

A Paper about 'Regionality'

Big Ponds, Small Ponds and Deep Ponds, but no Stagnant Pools: Regional Community Engagement within Globalized Education and Research

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Abstract

We welcome the frequent reference to the role of regional universities as the review of higher education gains momentum. We note the emergence of workshop(s) focussing on community engagement, and the input to these workshops from within Australia and from around the world. We choose to be proactive in defining the role of our own regional University in the hope that the diversity of Australia's universities can be better understood.

The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) acknowledges the importance of its regions, engages with its communities as a matter of course, and does not believe that "being regional" is synonymous with "being local". As senior members of a University with a student body in which more than 100 nationalities are represented, with more than 16,000 of its 22,000 students of all ages studying in their own locations world-wide, yet with a pivotal leadership role in the Darling Downs and Wide Bay regions, we understand the complexities of engagement. As a university with acknowledged leadership in distance education and e-learning, USQ offers "world-class-ness" in the pedagogies and technologies that will shape the future of much of Australia's competitiveness. As a University with no long-established generic reputation for research, but with demonstrable "pockets of world-class-ness" in specialist areas, we understand completely that "small", in research, can also on occasion be "beautiful".

We wish to share our perceptions with others, some of whom might prefer to produce a newly stratified university system for Australia. We believe that the pursuit of world-class-ness is less about the selection of one, or two, particular institutions, excellent though they undoubtedly are, and much more about nurturing world-class-ness, wherever it might be.

Introduction

We are encouraged by some of what is written in the "*Higher Education at the Crossroads*" Discussion Paper. The opportunity to take stock of the Australian university system some twelve years after the abolition of the Great Divide is timely and sensible. The opportunity to address fundamental policy issues in teaching and learning, research, operating and infrastructure funding, diversity, community engagement, internationalisation, world competitiveness, and more, is too important to be squandered.

Outcomes will be crucial to the placement of Australia in a world where knowledge is a most valuable commodity, and lifelong learning is an inevitability. Resolution of issues, be they in the area of public funding, system structures or system functions, must be far more than merely expedient. They must be sufficiently far-sighted to embrace the needs of the next two decades, sufficiently informed by the startling achievements of the last decade, and sufficiently brave in contemplating the diversity of clients who will be tomorrow's learners, their expectations and their intellectual potential.

It is dangerous to generalise but profoundly important that we recognise the danger of generic statements. The fact that some universities are sited in metropolitan areas, or are long-

established, or excellent in research, or located in the leafier suburbs of the 'sixties and 'seventies, or the broader pastures of the regions, is not a necessary basis for classification. Nor is it a basis for determining specialised sub-sets of the total system. Certainly, characteristics of "the metropolitans" or "the regionals" are common among the inhabitants but, to go beyond that, is to deny the valuable diversity that exists when one drills down below the generic level.

Our concern is that there should be a clear understanding of the "equal but different" contributions by individual universities, with those equal differences seen as complementary parts of the total system jigsaw. Such an expectation stems from an understanding of what has been achieved across the system through times of massive changes in demand, educational technologies, research imperatives and funding. It is not an expectation that all, or all parts, will be "equally good" or that there are many laurels upon which to rest. However it does mean that, despite the reality of the need for prioritisation, there shall not be an imposed pecking order biased by those with the loudest voices, the biggest budgets, the largest research programs or the longest histories.

"World-class-ness" is much less about getting your brand name into the Top Fifty of somebody's list, and much more about producing peer-recognised world class outcomes in those sub-sets of total performance in which a particular university seeks to excel. Most such lists are generated with the self-interests of the compilers in mind, against criteria that are at best uncontextualised or only partially justified. A much more legitimate aim for any university is that it shall do all its activities in accordance with national and international best practice. From that base, each university must identify "peaks of excellence" in which it can aspire to world leadership, as judged by the weight of opinion of its peers. "World-class-ness" in this sense occurs in the most surprising places!

We offer some observations, largely based on our experience in one regional university in recent years. Our prior experience before occupying positions of leadership at the University of Southern Queensland embraces many years spent as university teachers, researchers and managers in major metropolitan universities in Australia and overseas, in the new regional campuses of older (and younger) universities, and in substantial non-university research experience, consultancy and private enterprise. We immodestly believe that this is a sufficient reason to conclude that we have a sound understanding of the challenges that lie ahead.

Defining Regionality

Regional Australia is a big place. The people who live there have remarkably diverse histories, talents, aspirations, and resources. Unless they are teenagers hankering after the Big Smoke, they rarely envy their metropolitan cousins and generally only pack their bags when they cannot obtain work locally.

Regional Australia may feed metropolitan Australia but it does not exist to provide a feeder service to the big cities. A major challenge for the institutions, and not least the universities, of regional Australia is to demonstrate that they provide holistic service with quality outcomes sufficient to make it obvious that those regionally achieved outcomes are satisfying, often sufficient and nationally valuable. In brief, regional Australia does not depend upon a metropolitan-based Finishing School system. Instead, it contains people who, for example, on exiting from a regional university, are totally capable of taking their place in the region or, if they so choose, anywhere in the world.

Regional Australians are proudly regional in focus, commitment and lifestyle. In choosing a university, most do not enrol in the regional university simply because they "can't get in" to one of the metropolitans. Even when that is the case (and unquestionably it is easier for non-conventionally qualified candidates to find a place in our newer institutions), it takes very little time

for them to realise how fortunate they are. Lifestyle issues, flexibility, intimacy of experience, access to staff and a sense of community, distinguish the learning experience. User-friendliness, despite the recent unfavourable and unsubstantiated rank ordering of universities allegedly on that basis, by one particular far too frequent contributor to The Australian Higher Education Supplement, is a proud characteristic of the regional universities.

Regional Australia is part of Australia, just as Australia is part of the Asia-Pacific region, and the Asia-Pacific region is part of a global community. It embraces many towns and cities that have excellent education facilities, both at school and post-secondary level. Toowoomba, for example, rightly points to its superb private grammar schools and colleges, and its three similarly excellent state high schools. The city is the premier venue for the secondary education of boys and girls from southern and western Queensland. Over 60% of its high school population attend private schools.

From 1967, with the creation of Queensland Institute of Technology (Darling Downs), and thence the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, it was the wish of the City and region that its excellent secondary education structure be added to at tertiary level, alongside a strong Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector. The impetus that led to the creation of the University of Southern Queensland in 1992 was a community impetus that defied bureaucracy, prompted occasional “outrageous” decisions and began the legacy of “mixed mode”, on campus and distance education expertise that now distinguishes USQ. It was a regional activity that, thanks to the Dawkins reforms, has now produced a regional university with global reach, embedded in its communities yet providing teaching and learning opportunities to over 16,000 people around the world, studying in their own place, at their own pace. Its focus, with a further 5,500 students on campus in Toowoomba and 700 on campus in Wide Bay, remains regional but its clients are not constrained to live in that inner “Chinese box” of the “region: nation: world” set.

Local, Regional, National and International

People like to refer to their “local University”. There is a sense of pride that the University “belongs to them” and they can defend it, speak out in its favour and have influence upon what it does. As an expression of ownership, there is little wrong with being labelled as local. However, as a descriptor of what the University does, it is inadequate and misleading. It is also useless as a marketable brand. It suggests limited outreach, limited influence and limited aspirations. It is inconsistent with access to global content, boundary-less information and communications technologies, an international, multi-cultural client base and the realities of present or future funding models.

Being regional is entirely different from being local. It sets a framework for priorities without implying a constraint upon their scope or significance. It permits the concept that, from a regional base, there can be services that satisfy national and international teaching and learning needs, generate research outcomes, and create employment opportunities. It recognises that regional prosperity, especially in a knowledge society, depends upon the provision of educational services that can underpin the lifelong learning needs of those whose professional and lifestyle choices bring them to the region. It challenges outdated notions that educational opportunity can only be found by migrating towards the campuses of a limited number of large institutions, usually at sea level and in State capitals. In the case of USQ, with several thousand students studying “at distance” in metropolitan areas, it implies opportunity, even to those who live near city campuses yet for social, work-related, financial or lifestyle reasons cannot, or choose not to, study “face to face”.

Regionally important services and outcomes are almost always nationally significant. In generic terms, Australia’s image internationally is conditioned as much by what happens in its regions as in its great cities. Its world leadership in the provision of learning opportunities to isolated communities was embedded in the School of the Air and is continued in the pedagogical

leadership of universities such as USQ. The traditions of the Royal Flying Doctor Service are the practical expression of the need to provide excellence in health care nationwide, and modern diagnostic services carry on that tradition. Primary industries, broad acre farming, winemaking, the maintenance of transport corridors, the preservation of unique forests, lakes, gorges, parks, river systems and indigenous treasures, are all regional responsibilities of national significance.

In tertiary education matters, and probably other areas also, many nationally significant actions are internationally competitive. It might be a seductive argument that, with the targeting of a (very) small number of universities for special resourcing, “one or two” world-class universities could emerge. It would be idle not to believe that increased resources can stimulate latent excellence. Our best can certainly become even better. However, the difficulties are in the implied definition of the present state of Australia’s university system, the persisting cringe factor regarding anything non-Australian and the supposition that a league table of university-wide “world-class-ness”, is useful or even achievable. A view that what goes on overseas is *per se* likely to be better than the home-grown product is not sustainable. For example, when a comparison is made between the pedagogies of online learning world wide, we see the pre-eminence of the home-grown product. Particular non-Australian assessments of Australian universities need not prevail.

Our preference is for the equally seductive argument that “world-class-ness” is identifiable in the most surprising places, often trapped inside the most inadequately resourced institutions but, despite that, thriving and brilliant. We return to this theme later but here emphasise that, just as “regional” is the innermost Chinese box in the “region: nation: world” set, there is also the continuum “locally proud...regionally important...nationally significant...internationally competitive”.

The Importance of Diversity: Different but Equal

The Federal Minister of Education appears to express concern that Australia’s university system is duplicative with individual universities all trying to do much the same things. Whether this is his view or not, it is not one that can be sustained at any level other than the most generic. Beyond the fact that, rightly and with different emphasis, all the universities engage in teaching, learning, scholarship, research, community engagement and commercial enterprise, they have little else in common! Beyond the well-loved fallacy that each university is a set of diverse academic disciplines held together by a common concern about car parking, the most noticeable feature below the generic level is the quite astounding diversity that has been developed and fostered over the last decade.

It is essential that data available to a concerned public, or to those charged with making recommendations, is both accurate and properly contextualised. While accepting that no single data set can be expected to diagnose the profile of a particular university, the dangers of misinterpretation of status measures and/or performance measures are real.

By way of example, *Higher Education at the Crossroads*, (table d1, page 73) describes diversity and performance of our universities. It contains data on “Total onshore student enrolments in Australia (2000)” and “Total offshore student enrolments overseas (2000)”. The data shown therein for USQ are 15,342 and zero, respectively. The interested reader might reasonably but wrongly conclude that USQ apparently has no international students studying overseas. In fact, these data, for USQ and all other universities, are, unsurprisingly, conditioned entirely by the definitions and scopes adopted by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). In fact, the scope of the data is Semester 3 1999 plus Semester 1 2000, at a particular date and includes no Semester 2, 2000 enrolments. In fact, “Offshore student enrolments overseas” refers only to students enrolled for “face-to-face” teaching at offshore campuses. In fact, therefore, the data do little to describe the diversity of USQ in regard to its learner base, especially since USQ has a substantial mid-year commencing enrolment and significant numbers of continuing students

who may, for lifestyle reasons, only enrol in Semester 2. More significantly, USQ's enrolment, within the scope of the reported data, of 2,529 non-Australian students who study its distance learning programs in some 40 different countries, is subsumed into the "onshore" enrolments for no better reason than that they are apparently conveniently treated as enrolled on the Toowoomba campus. USQ's additional truly onshore international enrolment of 405 on campus students is also hidden in the total enrolment data.

Here, then, is an example of where it is necessary to drill down below the generic data in order to actually understand diversity. This takes time and the willingness to believe that a claim of diversity is far more than hypothetical. The "whole of year" data for 2001 would be even more informative. A reading of USQ's recently produced Australian Universities Quality Agency Portfolio, available with password access through the web at <http://sharepoint.usq.edu.au/augq>, would be better still.

About 75% of USQ's total enrolment study off campus. USQ produces study materials for some 1,400 courses each year. Its study materials are available to on campus students. Every student is an "online" student in the sense that each has access to web-based materials that add value to more traditional on and off campus delivery and content. Some 7,000 student units are enrolled exclusively online or, in the case of MBA students, as a parallel delivery mechanism to traditional distance learning. The University's key teaching and learning objective is to provide complete freedom of movement between on and off campus study for any of its students. It is a "triple option – dual mode" university providing on campus, off campus and online delivery options to a learner who moves his or her preferred learning mode between equally accredited, equal quality options, to suit lifestyle decisions.

USQ's teaching and learning strategies are unlikely, therefore, to be categorised as similar to many others in the system.

USQ chooses not to offer, or seek to offer, the therapies, law other than within a commercial law context, medicine, veterinary science, modern languages other than English and German, Japanese, physics majors, chemistry majors, architecture, human movement studies, etc.

With an emphasis often unique in the Australian system, USQ offers, and will continue to offer, strong programs in the visual and performing arts, mass communications, applied psychology, sustainable land use, VET and early childhood programs, climatology, bioinformatics, biomedical science and engineering, nursing, agricultural engineering, mechatronic engineering, e-business etc. It offers a range of combined degrees across all faculties. It has suites of articulated certificate/diploma/degree programs at undergraduate and postgraduate level. It has professional doctorate programs with unique content and structure in Education and Business. Its full suite of 2-year, 3-year and 4-year engineering and engineering technology programs has been uniquely comprehensively accredited/reaccredited by the Institution of Engineers Australia. That Institution has chosen to identify USQ's distance learning programs in engineering as the worldwide benchmark for such programs and the standard to which other programs will be compared in professional accreditation processes.

USQ, in its content and specialisations, is unlikely, therefore, to be imitating many others in the system.

USQ is a very small player in ARC-funded research. Meanwhile, it chooses to make its contributions through alternative funding mechanisms. It conducts research of international significance through its National Centre for Engineering in Agriculture (NCEA) and its Land Use Studies Centre. The NCEA is a joint venture with a Queensland State Government Department. The Chair in Land Use Studies is jointly funded by another State Government Department. NCEA's research is funded from the Rural Research and Development organisations, the private

sector and other State Government agencies. USQ's Centre for Rural and Remote Area Health includes a Chair of Rural Nursing jointly funded by Queensland Health. USQ's Centre for Engineered Fibre Composites has, with industry partners, Wagners, recently been awarded \$10 million by the Queensland Government's Department of State Development and Department of Innovation and Information Economy. Approximately \$7.5 million of that resource is being used to build an R and D Centre that will be the foundation of a new fibre composites industry within the civil and structural engineering industries. It is a unique capability worldwide. USQ's work in biotechnology is relatively small-scale but uniquely targeted to the areas of interest in the region. Its fundamental work in muscular dystrophy research is pioneering in scope.

USQ, in its R and D, is not, therefore, imitating others and does not have to be big to be beautiful....and significant.

USQ's corporate commitment to the development of leading edge e-infrastructure is exemplified through its Generic Online Offline Delivery (GOOD) project, its implementation of an integrated PeopleSoft information and business system currently nearing completion within a cost budget significantly less than most other universities, and a new state-of-the-art web presence. Its recent acquisition of the WebCT learning management platform, accessible through its intranets, is a risk management strategy in a rapidly changing teaching and learning environment. Its implementation of the RightNow customer relationship management system is another part of the development of USQ's Fifth Generation approach to the provision of cost effective, scaleable, educational services through the next decade.

There are few universities in Australia that have adopted a similar university-wide corporate approach to preparing themselves for the e-learning demands that will be an inevitable part of any successful future university system.

USQ is not, therefore, structuring its operations in an imitative way.

In the international education market, USQ's profile offshore, based on the use of its own pedagogically sound study materials, with value-adding from local tutorial and administrative staff, and without franchising the responsibility for delivery to a third party, is unique within the Australian system. It can sometimes result in a product that is susceptible to price under-cutting by competitors who might have an alternative approach to international education, but it provides controls on quality and outcomes that are educationally important and sustainable in the longer term.

USQ's off shore strategy is, therefore, very different from its competitors.

USQ is happy to be described using business terms. Its business is "teaching and learning surrounded and supported by scholarship and research". It has constrained its business enterprises to being a founding, continuing shareholder and prime customer of NextEd Ltd, and to the creation, with venture capital partners, of INDELTA Ltd, a web solutions and e-learning company.

USQ's enterprise activities are, therefore, unlikely to be other than generically similar to other universities.

Our thesis, then, is that a definition of the role of a particular university, regional or otherwise, is a significant challenge. The Australian system that has emerged over the last decade, through times of generational, fiscal, educational and social change, is diverse. Its individual member universities are different in all but generic characteristics. It will be a mistake to attribute particular hierarchical status, or to concentrate resource, upon any sub-set of the system on the basis of

expediency, loudness of voice, the “North American Model”, or any other model that fails to recognise Australia’s leadership in, among many things, lifelong learning and innovation.

Funding Facts and Fiction

We present some funding facts. They give rise to some unavoidable conclusions that, in part, could be shared by other newer and/or regional universities in which there is no reserve to fall back on, no extensive history of substantial benefaction or bequests, and per Equivalent Full-time Student (EFTS) operating grant funding at the bottom end of the range.

We have, not surprisingly, analysed key USQ financial performance data over the last decade. We have also developed models for a range of scenarios over the next five years. These scenarios are realistic in terms of their expectations with regard to government funding, full-fee income, salary and cost escalations etc.

The data confirm a very simple, intuitive “engineering feel” for the dimensions of the funding position. Despite highly professional resource management, pro-active, expanding international full-fee programs, and a willingness to participate in appropriate commercial endeavours, the operational revenue achievable by the University in the years to come would fall short of expenditure needs unless appropriate further actions occur. Workflow patterns, staffing levels, support service levels, international strategies, program mixes, academic assessment and infrastructure funding, are all variables that need ongoing attention.

In a nut-shell, and in addition to ongoing expenditure controls, the non-profit \$120 million business that is USQ, efficiently managed, and used to producing outcomes within tight cost constraints, needs a further \$5 - \$7 million operating revenue per annum in order to maximise its outcomes and consolidate its Vision. Such a sum of money is substantially less than that foregone by the University over the last decade through the inadequacies of the Relative Funding Model developed long before USQ was in any position to achieve the profile that it now possesses. The University survives today in a funding environment which, in 2001, provided less than \$50 million in Commonwealth Grants to supplement \$28.4 million in HECS revenue, leaving some \$41 million (34.2%) of its revenue to be sourced from non-public funds.

Actual Out-turns since 1993 together with a range of modelling outcomes, show a steady growth in total operating revenue and expenses, and a sustained growth in net assets through to 2004. However the end-of-year cash balances, reflecting a combination of careful forward planning and operational inactivity over the mid-nineties, highlight the possibility of rapid decline from 1997onwards. The current liquidity ratios of the mid-nineties were inevitably high but need to be monitored carefully if the University is to return its enviable position in this regard, in the years ahead.

The cynic might attribute a decline in cash reserves and liquidity ratio over the last five years to inappropriate management decisions during a period corresponding to the incumbency of the authors of this Paper. However, it is worth noting that USQ has, over the same period, radically and appropriately positioned or repositioned itself within the system, and moved from a position described in its AUQA Portfolio as “competent anonymity” to a position of national and international leadership in mixed mode delivery and e-learning. USQ was Australia’s University of the Year: 2000-2001. It has invested over \$65 million in capital works at its Toowoomba and Wide Bay campuses. It has forged a uniquely complementary, and mutually valued, relationship with its local communities and, for example, achieved a 55% growth in its international income in 2001 compared with 2000.

These are some of the facts of being regional, national and international at this time.

The University will vigilantly monitor its financial position, exploring each of the modelling parameters as new system funding models are put in place. Minister Nelson's desire to provide sustainable funding levels for the regional universities is laudable as long as, mistakenly, the necessary levels are not seen as achievable through "regional body" contributions. The principal appropriate public funding source for an appropriately diverse university system is the Federal Government. An appropriate stimulus to the achievement of very substantial non-public funding is the provision of sufficient distributable public funding that can, at least in part, be used to grow enterprise and attract investment.

Engagement with the Regional Communities

USQ has two regional campuses. Two central planks of the current administration's strategies have been "unburying the treasure" in Toowoomba and developing a meaningful presence appropriate to the community's aspirations in Wide Bay. The consequences have been profoundly satisfying and the following observations are based on six years of leadership in the development of synergies between the University and its communities, and the feedback from those communities.

Prior to the mid-nineties, USQ and its predecessor UC(ollege)SQ, were of little consequence within the city of Toowoomba. A local enthusiasm for the former CAE, the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, that had fostered development towards university status, was largely exhausted as a little understood and largely uncommunicated process of change to becoming a viable University began. The University was still perceived as a place on the edge of town where great things had happened and might just happen again, yet was not part of mainstream city life. It was a place where interesting people played music and created artworks, kids who couldn't afford to leave town studied, and mature-age upwardly mobile professionals and tradespeople forfeited their leisure and family life in the interests of study by distance education.

USQ is, today, a widely known and greatly valued complementary partner with the city of Toowoomba. It is the meeting place of business and academia, the venue for cultural, performing and intellectual activity. It is the city's largest employer, the largest consultancy skills base and one of the most significant economic drivers in the region. It receives public support from a Mayor and City Council that have understood the importance of having a multicultural, vibrant university community as a sub-set of its population. It receives excellent and supportive coverage throughout the regional print and broadcast media and is widely accepted as a first class, nationally competitive institution that adds value to the image of Toowoomba as an outstanding regional education centre. USQ's successes in winning the University of the Year award, and in being named in 1999 as the International Council for Open and Distance Education's Inaugural Award Winner as a world-leading dual mode university, were seen as "wins" for Toowoomba and the Darling Downs as much as for the University.

Toowoomba's embrace of its own University has not happened by chance. A Vice-Chancellor and his Deputy Vice-Chancellors, in a regional University, must accept very public roles. They must be willing to "work the room", be transparent in all their actions, do the extra yards in terms of presence at public events, and "throw open" the University to inspection by the community. This can be done through formal meetings and, especially, by a planned schedule of quality social engagements through which the community can come to understand the University's objectives and meet its leaders. USQ has done this consistently over the last five years. It has supplemented its people gatherings with a highly professional and deliberate set of actions to "unbury the treasures" of an academic community that was far better than anybody was encouraged to believe in the early 'nineties.

No regional university can expect to get the same amount of "ear-time" with politicians, policy-makers and bureaucrats as its metropolitan counterparts. It relies, therefore, on very professional interactions with the print and broadcast media and very pro-active identification of newsworthy

stories and targeted networking. The University is well served in this regard through its Corporate Relations Manager and journalism staff.

The most distinctive “non-award” examples of USQ’s engagement with its wider communities are its McGregor Summer and Winter Schools and its Performance Centre. The Schools, running annually for 25 years, bring together participants and tutors from across Australia and from overseas. Internationally renowned practitioners in painting, sculpture, textiles, vocal and instrumental music, provide workshops for about 1000 participants each year in residential schools on campus in Toowoomba. A measure of their success is the high “return rate” of participants, many regarding the Schools as their principal creative outlet.

The USQ Performance Centre is a major venue for live public performance of theatre and music. It sustains two orchestras with community participation, smaller voice and instrument groups and a nationally acclaimed string, piano and woodwind quartet.

USQ’s Wide Bay Campus was established to meet needs as expressed by the community. In 1997 Federal, State, and Local Governments and the University created a combined Civic Precinct and University Campus in the new city of Hervey Bay, in the Wide Bay-Burnett region. The regional context is one of rapid population growth but social and economic disadvantage. The area has high youth unemployment, is under-serviced in terms of higher-level educational facilities (resulting in the region having one of the lowest higher education participation rates in Queensland), and has one of the highest welfare recipient rates in Australia. It is not surprising, therefore, that the regional community now sees this campus as a strategic investment for its future.

The community wanted a “proper University” with real presence and a range of full degree programs offered in Hervey Bay. This was achieved within constrained capital works and operating budgets and with few additional growth places. A major achievement was the creation of a “*Campus for the Information Age*” through development of the “*Wide Bay Mode*” of flexible delivery to provide access to a much wider range of the University’s courses than could otherwise be sustained by a new campus. Academic planning was based on community need and interaction in a wide range of activities. The cultural activities of the wider University were brought directly to the regional community;

The Wide Bay Campus also demonstrates an innovative and practical approach to the delivery of educational services to the community, with the establishment of *joint-use library facilities* as part of the project. This is rare on a worldwide basis, which led to the Campus becoming an important case study in a recent OECD research project on the value of Universities to regional development (OECD/IMHE Project 1997-99);

The lessons of this study, that the ‘synergy of a joint-use service is that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts’ have been demonstrated as the University and the Hervey Bay City Council combine to achieve the educational, social and economic benefits of co-development on the Civic Precinct site. Staffing and operational costs are shared, there is no unnecessary duplication of services, facilities are provided more cost effectively and coordinated collection development optimises the availability of information resources. As a result, the community of Hervey Bay now has a much richer resource and more sophisticated facilities, while campus students and personnel enjoy a Library service that is available for more hours per week than the University could on its own afford.

In the wider context, the development of the Civic Precinct site as a regional joint-use facility and the focus for the ‘city heart’ of Hervey Bay, is already beginning to pay dividends. Its initial success is reflected in the development of ancillary services such as a community recreation centre on adjacent land, and local businesses are also increasingly using the facilities and

expertise offered by the University. The people of the region are increasingly promoting 'their' university. This is extremely encouraging for the University, and in the long run must also benefit the Cities of Hervey Bay and Maryborough, and the surrounding region, through the economic, social and cultural opportunities that the civic precinct site will support. These are opportunities that might otherwise be lost to this region.

To further broaden the concept of community involvement in higher education, the University has formed strategic alliances with the regional business community through short courses designed to develop knowledge and skills related to the use of the Internet and other electronic resources, a regional *IT Research & Development Centre*, a regional *Macromedia Users Group* (the first outside the capital cities), and a local branch of the *Australian Computing Society*. It has engaged with the regional legal fraternity by establishing an outreach service in conjunction with the Queensland Department of Justice Library, and with the new Hervey Bay Hospital by giving access to electronic resources supporting post-registration nurse training.

With face-to-face enrolments running some 80% ahead of schedule (excluding any regional growth places), the University is now embarking on a \$3.2 million Phase 2 of the Wide Bay campus building program.

Engagement with the community is, then, a reality for USQ, as with many other regional universities. It is a mutually enriching phenomenon that has, at its heart, the pride that a community feels in having a nationally significant and internationally competitive university "on its door-step".

"World-class-ness" wherever it may occur

We have attempted to describe many of the characteristics of one particular regional university. In so doing, we hold to the view that "world-class-ness" is about the achievement of "peaks of excellence" emerging from a total performance base that itself must represent best national and international practice. We are of the opinion that "world-class-ness" exists in much of what USQ does.

Surprising though it might be to those whose experience is dominated by involvement with the major metropolitan universities, there *is* a paradigm shift that can only be addressed in non-conventional ways. Those who, like the authors of this Paper, have had long experience, both inside traditionally excellent universities and with the relative newcomers, will not be surprised. Nor will they see it as a threat to the best traditional practices, the importance of outstanding research, the need for academic freedom or the role of universities as the storehouses of intellectual excellence. What has happened is the convergence of technologies and people to produce a scaleable quality alternative teaching and learning capability.

The challenge throughout the current review of the universities is to create and maintain a sufficiently diverse and long-term view of what individuals and the Nation will demand and expect in ten to twenty years time. The review must reject courses of action that will segregate a small number of aspirants to generic world-class-ness from the rest. It must envisage funding and policy regimes that allow all of us to foster the pockets of world-class-ness for which we are responsible. It must recognise that there are levels of public funding for operational effectiveness below which even the most daring of us will struggle to survive. It must realise that, although community cooperation such as we have described can add value to the operation, regional communities cannot "subsidise" their local universities from extremely limited local resources. It must similarly recognise the inestimable value a region places upon being the venue for a genuine nationally significant and internationally competitive university.

The financial stringencies of the last few years have been very real. They have sharpened the wits of most university leaders and caused us to dredge out the weeds from many of the stagnant pools. The pools have become much deeper as a consequence, well stocked and much more transparent. They are all of different sizes; big and small. And that is precisely as it should be in a sustainable educational and research landscape.

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