

REVIEW OF REGIONAL LOADING – ISSUES FOR REGIONAL PROVISION

Response from Griffith University

Griffith University welcomes the Australian Government’s review of the current regional loading policy and its commitment to developing a new, more logical and transparent basis for funding. This submission argues that a new policy should focus on the cost of provision of higher education in institutions located outside of inner metropolitan areas and is based on the actual cost of delivery.

The data presented in the papers requesting submissions to the review simply underline the reality that the current policy is confused and confusing. There are numerous instances nationally of some institutions being funded because they are defined as “regional” but others are not funded despite being in noticeably similar circumstances. Alternately, dissimilar institutions are treated similarly. Griffith argues the solution does not lie in trying to patch over the current problem through developing a different definition of “regional”, but by recognising the program is basically flawed by its lack of objectivity, is open to manipulation and should be completely redrawn. This is not to argue that many institutions in non-metropolitan areas do not face particular costs in delivering educational services and should be funded accordingly.

A number of the issues raised by the Bradley report regarding the provision of higher education in regional Australia also apply to outer metropolitan campuses. These are:

- The increased costs associated with smaller scale campus operations
- Relatively low student numbers
- High proportion of students from a low socio-economic status (SES) background
- Difficulty in attracting students due to limited range of academic offerings and competition from large metropolitan based campuses.

The Bradley Report also pointed to the need for a sustainable system of higher education provision in regional and remote areas that “anticipates and responds rapidly to local needs”.

This submission proposes that the new policy should be based on the actual cost of providing higher education in outer-metropolitan, regional and remote locations. The current policy is based on the proposition that regional and remote campuses incur significant cost differentials due to remoteness, small scale, cost of goods and services, and lack of other services normally found in major metropolitan centres. Griffith argues that these variables should be refined and carried forward into the new scheme, but that any financial support should be evidence based. Accordingly, it is proposed that a set of indices should be developed that measures the actual cost of provision of higher education in these locations and that this information should drive the new loadings policy.

Responses to Key Discussion Points

How can regional higher education provision be defined so as to distinguish it from metropolitan higher education provision?

The fundamental issue is finding an acceptable and objective way of assessing costs associated with running non-metropolitan institutions because of their location. Relevant variables include distance from State capitals and other population centres, climate, accommodation, transport, general costs of service delivery, the SES profile of the catchment population and so on. Broad categorisations of regional/not regional do not capture these fine grained and critical variables.

Some institutions located in near-metropolitan or outer-metropolitan locations will face particular costs because of where they are located and the nature of their catchment populations. They should not be disadvantaged in funding decisions because they fall outside a definition of “regional”. They include some that are part of multi-campus institutions with both metropolitan and outer metropolitan campuses and some that stand alone. These situations should be dealt with on their merits.

Any set of criteria for making funding decisions should be based on the principle of equity. Institutions that are genuinely remote require special consideration.

Should the definition of ‘regional higher education provision’ include those higher education students from regional and remote areas who attend a metropolitan higher education institution?

No. Such students do not incur extra costs for metropolitan higher education institutions that are not already addressed under other policies.

How effective are the regional loading eligibility criteria used prior to 2007 in identifying those regional universities and campuses that require assistance in a demand driven system?

What criteria do you recommend be used to define a regional campus so that funding can more effectively respond to the costs of regional higher education provision?

The criteria discussed in the above two questions should be discarded and replaced by criteria in line with the new policy proposed in this submission. The difficulty of reaching a universally acceptable definition of “regional” is precisely why the current program is flawed and why a different basis should be adopted.

How effective is the MCEETYA method for classifying metropolitan, regional and remote students (based on home post code) for identifying those higher education students who should be classified as regional or remote?

One of the issues associated with the current methodology is that it relies on students identifying their 'permanent' home address. Anecdotal evidence suggests that while students relocating in order to attend university might identify their parental home as their permanent address this may change as they remain at University, especially as they establish themselves in the local area with employment and accommodation.

In their 2004 report, James et al.¹ suggested that the use of the 'Rural, Remote and metropolitan Areas Classification' was outdated: (2004:27). They cite the work of Jones (2002)² which recommends the use of three categories; Metropolitan, Provincial and Remote, which can also be further broken into seven sub-categories. Recommendations 7, 8 and 9 remain relevant to this discussion.

In what ways does the proximity of a regional higher education presence affect access and participation rates for regional and remote students? Please provide any evidentiary materials if available.

Once again the work of James et. al. (2004) provides a succinct summary of recent research about the impact that proximity to a regional campus might have on access and participation. They argue that using a measure based on 'distance from a campus (e.g. 'high', 'medium', 'low') as proposed by Western et al. (1998)' . . . is inappropriate.' (James et al., 2004:27). The experiences of students living in relatively close proximity to the outer metropolitan Logan campus of Griffith University support this claim. A number of the suburbs in close proximity to the campus are identified by Vinson³ as experiencing entrenched social disadvantage. Students frequently identify issues such as limited access to affordable rental accommodation, employment options and accessible public transport as being factors that limit their access to their preferred programs. James' et al conclude that '...a proximity-based access indicator would fail to measure important patterns of educational advantage and disadvantage...' (James et al. 2004:28)

¹ James, R. (2004) Analysis of *Equity Groups* in Higher Education 1991-2002, p.27

² Jones, R. (2002). *Identifying Higher Education Students from Low Socio- Economic Status Backgrounds and Regional and Remote Areas*. Canberra: DEST.

³ Vinson, T. (2007) *Dropping off the edge*: Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia.

In what ways can higher education institutions, schools and VET providers work more collaboratively in regional and remote areas to improve educational attainment, broaden higher educational aspirations and increase young people's awareness of the available career and study opportunities? Please describe any examples of good practice.

What challenges and opportunities does the Bradley Review recommendation that regional higher education providers improve their outcomes and sustainability through collaboration and partnerships with other providers including VET and schools, offer regional higher education providers in their efforts to provide quality teaching and learning? In your response please provide examples of good practice such as the use of shared infrastructure and resources; co-location; joint delivery; pathways and applications of credit transfer.

Griffith University has established an Educational Partnerships Portfolio to develop and implement strategies to widen participation and partnership activities with a particular focus on schools, VET and communities in the Logan-Gold Coast corridor. Griffith also has a relationship with Brisbane's South Bank Institute of Technology which it is seeking to develop further.

Existing student outreach and support programs and initiatives include the Uni-Reach project aimed at encouraging younger high school students to consider undertaking higher education studies, the Mata I Luga project focussed on building aspirations in Pacifica high school students, partnering with the Logan-based Excellence Now in Albert Beaudesert Logan Education (ENABLE) schools coalition by offering access to campus amenities and teaching facilities for student classes, experience days, health education support via the annual Health4Life Challenge, and the Hip, Hop, Hype program.

It is intended to expand the collaboration with local schools around a broadly-based program aimed at students, their families and the broader community to build aspiration for undertaking higher education studies.

Griffith University has worked closely with its TAFE and private provider partners to develop numerous pathways for students, including dual offer arrangements for students enrolling in programs such as Nursing and Human Services. These arrangements include sharing teaching facilities on the Logan campus.

An MOU between TAFE Queensland and Griffith University in 2002 committed both parties to facilitate access by TAFE students to degree programs, with credit for TAFE studies. Griffith is the only tertiary educational provider in the Logan region, and Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE (MSIT) is the largest vocational, training organisation in the Logan region. Both provide wide-ranging and unique educational pathway opportunities for students including articulation and reverse articulation pathways for vocational and university students. The number of students awarded credit transfer into Griffith degrees based on prior TAFE studies for the Gold Coast and Logan regions from 2007-2009 are as follows:

	2009	2008	2007
Gold Coast Institute of TAFE (GCIT)	236	193	172
Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE (MSIT)	234	178	188

What impacts are enhancements to the National Broadband Network likely to have on higher education delivery and services in regional areas? Consider issues such as costs, accessibility, integrating services with other providers such as schools and VET, and partnerships with government, industry and business.

No comment.

What differences in costs do providers incur in providing quality higher education in regional areas (including in the flexible and blended modes), compared to metropolitan areas? In what ways are regional operations affected by the amount of funding available? Please provide examples and evidence of additional costs that can be directly attributable to regional provision.

No comment.

To what extent are the additional costs of regional higher education attributable to operation in regional and remote areas as distinct from the costs resulting from a multi-campus operational model? Please provide any available data to verify your response.

No comment.

What are some elements of a funding model which could be put in place to replace the current regional loading, so that the funding most effectively supports regional higher education provision and targets greatest need? Consider issues such as whether funding should be institutionally or student centred; whether it should be provided through a formula or a competitive grant; or whether funding should be subject to reaching performance targets negotiated with each institution; or any combination of the above.

A set of indices should be developed that would be used at the level of individual institutions and reflect as accurately as possible the actual costs of higher education provision for outer metropolitan, regional and remote locations. Funding would be provided through a formula based on a set of indices at the institutional level.

There is little justification for the use of competitive grants, or performance funding, to deal with an issue as fundamental as the differential cost of provision of higher education services unless the whole system is subject to such an approach. This is not recommended.