



Mr B Burmester
Manager, Higher education Group
Department of Education, Science and Training

c/o Michelle.Harmos@dest.gov.au

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Dear Mr Burmester

Model for distributing new higher education places

I attach this university's submission on a model for distributing new higher education places which may be summarised thus:

- 1 the model should be multi-layered, applying different considerations at each level or stage of decision making;
- 2 the first level or stage of the allocation should generally be to statistical divisions but in some cases it should be to statistical subdivisions, where the first principle should be access moderated by higher education preparedness, higher education demand and population density;
- 3 where there is more than one institution within a statistical division or subdivision a second stage of decision making will be needed between institutions which should be made according to institutional performance, availability of infrastructure and availability of programs;
- 4 the Commonwealth may wish to specify the disciplines in which places should be allocated within institutions, in which case a third level of decision making will be needed which should be based on student demand, labour force considerations, and the importance of disciplines.

I am happy for this submission to be published. You may verify the submission with Gavin Moodie, Vice Chancellor's office, Griffith University, NATHAN, 4111, G.Moodie@griffith.edu.au, fax 07 3875 7507, ph 07 3875 5482.

Yours sincerely

Glyn Davis
Vice Chancellor

Model for distributing new higher education places

Multi layered model

The model for distributing new higher education places should be multi-layered, applying different considerations at each level or stage of decision making. This is illustrated in the following table.

DECISION-MAKING LEVELS FOR DISTRIBUTING NEW HIGHER EDUCATION PLACES

Level	Criteria
1 Between statistical divisions	Access, moderated by higher education preparedness, higher education demand and population density.
2 Between institutions	Institutional performance, availability of infrastructure, availability of program.
3 Within institutions	Student demand, labour force considerations, importance of discipline.

Level 1: allocation to geographic areas

The first stage should be allocations to geographic areas. The primary geographic entity for allocating higher education places should be statistical divisions, although we shall see that other entities will be needed for some more specific allocations. There are 57 statistical divisions, which is a reasonable number to handle in a national model. States/Territories are too large since they disguise considerable variations within State/Territories. Just for illustrative purposes consider the number of people in each statistical division studying on campus in the statistical division as a proportion of the statistical division's total population. While these figures from the 1996 census are dated, they are readily accessible for the purposes of general discussion since they are published in the *Atlas of higher education: a community focus* (Cumpston et al, 2001). The table below shows that while Queensland would need an additional 9,304 places to reach the Australian average participation rate, bigger changes would be needed within the State. As with all other States/Territories a strictly proportional allocation of higher education places per population taking into account no other relevant factor would require a reallocation from the capital city statistical division to all other divisions.

TABLE 1: CHANGES TO NUMBER OF PLACES IN QUEENSLAND STATISTICAL DIVISIONS TO REACH AUSTRALIAN AVERAGE PARTICIPATION RATE, 1996

Statistical Division	Population	People studying in area on campus	Participation rate	Difference to reach Aust. average	Population density 1999 persons/km ²
AUSTRALIA	17,739,118	468,472	2.64%	0	2.5
Queensland	3,316,935	78,227	2.4%	9,304	2.0
Brisbane	1,477,013	53,450	3.6%	-14,500	340.9
Moreton	628,151	9,886	1.6%	6,700	38.4
Wide Bay-Burnett	224,921	1,396	0.6%	4,550	4.5
Darling Downs	192,877	3,215	1.7%	1,870	2.2
South West (QLD)	26,602	103	0.4%	600	0.1
Fitzroy	178,783	2,428	1.4%	2,300	1.5
Central West (QLD)	13,213	30	0.2%	319	0.1
Mackay	123,356	721	0.6%	2,540	1.8
Northern (QLD)	192,306	4,552	2.4%	520	2.0
Far North	221,501	2,392	1.1%	3,450	0.8
North West	38,212	54	0.1%	955	0.1

Sources: *Cumpston et al (2001) Atlas of higher education: a community focus, ABS (2000) Regional population growth 1998-99.*

As will be evident from the table above, statistical divisions vary considerably in population size and density. Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide all have populations over 1 million and all have population densities of more than 300 people per km², whereas 10 rural and remote divisions have populations of less than 50,000 and population densities of less than 2.2, and most less than 1 person per km². Even some medium sized statistical divisions include more than one campus. Thus the statistical division of Morton which rings Brisbane comprises the statistical subdivisions of Gold Coast City part B which contains Griffith University's Gold Coast campus, Sunshine Coast which contains the University of the Sunshine Coast and Moreton SD Bal SSD which contains part of the catchment for QUT's Caboolture campus.

TABLE 2: STATISTICAL LOCAL AREAS AND ESTIMATED RESIDENT POPULATION, 1999

Statistical subdivision	Population	Population density persons/km ²
Gold Coast City Part B SSD	348,402	314.9
Sunshine Coast SSD	172,928	376.3
Moreton SD Bal SSD	154,595	9.6
TOTAL MORETON SD	675,925	38.4

Source: *ABS (2000) Regional population growth 1998-99*

It will therefore be necessary to apply the model by statistical subdivisions in some cases, and perhaps by aggregations of statistical subdivisions in the large capital cities.

The first criterion in allocating places to geographic areas should be to provide reasonably equal access, measured, say, by participation rates for 18 to 24 year olds. However, a simple allocation of places by participation rates alone encounters a number of difficulties. The statistical division in Queensland which would need the 3rd largest number of additional places to give it a participation rate equal to the rest of Australia is the far north, comprising most of Cape York. This district has low school retention rates to year 12 and correspondingly lower student demand. Its university preparedness is therefore somewhat low and the district could not in the short to medium term make the best use of all the additional places needed to increase its participation rate to the national average. Furthermore, the far north is also a very large geographic area so allocating additional places just to the Cairns campus would not necessarily improve access for people in Cape York. The district is comparatively sparsely populated, so a full campus in central Cape York would probably not be cost effective while university preparedness is so low.

The primary criterion of student access therefore needs to be moderated by higher education preparedness, higher education demand and population density.

Level 2: between institutions

Statistical divisions and subdivisions and even statistical local areas aren't always appropriate geographic units for distributing places because some proximate campuses are in different statistical divisions. Thus the University of Southern Queensland's main campus at Toowoomba is in the Darling Downs statistical division, whereas the University of Queensland's Gatton College is only 38 kilometres away in the Moreton statistical division. So if places were allocated to the Toowoomba-Gatton region a second level of allocation would need to be made between institutions.

At this stage allocations should be made by institutional performance such as student demand and retention, the availability of space and other infrastructure to reduce the need for capital expansion, and where relevant, the availability of any program such as education or nursing to which the Government may wish to allocate places specifically.

Level 3: within institutions

Having allocated places to an institution Government may wish to specify in a third level of decision making where in the institution those places are to be allocated. The first criterion for allocating places within institutions should be student demand.

While it is tempting to try to allocate places according to anticipated labour force needs, Governments in Australia and everywhere else in the world have had indifferent experience in anticipating labour force needs. The Commonwealth's decision in August 2001 to allocate innovation places to information technology seemed unassailable at the time, but within 12 months seemed less secure.

The Commonwealth may finally have a view on the importance or worth of different fields of education, preferring, for example, to allocate places to the liberal arts and sciences over applied fields.

References

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