A new national University in regional Australia
FEASIBILITY STUDY

Preliminary Staff and Student Consultation Report
May 2009
Feasibility Study into the formation of a new national university in regional Australia

Background

The Bradley Review of the Australian Higher Education System and Cutler Review of the National Innovation System identified a range of national and regional challenges and opportunities in higher education and research including:

- improving higher education participation rates, particularly for groups currently under-represented in University level study;
- enhancing student choice in what they study and the location where they study;
- improving the alignment between higher education and labour force needs to reduce shortages in crucial areas such as health, agriculture, science, education and business;
- further improving labour force productivity to ensure Australia remains globally competitive;
- improving research collaboration and coordination to meet national priorities such as climate change, food security, biosecurity, environment and ecology, health services and early childhood education;
- improving the availability and use of technology, including facilitating better access to higher education for skilling, re-skilling and up-skilling the national labour force and for research collaboration;
- maintaining national competitiveness in the globalised higher education market (eg. the Asia-Pacific);
- extending higher education opportunity to a broader range of regional and remote communities and providing a sustainable basis for ongoing growth of higher education and research in regional Australia.

On 10 March 2009, the Deputy Prime Minister, The Honourable Julia Gillard, MP, announced that the Government would grant $2 million to Southern Cross University and Charles Sturt University to jointly investigate how a new national University might assist in meeting these national challenges and opportunities.

The first stage of the study is to conduct a Needs Analysis that will analyse relevant data on current and future needs for improved regional opportunity and distance and digital learning in the higher education sector. This stage will result in a report that will provide a framework through which universities and their communities can engage in an objective assessment of their future options.
The Needs Analysis will be critical in determining whether progression is made to the subsequent stages of the Feasibility Study. Subject to the findings of the Needs Analysis, the second stage would involve the development of models for addressing the needs, including the identification of potential partners and the various models of integration to be evaluated as part of the Feasibility Study.

The third and final stage would review in detail the requirements and processes for integration of the preferred partners, with review teams constituted of representatives of each participating University analysing specific issues.

The Feasibility Study is underpinned by stakeholder and community consultations, including drawing on the experience, perspectives and expertise of staff and students to improve our understanding of needs.

Summary of Feedback from Feasibility Study Roadshow

From 10th-19th May 2009 Malcolm Marshall and Mark Burdack, Co-Directors of the Feasibility Study travelled to each campus of Charles Sturt University and Southern Cross University for the first in a series of briefings to staff and students on the background and progress of the Feasibility Study, and to seek input across a number of themes relating to the Study. Charles Sturt University campuses at Orange, Bathurst, Canberra, Goulburn, Wagga Wagga, Albury-Wodonga and Dubbo and Southern Cross University campuses at Coffs Harbour, Lismore, and Tweed Gold Coast were visited. A total of 220 staff and students attended the briefings, in groups ranging from five to 75 people.

The briefings took the form of a power point presentation followed by a discussion around four broad questions:

1. What benefits do higher education and research bring to regional Australia?
2. What do you see as the current weaknesses in the provision, availability or organisation of higher education and research in regional Australia?
3. Would strengthening and growing distance education opportunities help to address labour force needs nationally?
4. If you could choose one thing, what would be the most important reform you would make to higher education and research provision in regional Australia?

The views and opinions of staff and students who attended the Roadshow have been collated in this summary. The report will be provided to PhillipsKPA, the consultant undertaking the Needs Analysis, to better inform the Study about the views and opinions of two of our key stakeholders – our staff and students. It is important to note that these comments represent the views and perceptions of staff and students who participated in the Roadshow and that no verification of the many observations has been made. The Needs Analysis will be presented to a meeting of both University Councils on the 3rd July in Coffs Harbour. The Needs Analysis will also be made publicly available.
• It’s about excellence.
• The benefit should be about what the university offers - not whether it is a regional or rural uni.
• We need to get away from the perception that good things only happen in the city.
• What’s the difference between metropolitan and regional anyway?

A number of key themes threaded through the discussion of the four questions posed by the Co-directors: what it means to be a regional university; the significant role of regional communities in meeting local and national research, innovation and social inclusion goals; the opportunities and challenges regional universities face in providing quality teaching and research; and perceptions of regional universities and regional Australia generally.

There was a well developed understanding of the important contribution of regional Australia and regional universities to national gross domestic product, export income, international competitiveness, food security and biosecurity, as well as their contribution to innovation in health services, flexible education and other areas. However, there was a view that these achievements were under-valued and their existing contribution and future capacity-building not reflected in the current models of funding for teaching and research in Australia.
Question 1

What benefits do higher education and research bring to regional Australia?

There was broad agreement that higher education and research conducted in and for regional Australia provided affordable access for regional students, fuelled significant innovation, and helped sustain and grow the social and economic development of regional communities. It helped meet the labour force needs of regional communities, and metropolitan Australia particularly through flexible learning provision.

- Provides higher education opportunities for people who want to remain in their region.
- It gives a choice so that people can stay if they want to.
- Helps to reduce the cost of higher education for regional people.
- Specialist training keeps people local (vet science for example).
- Pharmacy – good example of ‘train in the bush, stay in the bush’.
- For a lot of regional students, it’s their only chance to go to uni. They can’t afford to go to a metro uni and fund their education.
- People study here because it is the best course in Australia; we draw people from the cities as well as regionally.
- Graduates can go anywhere in the world and compete.
- Working in Indigenous communities one of the issues is trust. It seems that with many universities, there is a lack of trust and it is the regional universities that can do it. The relationships resonate trust.
- Very important that regional Australia has a whole range of experiences to offer, for example, Academies of Sport and Performing Arts; education is an important part of what needs to be offered in regional Australia.
- UAIs for courses in regions are lower than cities so kids have an opportunity they might not otherwise get.
- Not just students, it is about giving communities access to the institution.
- Letting our communities have access.

Some contrary views were expressed.

- Sceptical that ‘train in the bush, remain in the bush’ is true.
- Many people from regional areas go and study in the city and then come back.
- Higher education and research in regional Australia offers alternative to the city unis, but we’re fooling ourselves if we think that it would stop people going to the city.
Regional universities were credited with helping to build social capital in the communities in which they are located.

- **Universities have a role in creating better citizens.**
- **Helps to grow regional population, by keeping young people in the region and attracting people from outside the region.**
- **Entices young people to stay around longer.**
- **Getting best and brightest into regional universities rather than drifting to the cities.**
- **Lismore is a much better place for having a university.**
- **Encourages de-centralisation; stops the drain of 18-39s out of regions.**
- **Growing social and economic culture.**
- **Infrastructure through knowledge development.**
- **Building social capital.**
- **Across the world there is a trend of de-population of regional areas.**
- **A prime determinant in getting families to relocate to the bush is the availability of quality education.**
- **Universities can act as a conduit for cultural centre to regional spaces – positive effects of bringing artistic people to the region – bring writers in as writers in residence to a region where otherwise they wouldn’t come.**
- **Communities look to unis to be leaders – to facilitate.**
- **Vast inland Australia gets a voice in Macquarie St and Canberra.**
- **Puts into a town which otherwise wouldn’t have it, a whole heap of experts – fosters a sense of critical thinking.**
- **Promotion of expertise.**
- **Unis as repository of knowledge – people in a region come to the uni to contribute and share knowledge.**
- **At regional unis many general staff are women; role of unis as employer very important; lots of general staff are at lower levels of appointment; let general staff access degrees.**
- **In the past 20 years, a lot more women have been educated. With both mum as well as dad professionals, a range of study options is needed to sustain families. If it’s not available locally for kids, then they’ll pack up and move.**

Regional universities were also viewed as providing connectivity to the rest of the world.

- **Gives regions a broader, global perspective.**
- **Internationalises communities in which they are situated. A regional uni draws international people to the community and sends the local community overseas.**
- **Connectivity with the rest of the world. Communities of interest irrespective of geography.**
- **Brings students and staff from cities and internationally.**
- **It’s the thing that makes you not parochial.**
There was a strong belief that regional universities provided important direct and indirect economic drivers for their communities.

- **Synergies between the presence of a university in a city and the development of the city in general.**
- **Education is a significant part of the commerce of university cities generating direct revenue as well as revenue from transport, food, accommodation, entertainment etc.**
- **Policy-driven decentralisation of education is a good strategy, for example, Denmark where industries have been created around it.**
- **International profile pulls people from outside the region.**
- **Uni is the centre of life in many towns.**
- **At Goulburn it brought a new industry to town.**
- **When the uni at Dubbo was established, 80% of students were first generation uni students. When parents seek advice, they seek it from established professionals. They had been educated on the coast or at traditional model unis. As we get more graduates hopefully their opinions will be sought.**
- **Unis are often the largest employer in the community.**
- **Economic benefits to community are obvious.**
- **Potentially creating new tourists.**

Regional Australia was seen as the heart of innovation in Australia, and regional universities the natural incubators of innovation. Research conducted in regional areas helped to solve local problems, which could also resonate across Australia and internationally.

- **A lot of innovation comes from regional practitioners. Necessity is a driver.**
- **Small rural towns like to be inventive – deserve a uni that values that, that brings in ideas; tries out things; experiments. Rural areas – innovators – necessity driven.**
- **Heart of innovation in this country.**
- **Researchers based in a region drive innovation and assist the region to problem-solve.**
- **Regional challenges like Murray Darling issue need to be dealt with close to the action.**
- **Research tends to have a regional perspective and value adds back to the community.**
- **It spreads the knowledge base across regional Australia.**
- **The needs of regional Australia differ to urban areas – regional unis conduct research into regional issues.**
- **Research helps us understand our communities and context better.**
- **Unis drive innovation; communities that don’t have access don’t develop it – very important to sustainability of regional communities.**
- **EU spends millions of dollars to promote regionalisation of academic endeavour.**
- **Important incubators of innovation.**
- **What turns people on in the bush is reduced red tape. See themselves responding as needed. Can do the work without so many rules. The delegation goes lower down the tree.**
- **Research is more intimate and more direct.**
• Regional issues are the foci of regional research but may resonate globally in other parts of the world with a similar profile or problem.
• Research collaborations around the world lead to innovation and commercialisation.
• Capacity to walk in and ask for research and the outputs can be translated back in to a practical environment.

The need and opportunity for innovation in course development was also identified.

• Throughout this process it would be a mistake to presume that what regional unis currently offer is what they should offer – we need enough imagination to anticipate demand and drive demand for new disciplines.
• With a bit of imagination regional unis could lead demand in new areas that have an important research focus, for example, regional sustainable ecology could develop strong international standing and drive demand.
• We need to create a point of difference in serving regional communities. Can’t be knee-jerk though; not short-run, ad hoc courses. Hard to sustain if always developing new courses. Identify prospective needs. Set agenda as experts rather than just responding to them.
Question 2

What do you see as the current weaknesses in the provision, availability or organisation of higher education and research in regional Australia?

A tension was expressed between the positive outcomes regional universities deliver, and the challenges they experience juggling their unique roles in the lives of their communities within current Federal funding models for teaching and research. Regional universities suffered from the general disadvantage regional Australia faced compared with more urban areas.

- *Australia trades on its geography and history with the bush internationally but denies access for those living in remote communities.*
- *Australia has a wonderful, romantic view of the bush but behaves towards it in an appalling manner.*
- *Narrow, metro focused, coastal bound.*
- *Does Australia want a regional Australia well serviced or does it want metro/suburban unis?*
- *Regional heritage is the part we all understand; 6 million people live in regional Australia; where’s the corresponding funding?*
- *How do we convince decision-makers that we are very strong contributors to national good when we are not in direct line of sight?*
- *Critical to have infrastructure in regional Australia.*

Inadequate funding had a number of adverse consequences for regional universities.

- *Relative lack of funding for regional campuses leads to a number of ‘regional traps’ - higher workloads; greater staff-student ratios; impacts on research outcomes.*
- *Thinness of course offerings.*
- *Insufficient breadth of course offerings and capacity to offer specialisations, for example, within science.*
- *Not enough labs, facilities or access to lecturers. No funding to get anything done; insufficient resources.*
- *Some courses are high cost and more difficult to deliver yet are reputation building.*
- *Student experience not the same as a metro uni.*
- *Spreading ourselves too thinly does nothing except endanger what we do.*
Many regional students faced difficulties funding their studies.

- Need to look at our customers. Students have to work while they study. If you can’t get a job in regional Australia to study, you’ll go the city. Connection with employers is critical. Living in the city can be expensive though.
- The distance a student has to travel impacts on their engagement.
- Some subjects have compulsory residential schools – additional cost to student plus they may not be able to be released from work and other commitments.

There were particular challenges associated with multi-campus, regional universities and in particular, operating smaller, regional campuses.

- Need to centralise specialisations – can’t deliver support that is expected or needed across multiple locations.
- Spreading of resources too thinly across too many small campuses.
- Duplicating disciplines and support services across too many locations.
- How to get equitable spread of resources where common courses are offered?
- Pressure to do identical things at each campus when much better off differentiating - students respond when geographic specialisation is clear.
- You’ve got less and have to spread it further, running and managing large numbers of campuses across large geographic areas.
- Student services – common experience – how do you achieve that?
- Lot of campuses spread all over the place at significant cost – this will only get worse if integrated.
- Small campuses – diseconomies of scale.
- Having sufficient critical mass to undertake teaching and research.
- University services are replicated at each site and consume resources.
- How do you get the right services in the right campuses and what is the cost of doing it?
- Tyranny of distance - technology helps but distance between campuses a problem.
- Communications and training a weakness at regional, decentralised campuses.
- Communication task very complex.
- How do you build cohesive communication system that allows for a university not a multiversity?
- To get an issue dealt with that involves multiple support areas is very difficult.
- Multi-campus, decentralised institutions need strong systems; day-to-day administrative systems can be a nightmare - information overload through fear of excluding people.
- Bringing diverse groups together and getting systems harmonised would be a huge task.
- Training at smaller campuses – very hard.
- Locked into a degree with little flexibility if you miss a unit, have to wait a year.
The way in which research is funded and valued was identified as a weakness.

- **Academics are broadly treated as teachers** – if you get research too that’s good. In the cities, experts do research and some teaching. Need to change that to promote expertise.
- **NSW suffers from having too many providers of agricultural science** - current policy let them wither, everyone getting weaker and weaker. Good opportunity to push argument of co-ordination – lose parochial interests.
- **City unis not averse to being tied to a regional group.**
- **A lot of research is serendipitous and comes from unexpected interactions between researchers.** If geographically separated these interactions may not occur. Group researchers as well as make the best use of technology.
- **Attracting and growing young academics; you can’t get the best people and attracting the best people is how you grow reputation to attract students.**
- **Industry impact not valued; local agencies commission research which has a demonstrable impact on the ground but is not necessarily published.**
- **Teaching load needs to be reduced and academics freed up to do research.** Developing our research and doing it better.
- **We don’t articulate our research culture.**
- **Higher teaching loads in regions; few staff dedicated to research.**
- **Invest in research.**

**Insufficient support for postdoctoral students was identified as a particular weakness.**

- **Graduating PhDs need postdoctoral scholarships.**
- **Haven’t invested enough in research or research career path.**
- **Invest in research – infrastructure and human resources.**
- **Lack of strategy and structure.** Need to bring researchers through as students. We encourage them to choose an academic path but then do not provide them with a career. We skill them up and then don’t provide for them yet everyone else wants them.
- **Provision for research inadequate.** Insufficient PhD students. Income is teaching, and research is not adequately funded in the budget model.

Other comments related to the federal government’s higher participation targets for low SES students, and speculation about the general preparedness of students if the net is cast more widely - whether this might lead to an increase in students who require more assistance to succeed, and a need for services and courses to assist them, with a corresponding cost.

- **More care and feeding.** More student load. Less research output.
- **It costs money to assist low SES.**
- **Suggest a one year bridging course, as year one of a four year degree - students with a certain UAI going straight into year 2.**
- **Affordability - for a student to pay their way then incur a HECS debt from low SES is very hard.**
- **Certain courses where face to face is essential for graduates to succeed including residential schools can involve significant costs.**
- **We don’t know what impact lifting the cap will have on prospective students.**
- **Run the risk of losing better students with the lifting of cap.**
A number of practical challenges were identified for staff working at regional universities.

- **Opportunity cost and resource cost.**
- **There is an opportunity cost in time, access and cost.** Getting to conferences and networking for professional development has a cost attached to it.
- **Staff on the road constantly.**
- **Capacity to attract quality staff to the campus you want.**
- **Tension of where staff want to live.**
- **Professional networks and opportunities better in the city.**
- **Professional development.** Need greater liaison in local communities to provide local professional development and other professional development.
- **Limited collegiality, limited research collaboration, personal and professional development suffers, no natural interactions.**
- **Lower salaries living in a region. Regional salaries do not match urban salaries.**
- **You’ve got less and have to spread it further.**
- **People on very short term contracts, hard to get other work to supplement them – casual academic staff trapped in a revolving door.**

Competition rather than co-operation was also perceived as a problem.

- **Irrational emphasis on competition not co-operation.**
- **Education is not seamless between universities, VET, TAFE.**
- **Competition within a university, between universities and internationally.**

Telecommunications in regional Australia were identified as inadequate. There was a strong, recurrent complaint around technology – that the people needing it the most – isolated regional and rural communities – have the least access to it. There was concern about how to reach the 2% of people who would not have access to the National Broadband Network. Typically they would be small communities in great need, and likely to include communities within each university’s footprint.

- **Regional research represents what Australia is about but better technological infrastructure is required – (theology) students outside Alice Springs on dial-up are unable to submit assignments.**
- **Locating unis in regional areas reminds people that the technology that is assumed to be available isn’t necessarily there.**
- **Small towns will miss out on the national broadband strategy.**
- **Broadband should be rolled out from remote, regional and rural areas first and then to the city and not the other way around.**
- **Priorities should be set around highest need, not highest numbers.**

There was a perception that regional institutions had to deal with reputational issues associated with being regional.

- **Increase standing through growth and size – stop dominance of Group of Eight.**
- **This is often about perception but reputation results in talent in local community going elsewhere on pre-conceived ideas.**
• Perception worries them.
• Students go to uni with highest UAI requirement - make that uni their first preference.
• Capital city unis benefit from higher visibility.
• Assumption that regional means second rate.
• We don’t promote ourselves well. We don’t skite enough about our successes, we take it for granted.
• We need to lift the profile of local research.
• I think this is a great uni, I love it, and am disappointed that students don’t feel the same way.
• My family looked down on my choice when I walked away from a casual contract in the city and continual exploitation, to come to a regional uni.
• Australian universities have relied a lot on the concept of being regional, not on their expertise – seen as second class, perhaps pushed by the government’s funding model. If excellent, we should be drawing people from the cities, as occurs in the US.
• In the US it is a rite of passage to go to the other side of the country for uni – that culture doesn’t exist in Australia – there’s an opportunity to address that with this project.
• We’re defined by location and not by activity.
• Second chance linked to second rate.
• Don’t celebrate our achievements enough.
• Message about research doesn’t get back into regional communities.
• In some parts of the world, regions are perceived as not as good.
• We need to be smarter at how we package up what we do for regional Australia.
• Regional unis get sucked into big boys’ game – going to places where we’re not really comfortable and will never properly compete.
• Know what we can do and what we can do well and stay away from the rest - tendency to go in thinly in some areas.
• Need better recognition as an entity for excellence in specific areas with employers – bigger, better and more respected.

There was concern expressed about the loss of identity if integration proceeded.

• Would the profile of both institutions be lost if integration occurred?
• Take care not to disappear off the map if a new entity.
Question 3

Would growing distance education opportunities help to address labour force needs in regional and rural Australia?

What is meant by distance education, assumptions about the cost and effort needed to provide courses via distance education, the potential of technology to revolutionise distance education, the tension between providing sound teaching and responding to student expectations around technology, were all significant themes raised.

DE was identified as one way of addressing labour force needs in regional and rural Australia, and regional universities were seen as having particular strengths in DE.

- DE students are more likely to be career changes and postgraduate so it helps regional labour force needs by getting degrees they otherwise wouldn’t have got.
- DE lets people stay in the workforce and study by DE – enables them to stay in their towns and study – law a good example.
- DE allows people to work while they study; small family farms where kids are required to work.
- DE would help if there was an incentive or tie in with employers in their region eg. local government.
- Needs to tie in to the labour need they will be servicing.
- Work based relationship between provider and employer.
- Technology can be a selling point because graduates will need to use it in the workforce.
- Regional unis – great strength and culture in models of teaching and learning that are not content specific.
- Models of teaching are changing because of student mobility and technology.
- Needs to appeal broadly for geographically diverse audiences.
- It’s about giving students what they want, when they need it.

The range of offerings available via DE needed to be broadened and the quality of the DE experience enhanced.

- Increase offerings via DE including postgraduate.
- Provide product that meets expectation of market – that gets around poor telecommunications infrastructure.
- Offer flagship courses – among the best courses in country via DE.
- DE experience is patchy.
- Need more face to face via link or mix mode.
- Need to do it better.
DE students are very isolated. Don’t feel part of community unless the lecturer makes an effort. This may be at the cost of research output.

- Lack of clarity and consistency as to what is meant by DE.
- Different quality of DE required.
- Imagination needed - opportunity to come up with an idea of DE that is really quite different.
- Real opportunity to come up with a new concept BUT need to be clear about communicating and marketing that difference.
- DE options need to be expanded, both the course offerings and type of experience.

Most thought that a flexible or converged delivery mode with the option of strong interactivity offered the best model.

- Not two levels of teaching – one DE and one face-to-face.
- Online potential; converged potential; there’s no one size fits all.
- Being in the region matters educationally - fly in fly out education – can’t think of any examples where this is a positive model.
- Flexible options within the package of teaching and learning – not one or the other – needs to be a choice.
- Might have some students who want it to be high tech, others who do not.
- Shifting core subjects due to budgetary constraints to DE – students don’t like it. Expectation is for face to face classes.
- Are we limiting technology application because of our own limitations?
- Need to be responsive to student expectations.
- Increase DE but also blended modes for students who want to be connected, to feel part of a cohort, experience interaction.
- More blended model could help attrition rates.
- Blended offers more “scaffolding”.
- Shouldn’t be a question of either/or. Population base will mean some things cannot be delivered regionally, so need connectivity and need to grow your own for relevance to local culture so not either/or – it needs to be two way flow, effective knowledge exchange.
- Need to be logical about what is offered via DE - what is there demand for?
- We need better research into DE student motivations – why are students studying and why via that mode of study?

However, there was a strong view that the use of technology needed to be balanced with what is pedagogically appropriate.

- Students have expectations with technology, but it needs to be more than consumer driven – it needs to be educationally appropriate.
- Needs to be validated against educational quality and outcome.
- Just because technology is there doesn’t mean it should be used.
- Converged delivery mode within the models of teaching and learning.
The need to equip staff appropriately to deliver high quality DE was important.

- Train staff.
- Need staff well trained and confident across mixed mode; best practice with a set, consistent, minimum standard of experience for students.
- There’s a lingering thought that DE is easier but in reality it is more time consuming, needs to be consistent and to be considered in relation to staff workloads and staff student ratios.
- Staff development is needed to assist people to use technology for teaching and research.

The time and cost of high quality DE provision was also identified as an issue.

- Danger is if you proliferate too many individualised modes - too difficult for academic workloads.
- Need to be clear that DE is good for the bank account but not for educational outcomes or experience.
- Online can be more interactive than face to face and not necessarily cheaper.
- Perception that DE is cheaper and more efficient. DE is not cheaper nor easier nor more efficient.
- DE has been seen as cheap option but is expensive, time consuming, puts pressure on academics and takes time away from research.
- Technology changes so rapidly, maintaining it is high, really ads to cost of DE.
- Maintaining shelf life of technology; training staff; engaging students – not well funded in current model.

The potential of DE for international teaching and research was identified.

- DE shouldn’t be linked to regional solution – good quality DE would be winning internationally.
- Doesn’t have to be students on campus; we can think internationally through DE delivery – about using excellence to attract students from the cities and internationally.
- In the future there’ll be more competition with international unis via DE.
- There’s a sense of tension between being regional and yet being a strong distance education provider, reaching people throughout Australia and globally.
- Regional can compete successfully in a virtual world bringing value to regional sector – example of remote Aboriginal communities trained in research skills, leading to both regional accessing regional and international regional accessing regional.
Question 4

If you could choose one thing, what would be the most important reform you would make to help grow the provision of higher education and research in regional Australia?

Many ideas reflected a need for investment to draw teaching and research funding to regional areas, and to invest in the future capacity of regional Australia. There was strong support for better funding of regional students, as well as regional universities, in acknowledgement of the potentially higher costs they face with fewer opportunities for funding than their city counterparts, either through scholarships or paid work. It was felt that the Government gives significant funding support to metropolitan universities to deliver regional programs and rural research but comparatively little to regional universities that are better placed to achieve results.

- **Fund the concept of regional education.**
- **It is easier to support yourself in a city and easier to access support.**
- **Encourage commonwealth government to properly fund transition to university initiative.**
- **Assist students to travel – there are public transport equity issues.**
- **Make postgraduate study an attractive option in regional Australia.**
- **More scholarships.**
- **Financial support for the student population we’re trying to attract.**
- **Resourcing students as well as institutions.**
- **Increase Austudy so you can live on it.**
- **Tax free scholarships.**
- **Double the value of PhD stipends.**
- **Open PhD scholarships to international students.**
- **Transport, housing infrastructure for students to keep them in regional areas; capacity building – need to build participation to build research and innovation.**
- **Knock off quasi unis that are set up in regional areas just because it’s financially advantageous.**
There were calls to put research at the top of the agenda.

- More money for regional research.
- Provision in grant applications where if big research clusters have links in regional Australia they are given preference.
- Not suggesting infrastructure be built but you could require that any grant have input from regional Australia.
- Divide research funding up more equitably. The Australian government should not assume where breakthroughs are going to occur. There is an assumption that research and excellence will emanate from cities.
- Impact research is key but mismatch with funding model which focuses on theoretical research.
- Doesn’t want to separate teaching and research but get a guarantee a percentage goes to the regions.
- Develop centres of excellence in regional Australia.
- Take young researchers and support them.
- Reward excellence where you find it.
- Grow reputation and capacity.
- Centres of excellence that specifically address vocational needs in rural/regional areas.
- Every knowledge discipline needs access to regional/rural understanding. Make the connection between region to region and international region to region - example of CRC Desert Knowledge - natural advantages in being a uni with a regional footprint – because we have on the ground knowledge of arid zone living yet the market is global. Engage regional nodes. Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge within rural/regional footprint highly valuable within regions and internationally.
- Not knowledge provision, knowledge generation – if the other way around, it’s a confused entity.
- Need to develop more centres of excellence in regional areas.

Other ideas related to incentives to attract and keep young researchers.

- Mechanisms needed to link them into grants - grow our young researchers.
- Young researchers need a career pathway – an apprenticeship with a future afterwards.
- In Norway if you go to regional areas you get your HECS paid as an incentive.
- Regional unis have less capacity to offer scholarships to higher degree students and they go elsewhere; need to be able to build research culture and attract more people into the system; build research hubs.

Articulation with TAFE was considered crucial with pathways identified and recognised.

- Really establish links with specialist degrees; integrate TAFE-work-Uni.
- Closer collaboration with TAFE and other pathways.
There was also a call to stop grouping Australian universities.

- *Artificial clusters undermining institutions.*
- *Use of term like “sandstone”. We self-inflict by putting ourselves in the basket called “regional”.*

Finally, more research was needed into student motivations in relation to higher education generally, and distance education specifically.

- *Not a lot of client focus – motivations of students across the sector are critical to understand. More research needed into the motivation about what unis students want to go to and why.*
- *If we’re going to be going into these communities we really need to understand them.*
Conclusion

The project Co-Directors thank staff and students who attended the briefing sessions. The website for the Feasibility Study into a new national university in regional Australia can be found at www.nura.edu.au. Briefings will also be held at Charles Sturt University's campuses at Parramatta, Manly and Ontario and the Southern Cross University Hotel School Sydney, run in partnership with Mulpha Australia. Submissions are able to be made via the website.