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Review of Australian Higher Education
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Dear Professor Bradley

This submission to the Higher Education Review relates to questions 25, 26 and 27 and is based on the past ten years of furthering the field of regional and community engagement through international and national research and publication, as an international institutional evaluator for the OECD, a national and international commentator on university/ regional engagement, as Vice-President of the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance (AUCEA) and as the only designated professor of regional engagement in Australia.

Our research (Garlick, Taylor and Plummer, 2007 and Taylor, Plummer, Bryson and Garlick, 2008), shows that relative regional growth in Australia over the past two decades has greatly diverged between a few large rapidly expanding metropolitan centres and many contracting non-metropolitan (rural and provincial) regions. This disparity in economic growth has become entrenched. The result nationally is twofold. First, aggregate national growth is being held back, and second, social and economic exclusion is exacerbated.

The research carried out into 94 Australian regions between 1984 and 2002 shows that only four drivers are significant determinants of regional economic growth. Of prime significance from a positive driver perspective is human capital. Many non-metropolitan regions in this country, in a rapidly changing global environment, are losing their human capital through graduate 'brain drain', out-commuting, underemployment and the non-engagement of the productive ageing.

In parallel with these shifts in relative regional economic growth and flows in human capital has been a general regionalisation of university campuses to the extent that there are more now than 160 such campuses, in their various forms, across Australia (Garlick 2000). Many regional areas now have relatively close physical access to a university campus. Many of these regionalised locations have resulted from an erroneous policy view that the equity concern of enhancing low higher education participation in certain locations could be turned around through 'simple' higher education location strategies.

More recently, there has been a pull-back from establishing regionalised campuses, and indeed there has been some closure, and others are looking less viable than they could be as institutions reflect on their financial futures. Should the current

approach to university location continue we might expect more campus retraction overtime.

A significant policy instrument to address the structural concerns of regional economies and higher education institutional viability in a regionalised environment and knowledge dominant world is to strengthen meaningful and purposeful engagement arrangements between higher education institutions and regional communities across the spectrum of economic, social, environmental and cultural priorities. Again however, the institutional response (through teaching and learning, research, innovation, and leadership) to this additional agenda has been partial and limited in focus due to some extent to the lack of a policy and funding environment that specifically focuses on this activity.

One would conclude therefore that as one of the core business activities of universities is to create human capital (knowledge on legs) and the key driver for regional growth in a global environment is human capital, that engagement (mutuality) around human capital creation and retention should be a central policy and strategy for regional and institutional viability. But what should be the focus and the direction of any engaged knowledge-based relationship between the university and its regional community in relation to human capital?

Most institutions and regions have approached this question in a closed and narrow sense. Universities have sought to mine local student numbers to fill self-determined courses only to exacerbate the brain drain and at best delay the inevitable drift of graduates to metropolitan centres or overseas by three or four years. Universities have also not sought to focus their course offerings to changing demographics (particularly an ageing population) or the specific needs of regional and global communities. Similarly, universities have also sought to partner in local projects with little impact on regional outcomes and are not focussed on national and global priorities.

What is required is an approach to university/ regional community engagement that fosters a unique focus in both institution and region that will not only enhance viability of institutions and their regions, but contributes to the common good and progresses some of the big issues of concern in the nation and world today through local initiative and human capital generation and retention. By offering courses and research programs that are globally and nationally relevant and uniquely address regional priorities by actively engaging to generate 'enterprising' outcomes, universities can be a vehicle to: (a) attract new knowledge workers from around the world with an interest in being involved in new knowledge-based ventures with priority in the region of global and national importance; and (b) attract those from the margins of regional society that have not traditionally seen a university education as relevant to their futures (social inclusion) within the community.

Given such an approach to university/ regional engagement, any funding policy model needs to be simply facilitatory in nature so that engaged partners with the university from around the world can be enrolled in a region's priority areas. The funding model would be a joined-up portfolio approach with lead-agency that draws on the national goals of central agencies with funding provided to a partnership plan of the university (or universities) and the region.

I am happy to expand on the aspects outlined above to the Committee should it be required.

Yours sincerely

Professor Steve Garlick PhD, FAUCEA

References:

Garlick, S., Taylor, M., and Plummer, P. (2007). *An enterprising approach to regional growth: Implications for policy and the role of vocational education and training*. NCVER, Adelaide (ISBN: 978 1 921170 69 0).

Taylor, M., Plummer, P., Bryson, J., and Garlick, S. (2008). "The role of universities in building local economic capacities", *Politics and Policy*, vol 36, No 2.