

## Editorial introduction Regional University Futures

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This edition of *SLEID* explores possible futures for universities located in regional areas of Australia. This theme is framed within concerns raised within the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education, which reported in 2008 (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations). The report identifies higher education provision in regional Australia as an area of particular concern, recommending “a range of approaches including rationalisation, collaboration or merging for some campuses or institutions.” The Bradley Review calls for regional students to have the same rate of access to and completion of higher education degrees as their metropolitan counterparts. The Bradley Review has proposed that the government consider the feasibility of a new national university for regional areas and called for the provision of “innovative local solutions through a range of flexible and collaborative delivery arrangements in partnership with other providers such as TAFE.” It recommends that serious consideration should be given to the development of a university with special expertise in provision of higher education across regional and remote Australia.

These recommendations take place in the context of concerns about declining rates of participation in higher education within regional Australia and doubts about the future financial viability of certain regional universities. It is timely, then, to consider the distinctive contributions regional universities make to desired educational outcomes and the innovative approaches that they can activate to respond to the particular challenges of delivering effective higher education in non-metropolitan areas.

This issue opens with a foreword by Professor Scott Bowman, Vice Chancellor of CQUniversity Australia, reflecting his deep interest in and commitment towards measure dedicated to providing a vital future for regional universities. The potential and challenges faced in developing such a future are discussed in the articles included in this issue.

In the opening article, Nita Temmerman, Karen Noble and Patrick Danaher from the University of Southern Queensland’s Faculty of Education suggest that while the Bradley Review has some useful ideas for regional universities, it tends to devalue the vital part played by cultural, geographical and physical place in framing those universities’ interactions with their local communities. Julie Watkinson, Bronwyn Ellis and Janet

Sawyer from the University of South Australia discuss the ways in which that university's Mount Gambier Regional Centre, developed in cooperation with TAFE to provide a blend of face-to-face teaching and video-conferenced course delivery, represents an example of educational innovation through partnerships within a regional centre, as advocated by the Bradley Review. Joy Penman, also of the University of South Australia, explores the ways in which its Centre of Regional Engagement at Whyalla has implemented a number of initiatives to enable local school children to experience a university culture with the aspiration that they might eventually undertake such higher education. Marguerite Maher, from Charles Darwin University, considers the contributions the *Growing Our Own* Indigenous education project at CDU, implemented in five remote communities in the Northern Territory, is making in tailoring culturally responsive principles within its teacher training program.

Janet Sawyer and Nina Evans from the University of South Australia focus on a project whereby students from the university's School of Computer and Information Science are assisting regional business in Whyalla in the design, implementation and maintenance of an Internet presence. Philip Bell from CQUniversity Australia shifts the focus to northern Australia, discussing the impact of the mining boom on demand for higher education in this area and the challenges for higher education providers there in addressing the future human capital needs of communities in this area. Janet Sawyer and Bronwyn Ellis consider the role of the University of South Australia's Centre for Regional Engagement in adapting its Bachelor of Business and Enterprise degree to suit the distinctive features of that region's businesses through a focus on small business management.

Taken together, the articles in this themed edition of *SLEID* provide a rich and diverse consideration of the ways in which regional universities can and do respond to the distinctive challenges of their learning communities. We trust our readers will find much of interest and value in them.

## **References**

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. (2008). *Review of Australian higher education: Final report*. Retrieved from <http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Review/Pages/ReviewofAustralianHigherEducationReport.aspx>

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