



Office of the Vice-Chancellor

Tuesday, 4 August 2009

The Research Director
Economic Development Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Email: edc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Ms Bates

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Economic Development Committee's inquiry into employment creation opportunities in Queensland.

Overview of Southern Cross University

Southern Cross University (SCU) is a growing regional university with more than 15,500 students at its campuses in northern NSW (Lismore, Coffs Harbour and Tweed Heads), at four learning sites around Australia and a number of offshore collaborations.

In addition, we are developing a new campus at the Gold Coast at a site at Coolangatta Airport Development Park. The construction of the first building is almost complete, and the campus will open for enrolments from Session 1 2010. Planning for the second building is well underway. With the opening of our new campus, SCU has been building positive relationships with key government, industry and community stakeholders in Queensland and the Gold Coast; for example we have recently signed memorandums of understanding with the Gold Coast City Council and the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE.

Given SCU's presence in the Gold Coast, my comments are focussed on issues affecting that region, in particular the southern end.

Universities as sources for knowledge and innovation

My starting point is an observation from an OECD Report:

"As countries are turning their production towards value-added segments and knowledge-intensive products and services, there is greater dependency on access to new technologies, knowledge and skills. And, with the parallel processes of globalisation and localisation, the local availability of knowledge and skills is becoming increasingly important. OECD countries are thus putting considerable emphasis on meeting regional development goals, by nurturing the unique assets and circumstances of each region, particularly in developing knowledge-based

Professor Paul Clark Vice-Chancellor

industries. As key sources of knowledge and innovation, higher education institutions can be central to this process.”

Source: OECD September 2007 Report *Higher Education and Regions: Globally Competitive, Locally Engaged* p 11

This highlights the opportunities for government policies to see universities as an engine for economic growth, particularly from a regional engagement perspective (in this context, “regional” being used in the broader sense). The OECD Report includes a number of facets to this: research and innovation is, of course, a critical element, as is human capital development (including graduate employment in the region and professional development) and cultural and community development.

As the third tier of government, the Gold Coast City Council (GCCC) has been proactive in working with their local universities to improve higher education participation rates and the research presence. This focus on higher education is explicitly linked to enhancing the Gold Coast’s future economic development prospects. I would encourage both the GCCC and the State Government, as the two tiers of government closest to understanding community and industry needs, to work together with local universities to more effectively leverage opportunities for higher education in the Gold Coast. This partnership approach will also help foster innovation and ideas for longer-term economic growth in regional Queensland.

Science, research and technology infrastructure

I agree with the need to encourage diversification from traditional economic areas into knowledge-based industries. Just as it is important for government to recognise these opportunities through its relationship with industry, I would encourage government to work with universities so that the sector is better able to meet the new professional and research requirements that flow from these new opportunities. This can be part of the engagement between the sector and government mentioned above.

One specific initiative is for government to establish a capability data warehouse that facilitates staff in government, business and universities to identify and contact staff in other organisations with the required skills and expertise to undertake a particular research and development project. The link would be accomplished by a search engine running on a key word or words. This initiative could be particularly beneficial for those businesses that traditionally have not actively engaged with universities or researchers due to a lack of familiarity with different institutions and their expertise.

The Issues Paper asks questions about Queensland’s science, research and technology infrastructure. I note that the Gold Coast is somewhat disadvantaged in its research and development capacity. While this is changing, (for example, SCU’s new campus will include a Bioinformatics Research Unit that will provide IT and bioinformatics support for DNA sequencing and related medical, environmental, agricultural and industrial research), more infrastructure support is needed: The Queensland Government could play a role in working with all local universities and other stakeholders to more effectively leverage funding to help address this shortfall.

Skill requirements for the Queensland economy

Noting that the State Government is itself an employer of a substantial number of graduates in priority professions such as nurses, teachers, social workers and other medical and health specialists, nevertheless, sustained investment in education and training is essential to ensure there is a range of skilled and professional workers available when the economic upturn occurs.

This is a central issue for the Gold Coast, given its continued population growth and significantly lower rates of university participation. Studies and experience have shown that the physical presence of a new and substantial university campus is a critical element in raising educational aspirations among people who may not otherwise aspire to a university degree.

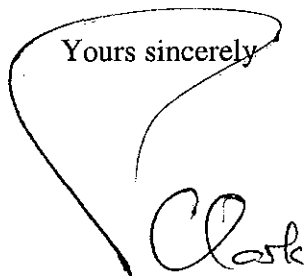
The Australian Government has set clear targets to increasing attainment in higher education and participation by people from a low SES background. Similarly, Queensland has set its own education and participation targets as part of its 2020 vision.

Ensuring that people in the Gold Coast have equivalent opportunities to those living in other cities will be essential in meeting these targets. People living in Australia's sixth largest city (and growing) should have access to as broad a range of on-campus courses at local universities as people living in other larger metropolitan areas.

To help achieve this, the criteria for the Australian Government's competitive funding processes (including the Education Investment Fund, EIF) needs to be able to reflect these national priorities. To date, of the \$1.514 billion allocated under the two EIF rounds, no Gold Coast university (or vocational education provider) has received funding. The Queensland Government can play an important role in liaising with the Australian Government about the need for additional resources for higher education (teaching, learning and research capacity) throughout the Gold Coast.

I look forward to the Committee's report from this important Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clark". The signature is written in a cursive style and is enclosed within a large, hand-drawn loop that starts from the left side of the page and curves around the signature.

Paul Clark