, there was a concerted effort to promote awareness of the university presence and its programs in the community. The Campus manager and academic staff became heavily involved in community engagement activities including radio and television segments and Rotary Career Days. Lecturers in nursing collaborated with community health services to conduct Health Fairs, at which nursing students, under supervision, provided free health assessments and lifestyle advice to community members (Penman, 2009). Such

activities raised community awareness of the nursing program as well as providing a service to the community and supporting student learning. Promotion of the new Centre was also achieved through program information sessions and workshops conducted for the community by each of the discipline groups represented at the site. For example, social work lecturers have run child-safe environment workshops and workshops on supervision (free of charge to local social workers), training sessions for board members of non-government agencies, and workshops (for which fees were charged) for community health workers on case note writing.

Recently it has been possible and necessary to increase the focus on research, and progress in this regard has been accelerated by the appointment of an academic head of the centre. Community development and research projects, as possible in partnership with stakeholders and relating to needs identified by stakeholders, are being initiated by MGRC staff and, in some cases, their Whyalla colleagues. These activities aim to not only embed but also develop appreciation of the role of the university as part of its community, and to support the careers of academic staff.

To date, the emphasis has been on health and community projects, reflecting the teaching profile of the CRE; however, the diversified economy of the Limestone Coast region with its extensive natural resources and industries provides opportunity for a range of initiatives (Robinson, 2009). The research arm of the CRE is the Centre for Rural Health and Community Development, based in Whyalla; the Director of this Centre has recognised that regional engagement in the form of research activity has had limited “economic or environmental dimensions” and that “opportunities to attract funds from the major industries, economic development boards and natural resource management boards remain to be pursued” (Robinson, 2009, p. 117). Progress in this regard is a key objective for the CRE in Mount Gambier.

Developing local scholars is considered important, and ways of attracting undergraduates to consider doing Honours need to be considered. Social work students may do Honours as part of their four-year program, whereas an additional year of study is entailed for business or nursing students. It has been deemed to be important that students be encouraged to think about these possibilities early in their studies. Successful honours students can then constitute a pool of potential doctoral students, some of whom may proceed to an academic career perhaps within the CRE.

### **Securing sustainability**

Building the reputation of regional campuses within the community and within the university itself is important. The benefits need to be recognised. Regional secondary school teachers and students have identified that “even the existence of a nearby campus represented a step towards expanding and supporting student aspirations” (Alloway et al., 2004, p. 230). Furthermore, teachers indicated that, especially in families without prior experience of university, “it is a safe stepping stone to start off there” (at a local campus) (Alloway et al., 2004, p. 230). This was particularly so for families with no experience of university. Students valued an initial familiar, supportive environment, and for some teachers who were parents it was considered a stepping stone in terms of managing their finances, to support their child at university. That regional campuses can promote rural student enrolments in metropolitan campuses and vocational education institutions is a poorly recognised benefit which needs to be promoted by regional campuses. This is a reason for collaborative marketing activities.

The provision of alternative pathways to university has been a source of enrolments from people who had not completed secondary school or gained a tertiary entrance score sufficient to enrol in a degree program. Such pathways include UniSA's Foundation Studies Program, a pre-tertiary program of preparation for university studies, which has been offered through the MGRC since 2007. People studying through the MGRC also have two business associate degree options. Two-year associate degree programs allow greater accessibility to university studies for people without the usual entry requirements, and admission can also be gained upon completion of an award from TAFE at Certificate III level. Two-year programs can appear less daunting and more manageable than a three-year degree, particularly for mature-age students returning to study. Those successfully completing an associate degree can exit with that qualification or gain admission to the final year of a related three-year Bachelor degree.

Effective marketing has an important role to play in attracting students, as has already been mentioned, this needs to focus on benefits of local study and pathways to further study. As well as preparing future professionals, regional campuses can make a valuable contribution to meeting the postgraduate needs of local professionals. These may include postgraduate certificate, diploma, and coursework masters, as well as higher degrees by research as mentioned in the previous section. These opportunities also need to be promoted. If undergraduate students can see a learning pathway stretching beyond their graduation, this may also contribute to retaining them in the region, rather than losing them to other institutions offering the postgraduate study that they seek. Where resources for postgraduate teaching and potential student cohorts are limited, collaborative arrangements with metropolitan campuses providing relevant programs are necessary.

Collaborative arrangements are particularly suited to meeting demand for particular qualifications, where there are fluctuating local employment needs and "demand may be finite" (DEEWR, 2008, p. 111). In the Limestone Coast region, there is strong community support for the introduction of teaching and midwifery courses, and while the CRE may not have the capacity to provide these programs, dialogue is in progress with the metropolitan divisions and schools regarding the local delivery of some components, particularly in teaching. These arrangements would depend on effective collaboration with local stakeholders. It is a challenge for regional campuses to provide a rapid response to community demand when needing to apply "a rigorous process of analysis of need and development of a sustainable and cost-effective service in response" (DEEWR, 2008, p. 110). It has been the MGRC experience that ongoing engagement with the community and dialogue about possibilities is paramount. Such discussion has shown that there is ongoing local demand for face-to-face education, despite the growth of distance and online education and the broader education opportunities in the capital cities.

As has been mentioned above, the establishment of the MGRC depended on support and cooperation from a range of individuals and organisations within the Mount Gambier community and UniSA's senior management (including the Vice Chancellor of the time, who subsequently chaired the Review discussed here). Collocation with TAFE SA was essential, allowing the new operation to begin with shared facilities, including cafeteria and lecture rooms. Later building improvements allowed more independence for the MGRC, but a harmonious relationship was still necessary. Growth over recent times has meant that space is at a premium and timetabling challenging. If the centre is to continue to meet student expectations, there will need to be further development of facilities or new

resource sharing arrangements. As the Bradley Review identifies (DEEWR, 2008, pp. 111–112), demand for current programs and courses could diminish, and so resource sharing and responsiveness to changing community demand is necessary. Utilisation of university facilities for a range of education providers and community organisations will continue to be desirable, as resources permit, and the university needs to be able to respond to community demand for new programs.

The ability to respond to community needs is dependent on the university as a whole supporting the introduction of the programs required to meet current skills shortages, or at least supporting provision of part of the program in the regional area. As mentioned previously, teaching and engineering programs are under consideration. It is unlikely that demand would be sufficient to allow provision of a range of degree programs, such as arts and science, at least not in their entirety. The need to respond to diverse industry needs for education offerings can require multiple-university response and collaboration. In the year following the inception of the MGRC, degrees in environmental science and forestry were introduced by Southern Cross University (SCU), based in New South Wales, where it offered these programs (Pullin & Munn, 2006; Robinson, 2009). Initially SCU shared some MGRC resources, as well as those of TAFE and local schools.

The economic viability of the MGRC has strengthened over time. Of the CRE student enrolments in 2009, 45% were in Mount Gambier and 55% were in Whyalla; hence a large proportion of the CRE's income for regional students is generated by the MGRC. This is achieved with minimal duplication of administration services and so minimised operating costs; there is, however, a significant budget for staff travel between the two sites. The economic viability of the CRE is, in part, maintained by its capacity to balance costs and resources across the two sites; for example, the management of teaching teams as single units across both sites allows flexibility in workload allocation as student numbers fluctuate at each location. Viability is also strengthened by staff providing service teaching for distance education students enrolled at city campuses; this collaboration occurs with UniSA Schools since the CRE does not enrol external students in competition with other UniSA programs.

We are mindful that, in order to secure sustainability, it is not sufficient to attract new students: we must also retain them for the duration of their program. The retention rates for the first cohort were good, particularly for the nursing program, which achieved 96.8% retention of its first student group. The retention rate was 83.8% overall, with 16.2% withdrawing from their program; of the students who withdrew, 27.2% are known to have enrolled into other higher education programs. Maintaining high retention rates can be influenced by doing everything possible to ensure that students have a satisfying university experience – not only in the areas of teaching and learning, but also in all other aspects of university life. For students, this includes feeling that they belong in their study environment. As Tranter has shown (2002), in research based on Bourdieu's theory of reproduction in education, students coming from backgrounds where going to university has not been seen as a natural progression after school may find it difficult to fit in with the "climate" of some university campuses. Hence universities need to work towards an environment that is as inclusive as possible of a diverse student body (Tranter, 2002), and implement strategies to ensure that initial experiences of attending university are positive. If students are able to stay in their own region to study, they also have ease of access to the support of family and friends as well as the supports put in place by the university. Feedback from the first cohort of MGRC students indicated that they greatly appreciated the support from university staff,

which in some cases kept them from withdrawing, but also we learned that there were extra efforts needed to initiate more social activities. “Foster social connections” is one of ten principles advocated by Krause (2005, p. 13) for enhancing student engagement.

Sustainability of the MGRC will be achieved as it becomes seen as an integral part of the community. Ways of enhancing its visibility and connection with the wider community can include reaching out to and making links with community organisations not currently in a relationship with MGRC/UniSA. For example, a community organisation in Mount Gambier could be invited to develop a relationship of mutual benefit with the MGRC. In Whyalla, the local branch of the University of the Third Age has been sponsored by the Campus, has a dedicated meeting room there, receives various types of support (facilities, guest lecturers) and also contributes to undergraduate classes from time to time (e.g., as an audience for presentations by business students and as “patients” for nursing students) and members have volunteered to help with university activities such as open days (Ellis, 2009). Perhaps the possibility of establishing links with the Mount Gambier branch of the University of the Third Age could be investigated. More limited space and facility-sharing means that the capacity of the MGRC to undertake such activities will be limited, until further growth is achieved. School group visits are a community engagement activity which has been achievable: the exposure of students and teachers to the university raises their awareness of the higher education opportunities in their own region, and also provides experiential learning opportunities for nursing students. Other community relationships are being formed and strengthened through courses in business management and marketing that are being made available as intensive short courses for members of the community as well as for university students from other campuses.

University accommodation for students and visiting academics is also a key factor in strengthening a regional university presence, and is an aspiration for the MGRC. Student facilities will attract students who do not wish to move long distances, but could manage to be away from home for part of a semester or study period. Other more permanent stayers may be attracted by the current financial support available to students moving away from home. The availability of university accommodation would also strengthen the support available for international students, as yet another virtually untapped student market which would enhance the viability of the MGRC.

Sustainability of course is reliant on funding. The Bradley Review recommendation (16) for additional funding of regional higher education from 2012 to include “funding to develop innovative local solutions through a range of flexible and collaborative delivery arrangements” (DEEWR, 2008, pp. xx, 112), suggests that further development of this regional educational model may gain support. Recognition of the imperative to continually strive to engage with the community and develop further innovations and partnerships is central to meeting the opportunities of the future.

## **Conclusion**

In order to increase participation in higher education by students of low socioeconomic status, as desired by the Bradley Review, and increase the proportion of community members with degree qualifications, a clear way forward is for universities to continue to develop a broad range of flexible and creative opportunities for students, and to secure adequate funding. Within universities,

there needs to be collaboration across disciplines and schools, to allow responses that are outside the normal ways of working in metropolitan environments. In regional areas, community engagement needs to be the cornerstone of activity, with community involvement in needs analysis, collaborative arrangements to support new program development and implementation, and regional expertise being utilised, so that those programs meet current industry and community needs.

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