

Gippsland Tertiary Education Review

Report on the consultation
process of the Tertiary
Education Plan for Gippsland,
Victoria



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1. Introduction

In May and June 2011, the Expert Panel received a total of 34 written submissions from a broad range of stakeholders across Gippsland on how they see the challenges and issues facing tertiary education in the region. These submissions helped to inform the Discussion Paper on a Tertiary Education Plan for Gippsland, Victoria which was released on 15 August 2011.

The Discussion Paper outlined the case for change in Gippsland, detailing the student, employment and population profiles for the region, along with information on future economic development and industry change in the region. The paper also presented a number of choices around the way forward for institutional arrangements and other issues that will require attention such as tertiary education and industry collaboration, educational aspirations, adult learners and programs at Years 11 and 12.

Between 23 August and 01 September 2011, consultations were held across Gippsland to consider the issues outlined in the Discussion Paper.

A series of public forums were held in Leongatha, Morwell, Sale and Bairnsdale, which were well attended by a range of interested parties, including education providers in the region, Local Learning Employment Networks, industry and employers, teachers, parents and students. The Expert Panel met with over 120 attendees during these forums.

The consultations also included two lunchtime meetings with principals of regional secondary schools, a meeting with representation of all six Local Government Areas, a meeting with the Committee for Gippsland, a working dinner with some stakeholders in the Gippsland east region, and industry visits with Burra Foods and the National Centre for Dairy Education Australia.

This paper reports back on this consultation process, providing an outline of the discussions under the headline of each forum.

2. Public forums

Leongatha Public Forum – 24 August 2011

The Leongatha public forum was held in the Wildflower Training Café at the GippsTAFE Leongatha campus. Attendance was approximately 31 people.

Professor Lee Dow opened the forum by outlining issues regarding tertiary education provision in Gippsland. He asked participants to share with the Expert Panel some specific issues around education in South Gippsland. Professor Lee Dow also noted that students in Gippsland bypass local campuses to attend metro providers.

Barriers

One participant highlighted that while South Gippsland might look more advantaged than other areas of Gippsland there are still issues regarding low aspirations and student retention rates.

A major theme discussed during the public forum was the various barriers that exist for students in Gippsland to access higher education. Physical location was highlighted as a major concern, as the need to either travel long distances or leave home were often too great a barrier to overcome by students and their families. Participants argued that 17 was very young for a student to leave home to pursue educational opportunities as the support from families was lost, often resulting in the student dropping out. The need to improve the transition to tertiary education by Gippsland students was viewed as achievable when students could remain at home, particularly for the first year of a course.

The need to raise the aspirations of parents as well as children was highlighted a number of times and low aspirations were linked with a high rate of course deferral.

Affordability of education was cited as a major barrier and concerns were raised regarding its exclusion from the scope of the project.

Delivery Options

The Expert Panel were encouraged to consider blended learning options and the idea of bringing a university to young people was noted as important along with an increase in course offering.

One participant shared the view that any delivery model should ensure progression through education is as simple as possible.

Another mode of delivery suggested to the Expert Panel was for students to undertake a general university degree and then undertake a relevant VET course for industry specific training.

The Expert Panel was asked to consider the Scottish education model of the University of the Highlands and Islands. This model seeks to ensure that education is accessible for all students at every level through blended learning. In addition courses are not placed in a hierarchy.

The option of blended delivery was further discussed by participants particularly in regards to the changing environment of learning. The ability for courses to be delivered online due to increasing technology was seen to be a vital step. The National Broadband Network was also raised as a method for addressing transport issues which exist in the region.

Industry Demand

The view was presented by one participant that more students in Gippsland are studying VET courses because this is directly related to the jobs in the region.

Higher Education

When asked whether young people should be encouraged to undertake higher education or undertake TAFE studies, participants stated that it was important to note that TAFE was a form of higher education, although they acknowledged VET is different to university. Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas were cited as a useful way to articulate through to a different form of learning.

GippsTAFE shared its vision of seeing the language around TAFE education being reversed, by allowing advanced diplomas and diplomas to be the first year of a university degree. It was noted that career advisors do not often mention TAFE as a first option, rather an attitude that it is a choice of last resort is often espoused.

Pathways

The need to develop partnerships, pathways and industry involvement was a key consideration at the public forum. It was noted that it was essential to firstly improve the aspiration of students to increase engagement and this could be done through partnerships with organisations such as Burra Foods, Phillip Island Community and the Smith Family. It was noted that these organisations were particularly engaged in creating opportunities for students undertaking a gap year.

A view shared by a participant was that there is too much emphasis on the Australian Qualifications Framework when developing pathways.

A participant asked the Expert Panel to remember that there was a range of people to be considered who are not ready for formal learning and need strong partnerships to encourage further education.

Professor Lee Dow concluded the workshop by stating that any solutions for Gippsland will have to be within the context and framework of an institution. He also highlighted the need for any plan to be forward looking in both the short and long term.

Morwell Public Forum – 25 August 2011

The Morwell public form was held in the Waratah Restaurant at the GippsTAFE Morwell campus. Attendance was approximately 33 people.

Professor Lee Dow opened the forum by outlining issues included in the Gippsland Discussion Paper including medium to longer term provision of tertiary education and ensuring tertiary education is appropriate and accessible. Professor Lee Dow also provided a point of comparison with the major regional towns of Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo and their respective higher education providers of Deakin University, Ballarat University and La Trobe University.

National Broadband Network and IT issues and possibilities

A major theme emerging during this public form was connectivity, the National Broadband Network (NBN) and implications for tertiary education delivery. Issues identified included:

- Opportunities for Monash Gippsland to expand its reach across Gippsland through online delivery
- Ability of IT to overcome transportation and distance issues facing many communities in Gippsland when accessing tertiary education
- The need for hubs or a central location for students to access IT to continue to exist – due to ongoing poor connectivity in isolated areas
- Establishment of a clear timeline for NBN implementation in Gippsland.

Participants questioned the flexibility of universities in approaching online and distance education, including comments:

- Querying the willingness of universities to accept non-face-to-face teaching supported by some block delivery for undergraduate delivery
- Seeking distance delivery of engineering courses.

Thin markets

Some contributors at the public form in Morwell expressed the view that teaching and delivery of tertiary education needs to be dynamic, supported by providers with harmonious relationships. This was linked with comments around competition versus cooperation.

In terms of cooperation the possibility of thinking of Gippsland as a whole and having the staff and facilities working as a whole rather than competitor parts was raised. A regional response was suggested, one that could deliver more courses than are currently offered by the existing Gippsland providers. The forum heard that cooperation is starting to happen in health delivery, with coordination of placements and facilities.

Regarding competition it was outlined that Monash Gippsland and GippsTAFE compete for the same students and this is an ongoing issue.

Aspiration and secondary school students

Aspiration was identified as an issue at the public forum. It was felt that aspiration could be lifted by broadening horizons and creating:

- Opportunities for secondary students to better understand tertiary education
- Opportunities for students to gain exposure to / experience higher education
- Seamless pathways between schools, VET and higher education.

The forum also identified issues that act to limit student aspiration including:

- SES background
- The financial costs of transition to higher education
- High deferral rates.

Sale Public Forum – 31 August 2011

The Sale public forum was held at the Community College Gippsland campus. Attendance was approximately 28 people.

The consultation opened with Professor Lee Dow's comment that the Tertiary Education Plan for Gippsland would need to balance tertiary provision in diverse regional settings. It was noted that too many providers in a thin market will scare people away from study as an option.

Attendees heard that the EG TAFE board will need to accept some form of increased collaboration between three providers and the notion of a new entity - it will be hard to make changes if the current structure stays the same. Timing and priorities for the region need to be identified.

The point was made that the Tertiary Education Plan for Gippsland provides an opportunity to develop future strategic alliances and it was noted that the community in Gippsland should not be defensive and should support the outcomes of the plan.

Institutional arrangements

The public forum revealed that there is mixed support for the possibilities for institutional arrangements of tertiary education providers through partnerships and flexible governance arrangements.

In support of a collaborative arrangement, respondents noted:

- A vibrant campus at Monash Churchill and collaboration is important.
- Local leadership and governance is critical to ensure that diverse local needs across the region are met.
- There is a need to make use of existing infrastructure without duplicating what is already there.
- A full collaboration model will have positive results for all stakeholders.
- There is a need for articulated arrangements – individual students should not be in a position where they have to negotiate a pathway with an individual provider.
- Opportunities for students in Sale will increase as tertiary education providers get closer to Sale.
- Technology should be used to improve distance issues, but it is not the end point. Disadvantages of blended learning are that online teaching is limited due to unreliable connectivity and a lack of social contact. Face-to-face learning is better.

In support of flexible governance arrangements in the Gippsland east area, respondents noted:

- EG TAFE has a vision to remain a core provider in the Gippsland east region, maintaining ability to have multiple partnerships with universities.
- Port of Sale will be a campus where VET and tertiary education is provided in partnerships.
- One benefit of EG TAFE as a regional provider is the smaller teaching/class size.
- TAFEs in Gippsland work independently and have different offerings – aware that they cannot provide everything.
- There are links between EG TAFE (Bairnsdale) and Monash Churchill, such as nursing pathways.
- There is a need to provide more options locally in order for students to stay local and feel connected.
- There are issues in regional areas with the ‘opening and closing’ of opportunities, resulting in student’s disengaging. E.g. RMIT withdrawing from the region.
- Diverse partnerships across the region are important to meet the needs of local industry.

Tertiary education and industry collaboration

When considering the need for collaboration between tertiary education and industry in Gippsland, the discussion illustrated the need for further focus and leadership on this issue.

Respondents noted that it is important that communities have an input to move Gippsland forward as a region and that economic competition will ensure that Gippsland becomes a sustainable region. It was noted that it can often be difficult to get SMEs to work together.

The food industry was given as a sector where Gippsland could focus developing organic and intensive farming in the area, with local trainees who stay in the area to work after study. Food industry is attractive to students – presentation can increase the interest further.

Education and training needs to be viewed as a business in its own right and attracting the right teacher is important.

From an industry perspective it was heard that it is difficult for industry to know where to go for education, which results in in-house training and developing own contacts. HTP Plantations struggled to find a training program through a provider, so they developed their own training despite Forestech at East Gippsland TAFE. Virtual tools example with Vitech in New Zealand.

A variety of experience is attractive to industry, including study and work in Melbourne. Attracting students back to Gippsland through scholarships in key industry positions.

Low aspirations

As in the submissions process, it was clear that low aspiration is a significant issue for the region.

Respondents commented that a focus should start at Yr 9 to increase retention rate and increase attractiveness of courses. The point was made that EG TAFE needs to consider what it can do to further raise aspirations and meet needs of the local community.

Other general comments made in the consultation were:

- TEP needs to identify how it can help to nurture the good things that Gippsland has to offer. Once students go to Melbourne they

do not return to Gippsland for work. Education hubs in Gippsland are required to help retain local students. There is also a need to attract students to Gippsland from outside the region.

- It is harder for students studying at Monash Churchill to get part-time work, compared to Melbourne.
- Students will/do travel from Sale to Latrobe Valley for VET training.
- Students will travel between Sale and Bairnsdale for study and will consider travel as a factor when choosing a course.
- Smaller teaching groups in Sale are positive – better learning environment, resulting in fewer drop out, increased retention.

Bairnsdale Public Forum –1 September 2011

The Bairnsdale public forum was held at the Community College East Gippsland. Attendance was approximately 30 people.

Growing our own and attracting students to Gippsland

Professor Lee Dow noted that throughout the public consultations a concept of 'growing our own' is emerging as an important message. Attendees were asked to consider to what extent should we be encouraging tertiary education in Wellington and East Gippsland Shire Councils? The Port of Sale was outlined as an example of ongoing development.

The group considered that a 'grow your own' concept is important as it is inevitable that students will 'be lost' to Melbourne. There is a need to consider industries of the future so that students are not 'lost' to industries where there is no demand for the role. Those students who can afford to have aspirations to leave region, go to Melbourne to study and stay there. A community plan is needed to retain students.

It was noted that there is a need to better market what we do well – partnerships are attractive to young people. However, it was also agreed that Gippsland suffers from too much of an internal focus. Students will need to come from Victoria, Australia and overseas need to be attracted to the region through marketing of a point of difference offering that is attractive to young people, with the food industry and the success of Farmtech at EG TAFE as one example.

Apprenticeships are doing well in the region, but there are skills gaps at the higher end with a need to attract and retain young professionals. LLENs are doing this by promoting cadetships to link with employers.

GAP years and student aspirations

The point was made that taking a gap year has benefits and can work well for students, however any time beyond a one year study break means the student is not likely to return to education. The group considered the domino effect of the gap year: in their gap year the tertiary education student takes full time job in place of an apprenticeship; the lost apprentice then takes a lower skilled or part-time job in place of a school leaver or adult learner.

It was agreed that student aspirations are hard to build without role models. Exposure in schools helps to build aspirations and there is a need to give opportunities to students who study in Gippsland.

Health sector

Health as a growth industry was discussed and the benefits of Monash's presence in Gippsland were noted, such as the provision of a Medical School. It was noted that there are skills shortages at all levels in the Health sector. Certain needs are not being met resulting in some employers investing in their own training as well as utilising the Medical School at Monash. Also, adult learners in nursing are finding ad hoc pathways.

Models and delivery methods

There are significant differences between towns in Gippsland, with some very remote areas in East Gippsland. It was noted that strategies need to consider 'distance' as an issue and that not having a central TAFE campus

works well for the region. It was noted that a blend of online learning and face-to-face interaction is needed – with NBN to improve existing infrastructure.

A model of provider collaboration was welcomed by some attendees and challenged by others. EG TAFE reiterated its vision to be the tertiary education hub for the Gippsland east region. In this context it was noted that TAFE cannot offer everything in Sale and Bairnsdale, therefore partnerships are established, examples of Deakin, Ballarat and Monash universities. Innovative methods used, such as Deakin at Your Doorstep - video conferencing can provide a decent learning experience when balanced with proper levels of face-to-face interaction. Risk of provider collaboration is that bureaucracy kills flexibility of a region.

A teacher from EG TAFE shared a view that aggregation of three providers would be a clumsy model as a collaborative provider model will see EG TAFE lose the flexibility it has. As an alternative a partnership model, such as the one with Deakin University, finds a way of reaching new cohorts and this type of relationship between the three providers is critical.

Education and industry collaboration

The group heard that links between industry and job seekers are required to develop skills and it is important that industry is able to broker new courses. A solution in Gippsland should focus on skills needed in the region, with the three institutions, and other providers such as Apprenticeships Group Australia complimenting each other, rather than in competition.

Leadership

The Tertiary Education Plan for Gippsland is an opportunity for the community to work together to align views and to demonstrate an exercise in leadership. In this regard, collaboration needs to benefit all parties involved. Gippsland should be forward looking to new industries – invent new industries for a sustainable Gippsland.

Indigenous education

The Indigenous Training Centre at Lake Tyres attended the Bairnsdale forum and subsequently emailed a contribution. It is noted that a rural policy is required to address the needs particular to Gippsland and that class sizes in Gippsland are too small in a context of wider settings.

3. Lunchtime meetings with principals of regional secondary schools

Leongatha – 24 August 2011

The Principal's lunch was held at the Wildflower Training Café at the GippsTAFE Leongatha campus. Approximately 14 people attended.

Professor Lee Dow opened the meeting by stating that in developing recommendations regarding a Gippsland tertiary education plan consideration of the long-term and short-term future needs of the region were essential but to be considered within constraints of funding. Professor Lee Dow also asked the principals to share their views regarding why few students attend local providers and their views on the range of course offerings for students.

Barriers

The discussion centred on the various barriers that face students in Gippsland, these included:

- The cost of living out of home and the link with an increasing number of students taking gap years to earn income prior to undertaking further study
- Low student aspirations
- Isolation of students from their family and friends if they moved to undertake tertiary education
- The lack of connection for South Gippsland with the remainder of Gippsland
- Students have to jump too many hurdles to undertake education in Gippsland
- Family aspirations are low, students are not encouraged by parents to undertake higher education
- Limitations of accommodation based around Gippsland providers
- The challenge facing students is not only starting tertiary education but also remaining.

Transport

Transport was cited as a major issue by the group. Participants noted that it was easier for students from South Gippsland to travel to metro Melbourne to study than to travel to the Latrobe Valley. The V-line directs people to metro areas. An example of a student from Wonthaggi choosing to study at Morwell was given; this student catches a bus from Wonthaggi to Dandenong and then a train from Dandenong to Morwell.

Students

One principal shared with the Expert Panel that schools find the aspirations of middle range students the hardest to build. To address this issue the school has started taking Years 8 and 9 students to Monash University Churchill in an attempt to raise the aspirations of this group.

It was particularly noted by participants that students from South Gippsland had a closer affinity with metro Melbourne universities rather than Monash Churchill. Therefore in an attempt to raise university attendance one school has started taking its students to Melbourne to attend university open days.

Participants felt it was essential to encourage students to stay in Gippsland.

Providers

Participants expressed the view that providers need to become increasingly flexible. Flexibility included extending partnerships with universities such as the University of Ballarat's partnerships with GippsTAFE, as well as increasing online learning. Examples such as Open University Australia demonstrate how online learning can be effective.

A further view was shared that it was not useful for providers to force students to attend classes at a central venue. It was also felt that schools should be linked in with providers as they have resources and facilities that can be utilised.

One participant felt that the focus on agriculture in discussions was flawed, because in their view the industry is in decline. The participant felt that assumptions about Gippsland's industries needed to be challenged prior to being able to move forward.

Low carbon economy

The Expert Panel asked the group what the impact on the removal of brown coal industries would have in the area. One of the participants felt that TAFE delivery was very flexible and within 12-18 months courses could be offered to address industry demands. It was argued that industry drives education, rather than education driving industry.

Industry

Participants shared the view that employers need to start encouraging staff to upskill. A participant felt that in the region people get jobs for comfort rather than something to sustain them long term.

Monash University Churchill

Participants raised concerns that Monash Churchill is simply seen as a branch of Monash Melbourne. The demand for a high ATAR score meant that Gippsland students are given an additional boost of 10 points which was seen by some as being negative, although others in the group felt that allocating additional points was a positive policy.

Participants felt that Monash Churchill is in the wrong place for Gippsland and that existing pathways with other providers are not sufficient.

Conclusion

The Expert Panel concluded by commenting that the future of Gippsland will belong to those who are flexible and adaptive. Changes need to be made in how business operates. Gippsland should seek to be proactive and competitive for the future.

Bairnsdale – 1 September 2011

The Principal's lunch was held at the Riversleigh Inn. Attendance was 9 people.

Student destinations

The group spoke extensively about student destinations post Year 12 in the east Gippsland area.

For a range of reasons, such as location and subject mix, one principal shared the view that Monash Gippsland is not an attractive option to some students. The high achieving students go to university in metro Melbourne, while the students with an ATAR of 60-70 have a preference for EG TAFE over Monash Gippsland. The Deakin at Your Doorstep offering with EG TAFE is attractive; however this is still viewed as relatively new venture.

It was noted that a minimal numbers of students from the east Gippsland progress to a place at Monash Gippsland. One school cited 30 students, with 2 or 3 going to EG TAFE and none going to Monash Gippsland. Another school noted that there were 110+ Year 12 graduates last year and only one student accepted a place at Monash Gippsland.

It was noted that St Paul's Anglican Grammar School had worked with their students and Monash Gippsland, which resulted in an increase of their graduates going to Monash Gippsland.

Schools in the region have a small number of students graduating from Year 12 each year.

Aspirations

Parents are not motivated and this has an effect on student aspirations. Local options are needed to help parents understand tertiary education offerings in the region. It is the case that parents come to schools for advice, however careers and student advice can be lacking in schools.

It was noted that aspirations can be raised through forming partnerships. Local support networks can provide students with an experience of tertiary education. One principal noted that a Year 13 program was unsuccessful due to a lack of student interest. It was suggested that location is an issue as students do not want to come back to schools to attend such schemes.

Internships and cadetships are useful programs that offer support and financial assistance.

The Australian Catholic University has a program to build student aspirations from Year 9.

Cost of education

Parents do not have the capacity to support their children in student accommodation in Melbourne.

Other issues

- Majority of EG TAFE students are adult learners – average age 35-36 years old.
- A perception that courses that do well locally at Monash Gippsland get moved to Monash Clayton, such as Physical Education programs.
- A perception that degrees from Monash Gippsland have a reputational issue when compared to Monash Clayton.
- EG TAFE is looking at 'food bowl' options with providers beyond Victoria.

4. Delegation representing the Committee for Gippsland – Traralgon, 23 August 2011

The meeting with the Committee for Gippsland was held at the Traralgon Business Centre, Traralgon. The meeting was attended by the Committee for Gippsland and Apprenticeships Group Australia.

Professor Lee Dow opened the forum by outlining some of the issues concerned with the provision of tertiary education in Gippsland as a whole. Some of those issues include, the challenges associated with Gippsland not having a single concentrated population centre like Geelong, Bendigo or Ballarat and the challenge of encouraging regional students to remain in regional areas.

The discussion began with some comments being made about a lack of information in the Discussion Paper regarding the number of students who return to Gippsland after leaving for student and employment opportunities. The Committee also commented that it would be valuable to know what happens to students who initially attend university but subsequently drop out.

Development of a niche market

A major point which emerged during this meeting was the need for Gippsland to develop a niche market in an area of education. The example of the Monash University School of Rural Health was given as potentially providing the opportunity for students to develop specific skills in rural health. The students could be attracted to the regional area of Gippsland by a course providing a unique specialisation. It was noted that this model has been developed by Professor Roger Strasser in Canada.

Barriers

The need to improve the culture of education and lifting confidence in Gippsland were raised as essential issues to address. The group shared that there is a perception within the community that a Gippsland education is inferior to a Melbourne education; lifting confidence in the Gippsland brand was suggested as a mechanism for lifting participation.

Issues around the lack of course options acting as a trigger for young people leaving the region were raised, again the group thought that high achieving students believe that the best education opportunities are outside Gippsland. Students are selecting courses based on availability rather than their aspirations which contributes to a high drop-out rate. The implementation of vocational counselling was raised as an area of need for Gippsland.

The group felt that students were concerned about the ability of their family to support them while undertaking tertiary education. They were also concerned that middle income families are currently overlooked by Centrelink's support structure. The Expert Panel was encouraged to consider a model which would allow students to undertake the first few years of a degree from home.

Education models

The Expert Panel heard from participants that a collaborative education model would better position Gippsland to retain young people. An institution incorporating both university and TAFE providers, with an overarching governance arrangement to plan strategically, was favoured. It was argued

that this model would prevent much of the wastage currently occurring because industry's needs are not being met in the region and TAFE delivery models currently exceed the region's capacity.

The issue of a Gippsland provider was raised during the discussion, but the group was concerned that this type of provider would be aimed at low to middle achievers and could be viewed as a sub-standard provider of education. Central Queensland was cited as a current example dealing with a reputation issue.

The Committee for Gippsland felt that it is important for Sale to have a tertiary education facility based in that region i.e. Port of Sale development to address its specific challenges.

The group was sceptical that a model which involved students undertaking a general degree then a more focused degree would assist.

Industry

Apprenticeships Group Australia emphasised the importance of attracting major employers and industry to Gippsland. It considered that industry should be directly approached and asked, what education and training would be required if they were to be located in the Gippsland area. Providers would then need to meet this need to ensure that a skilled workforce is utilised.

Monash University

The group raised concerns about the impact on the Gippsland student cohort and Monash University's aim to be a research university.

The discussion concluded with a summary of what the group felt were the three key issues for tertiary education in Gippsland, which included, the attainment of students, the need to create closer linkages between providers and the need for extensive public transport and infrastructure development.

Committee for Gippsland

- Mary Aldred, Executive Director of Committee for Gippsland
- Jeanette Vannaprasedth, Member of the C4G Executive Committee (Telstra Country Wide Gippsland)
- Ian Needham, Member of the C4G Executive Committee (LV Printers)
- Anthony Heinemann, Member of the C4G Executive Committee (bankmecu)
- Kevin Kennedy, Apprenticeships Group Australia

5. Local Government Authorities, CEO meeting – Moe, 25 August 2011

The meeting with Local Government Authorities was held in Moe at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Gippsland Regional Office.

Professor Lee Dow opened the meeting by outlining the issues in the Gippsland Tertiary Education Plan Discussion Paper, including medium to long-term provision of tertiary education and the need to ensure that provision is appropriate and accessible.

The Expert Panel noted that they liked the idea of multiple provision options in Gippsland, citing the University of Ballarat's interest in entering Gippsland, but noted the issue of thin markets was an essential consideration.

Professor Lee Dow also noted that the National Broadband Network would be an important aspect of online delivery.

Barriers

Participants noted that when accessing education, students should not be expected to travel to a provider, rather delivery should be offered at a location convenient to the student.

The combination of barriers and low aspirations result in low tertiary education attendance. The role of parents contributing to aspirations was also highlighted as having a link with student retention.

One participant noted that it was critical to support the Bairnsdale Secondary College Precinct for the future. The importance of choice was also stressed with multiple models seen as the key to achieving a wide range of offerings, rather than focusing on creating one TAFE or one University.

It was noted that adult learners prefer to have face-to-face contact, so that while an increase in technology should be a key method of delivery it cannot be the only option for students.

Providers

The Local Government Area of Bass Coast was discussed as an area where 30 per cent of the population is over 60 years of age. It was noted that the area has very low aspirations which was felt in part to be due to the fact that there are very few training providers in the region, except for a small campus of Chisholm Institute of TAFE.

The Bass Coast Education Plan was cited as being a useful way of providers meeting together to discuss issues in the region. Issues include an education precinct in Wonthaggi, along with the redevelopment of the Secondary College.

Attendees outlines that Chisholm TAFE and Apprenticeships Group Australia have developed an agreement that involves sharing teaching arrangements to deal with thin markets. Providers in the region are encouraged to take a collaborative approach as well as a focus on bringing in new providers.

Participants were supportive of having a Go8 university in Gippsland and wanted to see an increase in partnerships with Monash University. While it was considered that Monash's responsiveness to the needs of the region

should be improved, it was also noted that the role of a research university in the region was important.

Transport

Access to Monash Churchill was raised as an issue for South Gippsland students, with it noted that the likelihood of students attending the Gippsland campus was very low. Participants shared some examples of the problems for students travelling to Churchill. This included consideration that it is easier and quicker to get from Leongatha to Melbourne than Leongatha to Churchill (although it was noted that services have recently improved).

One participant also raised a concern with current policy regarding carpooling and P-plate drivers. It was argued that by not allowing P-plate drivers to have more than one passenger restricted the options of students travelling to education centres in Gippsland.

Additional issues

Other issues raised were:

- The mismatch between the skills needed in the region and what courses are offered e.g. engineering
- The importance of the National Broadband Network
- Links between low aspiration and inflexible courses and pathways
- The value of mentoring programs as an important tool in engaging and retaining students in the region. It was suggested that mentoring should begin at the primary level
- The value of learning hubs was noted as being useful method of engaging students
- VCE completion was getting higher in South Gippsland but retention rates are still low
- The impact that a low carbon economy will have in the Latrobe Valley.

6. Industry meetings

Burra Foods, meeting – Korumburra, 24 August 2011

The meeting was attended by Ms Helen Falls, HR Manager of Burra Foods.

Burra Food shared with the Expert Panel its preference to employ locally and some of the programs it runs with students in Gippsland.

Burra Foods has developed partnerships with the local schools and employs a gap year student to work in the factory every year for 12 months. This gives the student an opportunity to undertake employment in an area of interest and encourages them to see how tertiary education can assist with a career in the industry.

Burra Foods has set up a buddy training system which involves staff with greater experience helping to train apprentices and trainees. While viewed as useful, from a HR perspective there are still gaps in the knowledge of staff which would need to be addressed through training. It finds that staff are often missing technical information which would assist them in understand the how's and why's of how some equipment operates.

Burra Foods would like to see a greater focus on the training of processing and production skills. Courses run by the NCDEA, where there would be an opportunity to network with others from the dairy industry would require lengthy travel and it is often difficult for Burra Foods staff to undertake this type of training.

Burra Foods workforce profile is over 40 years of age and its staff turnover is 7 per cent which is considered low in comparison to the industry average of 10 per cent.

Burra Foods has found positions in finance difficult to fill in the past, however there are 3-4 people each week handing in their resumes looking for various work.

National Centre for Dairy Education Australia – Warragul, 23 August 2011

The meeting with the National Centre for Dairy Education Australia was held at the NCDEA Warragul campus. The meeting was attended by Mr Luke Prime and Mr Peter Carkeek from the NCDEA.

Professor Lee Dow opened the meeting by outlining the issues the Expert Panel wished to discuss with the NCDEA regarding the dairy industry in Gippsland. Specifically, understanding what education and training opportunities are available for dairy, the role of dairy as part of a broader agricultural industry and the future outlook for dairy in Gippsland.

The NCDEA provided a synopsis of its history, explaining how it has taken steps to ensure that its training and skills development has a strong industry focus. To ensure this is the case the NCDEA has not only aligned its courses with the National Training Package, but has designed industry qualifications which also go above and beyond the package. The three main qualification packages the NCDEA offers are in service and support areas, leadership and governance, and farm career pathways.

Partnerships and Pathways

The NCDEA has developed partnerships and aligned its agriculture courses with Deakin, Ballarat and Charles Sturt Universities although it has been unable to develop a similar pathway with Monash University. The NCDEA also works with GippsTAFE, East Gippsland TAFE and Chisholm TAFE. It noted that these three providers do not provide training in agriculture, so they do not compete with NCDEA, rather the organisations work together. NCDEA is currently working with EG TAFE regarding the delivery of NCDEA diploma and advanced diploma courses.

NCDEA perspective of the dairy industry in Gippsland

The NCDEA shared that it believes that dairy is a growing industry and although profits tend to fluctuate, recently they are higher than they have ever been. The NCDEA considers that dairy the largest employer in South Gippsland and farms can employ between 1-5 people, with approximately 1700 farms across Gippsland.

The NCDEA feel that the dairy industry is easy to break into but owning land and housing is difficult, particularly because the cost of housing has risen. In addition the water component price of farm ownership was high, although now decreasing and dairy equipment costs have gone down. It costs approximately \$700 000– \$800 000 to buy a 200–300 cow farm in Northern Victoria, but in Gippsland it costs approximately \$1.3– \$1.6 million.

Students

NCDEA has started attracting students from metro areas, particularly Pakenham, the Mornington Peninsula as well as Caulfield Grammar. NCDEA feel that while regional students want to go to Melbourne for the experience, they usually return to the region after three years.

An observation made is that few people want a qualification; rather they focus on gaining a skill set. Industry also has a focus on outcomes rather than qualifications.

The NCDEA sees that the future of education is in clear signposts. The development of clear pathways to ensure that students are guided through courses in the most applicable manner is a key issue. Career planning and counselling would assist.

The NCDEA aims to speak directly with its clients and it feels it is particularly important for post-35 age group to have confidence built by a provider in order to engage in further education.

Innovation and research

The Expert Panel raised the issue of innovation and research in the dairy industry, particularly noting the importance for Gippsland in aligning innovation on the farm with research.

The NCDEA shared with the Expert Panel that Gippsland has little innovation in the dairy industry. Dairy Innovation Australia Ltd funds innovation and research, however when it calls for submissions it is hit and miss who takes up the opportunities. It would be necessary for Gippsland to make a concerted effort to apply for funding in this space.

New Zealand dairy perspective

The NCDEA sees the New Zealand dairy industry as a leader in education. The industry has grown rapidly and is approximately 60 per cent of NZ's GDP. The industry is well organised and focuses on profitability with systems in place for research and development. More people are employed in the NZ dairy industry than people are employed in the Australian dairy

industry, it is more sustainable. If a business is not profitable or sustainable it is not a good employer.

Additional points

The NCDEA believe that improving bandwidth is an important challenge to be overcome for the future of Gippsland.