



Queensland University of Technology

Response to the House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments.

Queensland University of Technology (QUT) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Committee's inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments, and we commend the Committee and the House of Representatives for their interest in this important area of policy.

QUT is a leading Australian university with two Brisbane-based campuses and over 50,000 enrolled students. While our campuses are both in the city, we educate many students who come from rural and remote Queensland, and conduct significant work towards inclusion and participation in the metropolitan fringe and regional areas. We also educate a significant number of students whose circumstances could be characterised as complex environments.

This submission focuses on certain impediments confronting people in the inner regional/outer metro fringe to the north of Brisbane. While the location is not defined as remote, we believe it likely that some of these factors are shared between this community and remote communities, including those that contribute to a picture of complexity that prevents some Australians from participating in further education, whether within higher education or vocational education and training (VET).

QUT collaborates actively with other universities as well as other education systems and providers, including early childhood, government and non-government schools, TAFE and other VET providers. Through these collaborations and our own work, including QUT's Widening Participation Program, we have proudly driven sustainable partnerships in urban, urban fringe, regional and remote areas.

For more than 30 years these relationships have cooperatively worked to build capacities, create aspiration and open opportunities for students to access and participate in higher education – in particular within the cohort of students who are continuing their journey from a low socio economic area of disadvantage.

The Productivity Commission (PC) research paper *A Driven University System: A Mixed Report Card* notes that the Demand Driven System (DDS) did improve access for many students previously excluded by their circumstances:

The expansion in the number of Australian Government-support university places mean additional students had an opportunity to attend university during the demand driven system that they would not have had in earlier periods.

The PC found that additional students came from a wide range of backgrounds, including many whose characteristics had previously been associated with lower uptake and success. Of the additional students whom the PC judged would not have attended university prior to the DDS, 65% were the first in their families to attend university (compared to 45% of students the PC determined would have attended university prior to the DDS), 32% were from the lowest socio-economic status (SES) quartile (cf. 15%), and 30% had undertaken some VET training previously (cf. 10%).

However, the PC also found that growth in access has been uneven and that gaps in participation and attainment persist. Simply put, even with the doors thrown wide, there were still Australians who are missing out on the benefits of higher education, due to the circumstances of their lives.

To help explain these stubborn gaps, it is useful to explore the structural and attitudinal factors influencing students who live in the urban fringe, and the complexity of the environments in which they negotiate their lives.

A wide range of social, political and cultural factors can impact upon a student's educational journey during high school and after they complete. Some of these factors manifest in regional data, particularly as it intersects with SES and other demographic data.

According to the 2019 Survey of Education and Work conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 59% of school leavers nationally are enrolled in further study, supporting a national picture of a positive student attitude towards the relevance, value and attainability of higher education.

By contrast, for students completing year 12 in Moreton Bay North, a low SES area in the urban fringe of Brisbane, their intended destinations are at a different point of the spectrum.

The Queensland Government's Post School Destination Survey – Next Steps produces a profile of post-school destinations of year 12 completers across Queensland. The figures show that students in schools in the Moreton Bay region aspire to progress to a bachelor's degree qualification at 8 percentage points below the statewide average. One school reported only 15% of students aiming to go on to university study; another, 19.8%. Over the 5 years 2014-2019 the region has actually seen a decline in the proportion of students aiming to progress to study towards a bachelor degree or VET qualification.

These figures demonstrate a lag in both the intention and actual participation in tertiary education at both national and state levels. These alarming statistics suggest that the journey is more challenging and more complex for many of these students compared to those in urban areas, and that opening the way is, by itself, insufficient to properly address the disparity. The issue is not only about the pathways available: it is also a question of aspiration to participation in tertiary education.

Supported by local commentary of community members, there are marked indicators of the complexity of factors driving these statistics. Broadly there is a shared view that these

factors appear to be both more significant and pronounced on the urban fringe compared to inner suburbs of Brisbane.

In understanding these data, it is important to look at the social and cultural factors this region faces and to consider the impact of these influences in building and sustaining aspiration for school leavers to see their future through participating in tertiary education.

Social factors

The social determinants that underpin the opportunity and potential for the future of a young person who lives in this region, are driven by barriers which are not generally experienced in the same range as those in the inner city.

In the Moreton Bay North region, 40% of residents live in an area defined as 'most disadvantaged'. Additionally:

- 33% have a weekly income under \$499 per week
- Only 7.4% hold a bachelor's degree
- 15.5% have no internet access in their home
- 34.1% are renting their place of residence

The poor health outcomes and the social instability in this region is disturbing. According to the Brisbane North Population health snapshot, the Moreton Bay North region has the highest prevalence of seven of the eight chronic conditions reported, with psychological distress in the region being the highest in the Network. The report concludes people in this area have the poorest health status and highest health risk factors of any other sub region. It acknowledges that these outcomes demonstrate that health care services are not distributed according to need.

This metropolitan fringe region also houses the three Magistrates Courts with the highest level of DVO lodgements in the state. The Pine Rivers Magistrates Court experienced an increase of 16.9% of lodgements in one year (from 2017/18 to 2018/19).

Cultural factors

The region has a strong sense of tradition and belonging, manifesting positively through patriotic observance and strong community participation in events like the Anzac Day March and Australia Day celebrations. While this sense of community is generally a positive feature, it can also produce a 'gravitational pull' effect that can inhibit residents from developing goals that will see them vary from the norms around them, whether professional, cultural or educational. This can include the inhibition of students' development of aspiration to proceed to tertiary education (whether university or VET), even where the student harbours an enthusiasm to continue on to further study. Students require a supportive network to succeed. While a student's aspiration may be to 'push' ahead with a determination to further their education, the 'pull' of family expectations and demands can hold students back to a future of horizontal mobility.

This lowering of aspiration can be reinforced inadvertently by the way governments and other outside organisations interact with the region's residents. A recent Jobs Fair held in

the suburb of Morayfield within this urban fringe featured a high proportion of offerings unskilled or low-skill work. In light of the low aspiration for higher learning recorded in the area (22.4% of year 12 completers at the local public school expressed interest in studying for a bachelor degree, which is 36.6% lower than national enrolment rate), the Fair's list of exhibitors and scheduled workshops suggests that this event was designed to fit within a narrow conception of the local culture rather than extend or diversify it.

These examples suggest that the views of some in the region – that education has a limited relevance, value and shelf life – are influential in determining the range of options put before people, with the potential to produce a cycle of lower participation and attainment. The idea that tertiary education is relevant, valuable and attainable is often exhausted by the end of year 12, when education becomes optional.

While this region is a proud community with a collective culture of defending against attacks to their identity, their lives and their livelihoods, the cost of this pride may be a disinclination to aim beyond the current norms of educational attainment, occupational aspiration and social mobility.

Political factors

Fortunately, opportunities to build confidence, resilience and aspiration arise in many areas of a student's day to day experiences. Recent government policy changes to all systems of education, including subsidies to early childhood education and care, have enabled exposure to activities that build this belief in self and in social possibility, and have the potential to elevate levels of participation in tertiary education. More work needs to be done in this area but the prospects for significant improvement are excellent.

As the Committee's 2018 inquiry into Unique Individuals Broad Skills found, 'the agreement' between state and federal governments is key to improve learning outcomes for all Australian students. The Committee refers to the Quality School Quality Outcomes report that sets out reforms to improving outcomes including preparing students for the globalised world. The importance of strengthening confidence in students without strong role models in the home or even in school cannot be over-stated.

Where there is stable policy with reliable and fully implemented programs such as the National Career Education Strategy, tertiary education outcomes could be much higher in terms of breadth of participation and student success.

Conclusion

The opportunity to access university or VET is obviously important, and interconnecting policies that address economic and social factors are part of the solution. But there is a step prior that is crucial to all the rest, and that is the critical prerequisite of aspiration.

As a member of the Queensland Widening Tertiary Participation Consortium, since 2009 QUT has partnered with Moreton Bay North schools for the purpose of delivering programs in low SES and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background communities to increase tertiary participation.

Where the Widening Participation Program is fully implemented and sustained at a school level, research has found that the approach taken by the Consortium – that is a state-wide collaborative approach delivering similar programs in different locations – provided evidence of effectiveness. Increasing enrolment numbers experienced by both QUT and the University of the Sunshine Coast may lay claim to some of the success of the WPP.

However, QUT remains concerned about the low rates of determination to enter tertiary education post year 12 for students in this urban fringe, and the social and cultural drivers that influence aspiration that is affecting participation and subsequent attainment of qualifications.

Submission queries:

Ms Susan Lamb
Vice-Chancellor's Fellow
Queensland University of Technology
susan.lamb@qut.edu.au

Resources and further reading

<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6227.0>

<https://qed.qld.gov.au/det-publications/reports/earlyyears/Documents/nextsteplongitudinalpostetrf2018.pdf>

<https://statistics.qgso.qld.gov.au/nextstep/profiles>

<https://deceptionbayshs.eq.edu.au/Supportandresources/Formsanddocuments/Documents/next-step-summary-report.pdf>

<https://dakabinshs.eq.edu.au/Supportandresources/Formsanddocuments/Documents/next-step-summary-report.pdf>

<https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/university-report-card>

<https://www.courts.qld.gov.au/court-users/researchers-and-public/stats>

<https://www.brisbanekids.com.au/event/australia-day-celebrations-at-sandstone-point/>

<https://myk.town/2019-kallangur-anzac-day-march-galleries/>

<https://www.ourbribie.com.au/news/vox-pops-2019-australia-day-on-bribie-island/>

<https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/southeast-queensland-town-is-nations-dole-bludger-capital/news-story/e1b2f0ef1634eaa1c65310d0ec0bf3a0>

<https://www.news.com.au/finance/work/at-work/government-denies-suburb-shaming-in-revealing-welfare-cheat-hot-spots/news-story/a2ca94271c0c75d43dd63ef0645b8673>

<https://www.employment.gov.au/moretonbayJF>

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Employment_Education_and_Training/School_to_WorkTransition/Report

<https://www.usc.edu.au/explore/vision/key-statistics>

<https://www.qut.edu.au/about/our-university/qut-at-a-glance>

<https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/queensland-widening-participation-consortium/>

<https://www.qut.edu.au/about/equity/widening-participation>