

**Business Higher Education Round Table
VIC Regional Engagement Forum
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The Community as Stakeholders

**A Regional Development
Community
Organisation's View**

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My apologies for not being able to make this presentation in person, but thanks to the wonders of modern technology I am able to be in two places at once. At the BHERT here in Bendigo and in Alice Springs at the Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia National Conference in Alice Springs.

In the context of today's theme community engagement is a very important issue for me, both in my professional capacity in the Central Victoria ACC as well as a personal belief that Australian universities, like their US counterparts, must engage and involve the broader community as key stakeholders if they are to survive.

I am also convinced that world class modern regionally-focused universities, which are able to combine research excellence, high quality teaching and have an external stakeholder service focus, are the key to building sustainable regional and rural communities. This view is supported by the *New Globalism* concept that is being promoted by the OECD.

At the heart of *New Globalism* is the recognition that the competitive advantage of developed economies is in their capacity to harness knowledge and to create national wealth through this knowledge. This wealth comes in two forms: the economic wealth, and the capacity of communities to sustain themselves (that is, the cultural, amenity, quality of life factors needed to sustain a cohesive sense of community and society).

New Globalism emphasises the importance of creating learning cities, learning communities. The OECD has identified four themes for knowledge-based regional development to occur. These are:

“Theme 1: Sustainable economic growth including the expansion of high quality jobs

The emergence of knowledge-based economies brings changes to the social networks and norms that sustain particular cities and regions. Social Capital can be understood as the glue that sustains these norms and networks. Strong social capital is now recognised as important to both productivity and building a competitive edge in a global context. A component of strong social capital is inclusive participation in democratic and market processes. Competitive cities and regions can be understood as being built upon both market and democratic participation. The creation of socially inclusive and prosperous cities and regions with strong social capital is a key to successful Learning Cities and Regions.

Theme 2: Social Inclusion and the Building of Social Capital

Strong linkages between education, training and high quality jobs are crucial in fostering Learning Cities and Regions. The strengths of these links will rely upon effective frameworks that enable life long and organisational learning.

The effectiveness of this learning will increasingly rely on the ability of education and training strategies to be flexible and responsive. Building strong links between innovative organisations, individuals and learning will be crucial to successful Learning Cities and Regions.

Theme 3: The role of different education and training strategies in fostering learning cities and regions

Strong linkages between education, training and high quality jobs is crucial in fostering a *Learning Cities and Regions*. The strengths of these links will rely upon effective frameworks that enable life long and organisational learning. The effectiveness of this learning will increasingly rely on the ability of education and training strategies to be

flexible and responsive. Building strong links between innovative organisations, individuals and learning will be crucial to successful *Learning Cities and Regions*.

Theme 4: An integrated approach to achieving good governance

The problems and opportunities presented by transitions to knowledge-based economies will alter the mechanisms through which policies are developed, coordinated, implemented and monitored. Policy making in this context should be spatial, strategic and crosscut (sic) areas such as training, education, industrial relations and R&D. Increasingly the importance of partnerships within and between governments and between government, business and communities to solve problems and take opportunities are coming to the fore. The ways in which changing social and economic conditions transform mechanisms of governance and when and how government should interact with market and social processes is important to create Learning Cities and Regions.”¹

I would add a fifth theme – **An integrated and broad research capacity that jointly engages the community and their higher education institutions in the continuous process of community capacity and wealth creation.**

How are we going in establishing this capacity in Regional Australia? I would contend that overall our score is barely a pass, with the exception of a few very engaged regional universities, we have a lot of work to do. The onus for improving our performance is primarily with the higher education sector – universities are primarily service organisations.

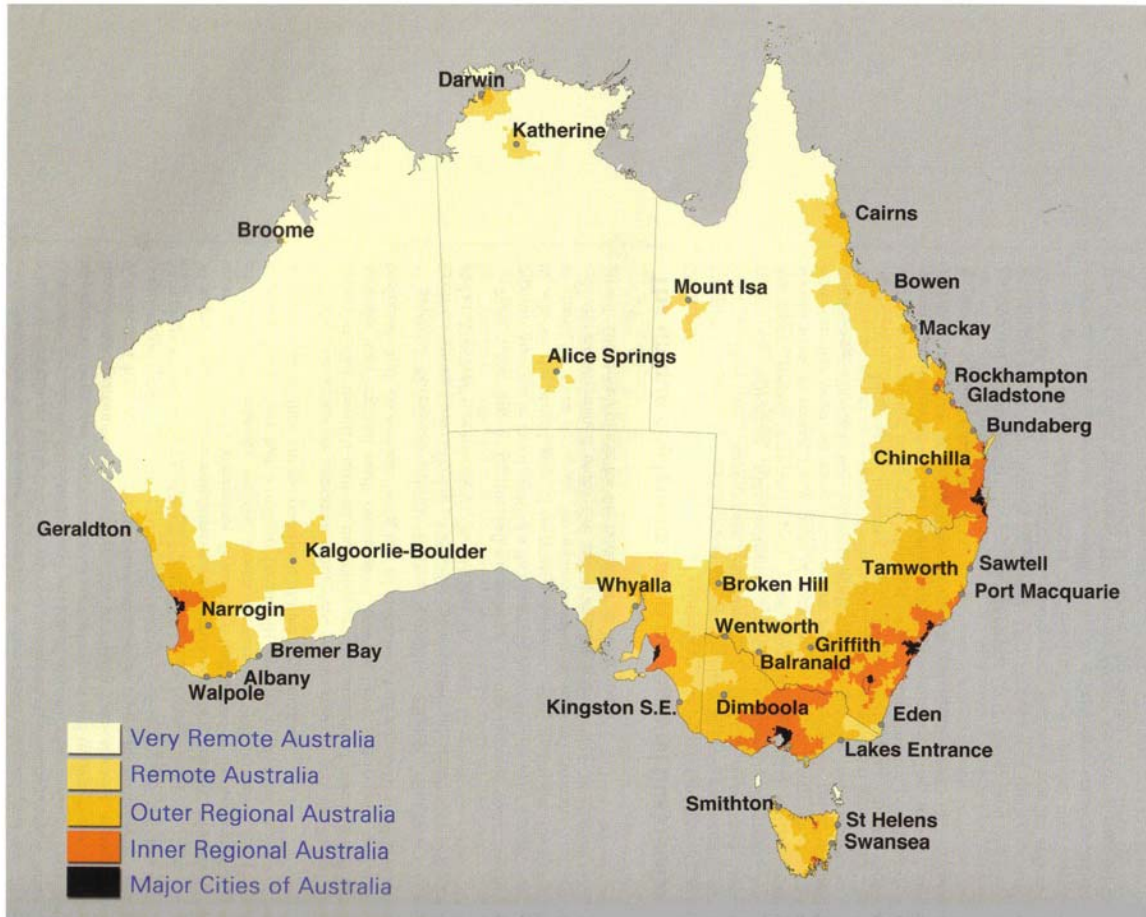
The core services provided by every university are: research and teaching.– the value derived from these services is a community/society wide benefit, and like all value-adding services the outcomes must have a tangible value to the individual service user and the community as a whole. **The real worth of a university is how it influences its external environment by creating an enriched community, where the community values the institution to the point whereby it claims “ownership” of that institution and seeks out every opportunity to collaborate with that institution in all aspects of both university and community endeavour.**

It is time this service ethic is engrained in the organisational culture of every university. Those members of universities who cannot accept this focus will not survive in the long-run because their institution will not survive itself without the funding it raises from its external stakeholders – dare I say its customers.

I have been directly involved in the change process of structural adjustment since the mid-1980s, it is now time for the Australian Higher Education Sector to face the reality of structural adjustment.

Recognising and engaging communities as key stakeholders is a significant challenge for universities globally. The issue is even more challenging in regional areas especially for those universities with both metropolitan and regional campuses. Regional Australia is defined by this map:

¹ OECD “Learning Cities & Regions Conference, October 2002
(<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/38/25/1937981.pdf>)



(Source: Figure 1 – Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (Plus) Classifications, Keniry 2003, p.3)

Approximately a third of the Australian population lives and works in regional Australia.

I can confidently state that we (universities and communities) are not good at this process and that the most successful universities in the future will be those institutions which perfect the *Scholarship of Engagement* for their particular environment.

Universities face the challenge of changing their core culture to become service-driven businesses. I can here you all groaning “not another private sector – *universities are businesses* – person who doesn’t understand what an academic is and does”.

My challenge then is to communicate my message and to challenge the traditional paradigm of university culture and the traditional role of the university. This is where consideration of the *scholarship of engagement* is relevant to each of us as stakeholders.

Traditionally, universities have the core business roles of research, teaching and service, with the priority in that order. Unfortunately, service is often seen as a “nice to have” priority, rather than a the priority on which teaching and research is determined. It is also evident that academic staff seeking promotion believe that their core role is research, research and more research!

I suggest that this model should be modified to include being a service-focused organisation that engages the community through its excellence and relevance as demonstrated by its research, teaching and service. To do this academics must spend

much of their time in the world of their external (i.e. non-university) community. Such social reality is confronting as well as challenging in that it means that each researcher and lecturer must be able to demonstrate why their work is of value, not just within their academic community, but also how it may be of benefit to the whole community. That is, every individual must be held directly accountable for ensuring that they are of value to the broader stakeholder interest as well as being responsible for communicating this worth beyond their immediate academic environment – this is scary stuff, because it brings an element of Darwinian reality to each of us in our respective roles.

Excellence must be the goal and so successful community engagement must be based on relevant rigorous research that is backed by genuine community commitment.

In an Australian regional context this means that our university campuses that are located outside the capital cities must give priority to focusing on engaging their regional community by:

- undertaking relevant and excellent research,
- offering graduate and post graduate programs that equip students with the knowledge and competency to operate in a highly competitive global world and
- providing the range of services that a university can offer that directly contribute to the sustainability of regional communities.

If these are achieved, regional institutions will be able to succeed in the national and global context – that is, *if you are not good enough at home, you won't cut it nationally nor internationally.*

That is, regional campuses have a direct responsibility to contribute to enhancing not only the vocational and scientific capability of their regional communities, but also to provide a base for being an important component in the vibrant cultural and social heart of sustainable communities.

In other words, everyone within a university from the Vice-Chancellor down must ensure that they are as relevant to and active in the broader community as they are within the cloistered university community. This is challenging stuff, because it also requires that the leaders must be willing to engage with their university's critics, not just a tame line of conga-line stooges.

To illustrate this I will use the work of the US Kellogg Commission's *Returning to Our Roots* project on the future of State and Land-Grant Universities. This project commenced in 1995, was in response to the recognition by the US National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges "that the US and its state and land-grant institutions were facing structural changes as deep and significant as any in history"².

The US State and Land-Grant Universities share the same dilemma and challenges that are faced by their regional counterparts in Australia. We therefore should look closely at the outcomes of the "Returning to Our Roots" project.

The project highlighted the need for significant areas of reform in the way regional higher education institutions organised themselves and delivered their services. These areas have been grouped under the following broad categories:

1. The Student Experience

² Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities,

2. Student Access
3. The Engaged Institution
4. A Learning Society
5. Toward a Coherent Campus Culture
6. Renewing the Covenant: Learning, Discovery, and Engagement in a New Age and Different World.

I will focus on the *Engaged Institution*.

As with their US counterparts, many Australian universities have a rich heritage of service to the nation. Over the last 50 years, several regional universities, have made a significant contribution to the research and knowledge of the nation. However, certainly here in Central Victoria, there is a feeling that this service effort is slipping and regional universities need to reengage their communities.

Australian institutions have expanded the learning and research opportunities that are available in regional areas – why change? The answer to the question of “why change” is twofold:

- Universities face a growing public frustration with what is seen to be their lack of responsiveness – driven by a perception that they are out of touch, out of date and insulated from the real needs of the communities they service.
- The perception that despite the resources and expertise that can be found in our universities, they are not well organised, especially in being able to work with external groups to resolve local problems in any coherent way – in short the managerial competence of universities is being more closely scrutinised than ever before and the worth of academic endeavour is not being adequately demonstrated to the community at large.

It is too easy for universities to dismiss their short-comings by using the excuses of:

- Enrolment pressures
- Funding constraints
- Demands for affordability and cost containment
- A growing emphasis on accountability and productivity
- Urgent request for solutions on all manner of issues

These issues are also faced by our US counterparts. The Kellogg Commission concluded that:

*it is time to go beyond outreach and service to what the Kellogg Commission defines as “engagement.” By engagement, we refer to institutions that have **redesigned their teaching, research, and extension and service functions to become even more sympathetically and productively involved with their communities, however community may be defined.***

*Engagement goes well beyond extension, conventional outreach, and even most conceptions of public service. Inherited concepts emphasize a one-way process in which the university transfers its expertise to key constituents. **Embedded in the engagement ideal is a commitment***

to sharing and reciprocity. By engagement the Commission envisions partnerships, two-way streets defined by mutual respect among the partners for what each brings to the table. An institution that responds to these imperatives can properly be called what the Kellogg Commission has come to think of as an “engaged institution.”

Kellogg Commission, Executive Summary, Jan 2001, p 14.

An engaged university can enrich the student experience and help change the university culture. It achieves this by broadening the opportunities faculties and students have in accessing research and new knowledge as well as by expanded access to internships and a range of off-campus learning opportunities.

To be engaged, a regional university must accomplish at least three things, it should:

1. Respond to the needs of today’s students and tomorrow’s, not yesterday’s – that is adopt a “demand” driven service model rather than the traditional (and intellectually lazy) supply driven model. This poses the real question that every university must ask themselves – ***How does the university listen and what competencies must it develop to be effective in its “listening”?***
2. Enrich students’ experiences by combining research and engagement in the curriculum and offering practical opportunities for students to prepare for the world they will enter – that is, demonstrate that “academic” endeavour is a factor in “real world” endeavour and actually is relevant in everyday community activity – this requires university management and academic staff to be active in the community and to have their performance measured against their personal and professional relevance to the communities that they service. Such a process is much more than “work experience” programs, it requires a genuine interaction of research opportunities and community need to create “real-world” teaching options for action learning throughout the community and across disciplines.
3. Focus its critical resources (knowledge and expertise) for work on the problems faced by the communities it serves.

Universities are service-driven organisations funded by the broader community, academic staff have an obligation to service the needs of their community before their personal professional desires – the leaders of universities where such service is not given the highest priority can expect to be replaced by better leaders who recognise and respond to community need.

(I can just hear a number of you saying – “he wants us to become a TAFE – we’d never have discovered penicillin, split the atom, etc. – wrong! So called “pure” research will continue to have a place, its just the community will be involved, because you need to ensure that they value this effort if the funding is to continue.)

As in the US, Australia’s regional universities need to become better at putting knowledge to work in contemporary regional society by adopting new and more responsive models for community engagement by:

1. Giving a clear commitment to the basic idea of engagement by modernising their historic mission and rigorously driving change. ***Are universities genuinely leaders of society or have they always followed?***

2. The infusion of engagement into the curriculum and teaching mission – regardless of discipline. This will include being ruthless in getting rid of any executive, academic and administration staff that cannot adapt.
3. Remarkable diversity in approaches and efforts – this recognises that engagement requires considerable local activity involving all staff from the Vice-Chancellor down. This is a process that must be demonstrated and led from the very top by real and effective action. The performance of regional universities and senior academic staff needs to be viewed from “ground level” and on the basis of the scope and diversity of their efforts to engage the community in the pursuit of academic and university service excellence.
4. Each university should clearly articulate their concept of “community” and how the University will relate to the external “world”.
5. Creating a leadership agenda and measuring the top leadership team’s performance against the achievement of the agenda. The agenda should be developed through broad engagement. This is not for the faint-hearted and must be given the highest priority as a core function of executive managers and be linked with continuing tenure or promotion.
6. Recognising that funding will always be an issue, but that a lack of funding is not a valid excuse for not taking action.
7. Making the right people accountable for achieving the desired level of performance – this is the most difficult element. Accountability for effective community engagement should be an essential criterion in faculty promotion and tenure. There should be no way for staff to avoid engaging the broader community.

Conversely, those who prove their expertise and capacity to fruitfully engage the community within a framework that contributes to both the external need to “solve” community problems as well as contributing to research and teaching excellence should be rewarded.

To measure community engagement, the Kellogg Commission developed a Seven-Part Test.

“1. Responsiveness. We need to ask ourselves periodically if we are listening to the communities, regions, and states we serve. Are we asking the right questions? Do we offer our services in the right way at the right time? Are our communications clear? Do we provide space and, if need be, resources for preliminary community-university discussions of the public problem to be addressed. Above all, do we really understand that in reaching out, we are also obtaining valuable information for our own purposes?

2. Respect for partners. Throughout this report we (Kellogg Commission) have tried to emphasize that the purpose of engagement is not to provide a university’s superior expertise to the community but to encourage joint academic-community definitions of problems, solutions, and definitions of success. Here we need to ask ourselves if our institutions genuinely respect the skills and capacities of its partners in collaborative projects? In a sense we are asking that we recognize fully that we have almost as much to learn in these efforts as we have to offer.

3. Academic neutrality. Of necessity, some of our engagement activities will involve contentious issues— whether they draw on our science and technology, social science

expertise, or strengths in the visual and performing arts. Do pesticides contribute to fish kills? If so, how?

How does access to high quality public schools relate to economic development in minority communities? These questions often have profound social, economic, and political consequences. The question we need to ask ourselves here is whether outreach maintains the university in the role of neutral facilitator and source of information when public policy issues, particularly contentious ones, are at stake.

4. Accessibility. Our institutions are confusing to outsiders. We need to find ways to help inexperienced potential partners negotiate this complex structure so that what we have to offer is more readily available. Do we properly publicize our activities and resources? Have we made a concentrated effort to increase community awareness of the resources and programs available from us that might be useful? Above all, can we honestly say that our expertise is equally accessible to all the constituencies of concern within our states and communities, including minority constituents?

5. Integration. Our institutions need to find way to integrate their service mission with their responsibilities for developing intellectual capital and trained intelligence. Engagement offers new opportunities for integrating institutional scholarship with the service and teaching missions of the university. Here we need to worry about whether the institutional climate fosters outreach, service, and engagement. A commitment to interdisciplinary work is probably indispensable to an integrated approach. In particular we need to examine what kinds of incentives are useful in encouraging faculty and student commitment to engagement. Will respected faculty and student leaders not only participate but also serve as advocates for the program?

6. Coordination. A corollary to integration, the coordination issue involves making sure the left hand knows what the right hand is doing. The task of coordinating service activities—whether through a senior advisor to the president, faculty councils, or thematic structures such as the Great Cities Project or “capstone” courses—clearly requires a lot of attention. Are academic units dealing with each other productively? Do the Science, Engineering, Education, Business, Health, Social Services and Regional Development faculties understand the engagement agenda? Do faculty, staff, and students need help in developing the skills of translating expert knowledge into something the public can appreciate.

7. Resource partnerships. The final test asks whether the resources committed to the task are sufficient. Engagement is not free; it costs. The most obvious costs are those associated with the time and effort of staff, faculty, and students. But they also include curriculum and program costs, and possible limitations on institutional choices. All of these have to be considered. Where will these funds be found? In special state allocations? Corporate sponsorship and investment? Alliances and strategic partnerships of various kinds with government and industry? Or from new fee structures for services delivered? The most successful engagement efforts appear to be those associated with strong and healthy relationships with partners in government, business, and the non-profit world.”

Kellogg Commission, Executive Summary, January 2001, p. 16

This model can be illustrated by the following diagram:



(Source: *A Common Agenda, to Strengthen the Relationship Between Higher Education and Society*, Facilitated through the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good (Updated July, 2004))

What then is the Australian Experience?

Research

The Winter 2004 edition of the Journal – *Sustaining Regions* indicated that recent (1998 - 2004) research on regional issues in Australia and internationally focused on the following areas:

- Labour market development and analysis (Australia:153, International: 33)
- Indigenous development (Australia:163, International:5)
- Technology transfer and industry clusters (Australia:43, International:10)
- Community Development (Australia:111, International:2)
- Social Sustainability and Services (Australia:42, International:6)
- Regional Analysis (Australia:20, International:0)
- Regional Governance (Australia:20, International:4)
- Environmental Management (Australia:43, International:8)

In assessing these areas of research, the Editorial found that the research process is influenced by a number of factors, including a reluctance of Government to engage with urban and regional development issues. It should also be noted that the sort of research that is being undertaken is a sad reflection on the nature of regional policy and practice in Australia. The Editorial research found that the translation from research into policy implementation in Australia is “not particularly strong” (p.3). This surely brings into question the effectiveness of regional (and capital city) universities in engaging their communities.

The Journal identified the following research gaps:

- Regional Economic Modelling, (not withstanding La Trobe’s Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities’ REMPLAN[®] - which is a very useful tool)
- Forecasting the Social, Economic and Environmental Futures of Regions
- Innovation and mechanisms for technology diffusion
- Health outcomes and the physical and social environment
- Social well being and regional processes
- Regional labour markets as drivers of social and economic outcomes

I would add a number of other areas:

- Entrepreneurship and venture finance for SME’s in regional and rural Australia
- Community sector enterprises as modelled by the activities of Bendigo Bank’s Community Development Australia
- Community services provision as a multi-disciplinary issue (public health, nursing, social work)
- Culture and arts
- Transport
- Telecommunications
- Land use and population (particularly the future demographic implications for the sustainability of regional communities and industries)
- Water use and irrigation, including the economics of water and water use – particularly in developing methods to determine end product consumption of water
- Affordable housing as a regional development issue, including design, efficiency and distribution
- Alternative energy, particularly fuel cell and renewable energy generation for regional self sufficiency
- Agribusiness, science and biotechnology
- Value-add business processes for regional economies
- Education and training – particularly how to meet the future retaining needs of an aging workforce
- Community capacity building and sustainability

I could go on The point I am making is that our regional universities have an almost infinite range of research opportunities that absolutely lend themselves to “community engagement”, all they need to do is to get out there and develop strong links with their community stakeholders.

“Oh but we don’t have the funding”, I hear you say – The reality is that funding has been and will always be a challenge, but if universities are effective in engaging their community stakeholders then funding will be less of a problem. The reality of the new age we are in is that academic staff are no longer insulated from the “real world” discipline facing almost every working person that requires them to generate the funds to pay for their “labours”.

That is, “funding” is no longer someone else’s problem, so academic staff must take personal responsibility for raising the funds for their work. This means that community engagement is as much a matter of survival as an appropriate and desirable means of operating.

Teaching

Universities should be the centre of teaching excellence and based on three broad ideals. They must become:

1. *Genuine learning communities* which support and inspire faculty, staff and students
2. *Student centred*, with a commitment to teaching excellence and meeting the legitimate needs of students, wherever they are, whatever they need and whenever the need it³
3. *A healthy learning environment* by providing students, faculty and staff with the facilities, support and resources they need to excel

Universities have a public obligation to provide excellent higher education teaching. Accordingly every regional university should base its operations on the following principles:

- *A learning community* which is oriented around its learners’ needs and provides an excellent learning environment.
- *Access and opportunity* for its community.
- Providing *an education of value* based on standards of excellence and which provides graduates with an education providing the skills, attitudes and values for them to be successful in their careers and good community members with a commitment to life-long learning.
- *Containing costs* to maximise the effectiveness of resources.
- *Accountability*, as a prudent steward of public and stakeholder resources, for its performance and relevance.
- *Able to meet new needs and flexibility in quickly adapting to an ever changing environment*, by adapting its operations to suit the community and student needs by meeting the face to face through to distance education needs of students using a

³ Kellogg, *The Student Experience*, pviii.

service delivery model that determines hours based on student demands rather than organisational preferences.

- *Flexibility and responsiveness* as demonstrated by a commitment to developing new partnerships and collaborations, improving governance structures to better meet teaching, research and service obligations, to work better and more collaboratively with its many stakeholders and to respond to change and emerging need – all of this requires a commitment to greater flexibility by the university academic and administrative staff. This flexibility must become ingrained in the behaviours of university leaders and staff⁴.

Service

If a regional university ensures that it actively engages its community stakeholders and adopts a service delivery model that is “demand” rather than “supply” driven, and achieves the principles outlined above, it will have achieved its service objectives. Evidence will be seen by:

- Academic and administrative staff getting out and about.
- Community “ownership” of the regional campuses resulting in stakeholders seeing issues such as funding, resources, university priorities, teaching, research and engagement as community wide rather than simply a “university” issues. Your stakeholders will become your greatest advocates and supporters, they will actively pursue every avenue to ensure that “their” regional university is well funded, resourced and respected.
- The relevance of research being undertaken as well as the fee for service work being undertaken.

Properly managed “service” delivery by a university will become its key strength.

What then should a regional university campus in Australia be?

I would suggest the following regional development/service delivery model:

1. A university in a regional location should be more than a metropolitan-based institution’s campus. It must offer courses, undertake research and provide services as would any other university in addition to its economic and social contribution to the region in which it is located.
2. A regional university must be distinctive in the context(s) in which it operates. It must:
 - a. strive to offer an university education based on excellence that is relevant to its stakeholder community(s), and
 - b. be an important link between its region and global networks of knowledge and a means by which the stakeholder community(s) can connect to the world: *it can do this best when it is truly connected and responsive to its own regional community(s).*
3. Resources will ultimately limit the endeavour of a regional university.

While it is not realistic for a regional university to compete with major metropolitan institutions, the resources available in the region offer opportunities that can

⁴ Kellogg, *The Student Experience*, p.x

contribute to a distinctive regional model of university education. Innovation implies a better use of available resources rather than simply more resources.

4. Identity, service and relevance to its stakeholder communities are the differentiating factors which will define a regional university.

A regional location offers both an identity and the potential for local “ownership” of the university that is less readily achieved in a metropolitan context. Relevance in courses and research are the means for strengthening the region and the sense of ownership. Research and teaching programs should not simply be generic versions of capital city based programs unless these meet the needs of the local community interest. Generic programs probably indicate a lack of market awareness and institutional laziness.

The significant further dimension of a regional university is in the service role it plays within its regional community.

5. The *service dimension* of a regional university.

All universities claim a service role in addition to their more prominent teaching and research activities. Past assessments have concluded that, although there were many worthy activities being undertaken, these were more *ad hoc* than as a result of a structured and strategic institutional commitment for the delivery of services that were relevant to stakeholder community needs.

Universities are part of the service sector of the economy, a factor that is acknowledged in their search for funding from sources other than government and in their increasingly competitive marketing.

Service delivery in rural and regional Australia is an issue that is much broader and more complex than simply the provision of higher education teaching services. Regional universities are major economic drivers in their regions – if the Bendigo experience can be taken as indicative, the contribution that a large campus makes in a regional centre is out of all proportion to the direct and multiplier effects of their expenditure⁵.

6. A service-based/regional development model of regional university campus.

- a. The model is of a “home” campus linked widely throughout the region via an *extension office* which drives community engagement by the university with community stakeholder groups. For this to happen the *extension office* must have the organisational authority to organise and harness resources and direct academic activity, the challenge will be that the “operators” in these extension offices will often not be recognised academics, but skilled business development professionals who are more skilled than traditional academics at matching stakeholder needs to academic endeavour in a way that is relevant to the broad needs of the community.

- b. The research activities of the university, its affiliated universities and other research organisations are connected through the *extension office* and subsequently to regional needs and opportunities. This must be a 2-way connection. A local example can be seen in the Birchip Cropping Group – in this case farmers were not able to get the research they needed, so, through a cooperative arrangement, they

⁵ REMPLAN©, Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities, La Trobe University

pooled their resources to commission work on their research priorities and have now created a demand-driven research agenda where are researchers literally beating a path to their door.

- c. Many existing courses in a regional university are already strongly connected to their corresponding regional industries: teacher and nurse student placements are probably the main examples. Here in Bendigo, as with most other regional Australian university campuses there are a number of industry-based learning arrangements, These operate on a course-by-course basis and connect individual students to specific industry or professional practice locations. The next step in improving this model is for a coordinating base at the university, the *extension office*, and a network of *regional extension centres* which connect to regional communities, not just the specific course-workplace connection.
- d. The last component of this extension-service model is to link the delivery of many government services, particularly those of federal and state service delivery/industry development departments which while largely operating as “silos”, have direct interests in the education and training activities of the regional university, and are, in many cases, partners in these activities and have active research programs of their own.
- e. The free-flow of expertise between the university and its regional community could also see the extension office function as a learning and research “transit lounge/marriage broker”.

By linking (i) research, education and training with (ii) industry needs and service delivery in a (iii) whole-of-community context can only benefit all stakeholders.

This then is the challenge: how do we achieve a coordinated regional development and service delivery model in regional university campuses?

As long as we fight on many fronts to maintain the range of services to which we claim regional communities are entitled, we face a losing battle against what are, within a “silo” mindset, perfectly understandable service-delivery decisions in the face of departmental budget cuts. And so jobs decline and communities slowly disappear ... and services are wound down at ever increasing rates. It is about turning the argument around and building communities not focusing on maintaining services, just as “strong communities make strong banks” (Rob Hunt, Bendigo Bank), so also strong regional communities can make strong and relevant regional universities.

In concluding I should make the following requests of our universities with regional campuses:

1. Recognise that regional needs are not always the same and that a great deal of worthwhile research and learning can occur in regional areas and off campus by directly involving stakeholder communities.
2. Institutions must transform their thinking about service, so **engagement becomes a core business priority of every campus and every faculty**. This process should be used to transform the academic and organisational cultures. People who are unwilling and or unable to adapt should not remain in the system.
3. Every regional campus should have an engagement plan measured against criteria modelled on the “Seven-Part Test” developed by the Kellogg Commission. Performance reviews of Vice-Chancellors, executive teams and

academic staff should be linked to achieving a satisfactory level of community engagement.

4. Universities should encourage interdisciplinary scholarship and research, including the creation of interdisciplinary teaching and learning opportunities which incorporate a requirement for measurable community engagement.
5. University leaders should develop incentives that encourage and require faculty involvement in the engagement process. These incentives should reward performance.
6. Academic leaders should provide secure stable funding to support the engagement process by reallocating existing funds and actively seeking additional funding specifically for community engagement activities.

I must emphasise that my comments are not a call to reduce academic excellence and reduce the standing of regional universities – many would argue, that, by avoiding community engagement regional universities are reducing their standards as well as their relevance anyway.

My underlying point today is that our regional universities are important and play a key role in ensuring the economic and societal health of rural and regional Australia – the problem is that many institutions operating regional campuses are letting themselves and their communities down and unless they change direction and become genuinely responsive to and part of their local communities, one must ask the question why should they exist.

It is up to regional campuses of Universities to take the initiative for university leaders to personally show leadership and model community engagement.

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