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7 August 2009

The Research Director
Economic Development Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane QLD, 4000
edc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Research Director,

Re: Submission to an inquiry into employment creation in Queensland

Please find a submission on behalf of the University of Southern Queensland to the Economic Development Committee's inquiry into employment in Queensland and the global financial crisis.

If you require any additional information or need to contact me for any reason, please contact me on sam.tickell@usq.edu.au of 07 46 31 2391.

Yours sincerely

Mr Samuel Tickell



Preamble

The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) has an acknowledged national and international leadership position in open and flexible higher education. USQ believes that distance and flexibly delivered higher education has the potential to be a key tool to assist Queensland to emerge from this global economic crisis and that the Queensland Government, through its relationship with USQ, has an opportunity to support and develop its uptake which is not afforded to other state governments.

Through engaging with higher education (learning, teaching and research), flexibly delivered, Queensland businesses and regional communities can increase knowledge capital and social capital, and, in turn, improve sustainability and innovation capacity. Through the consequent increases in higher education participation, Queensland would also meet Federal targets through the Bradley Review¹ and would allow greater stability in employment trends; particularly in difficult periods as University trained public have lower unemployment rates when compared to others with lesser training².

Through research, Queensland can embrace the concept of sustainability of its natural resources, while establishing a parallel economy to withstand diminishing resources and global downturns, like the one currently being experienced. Funding through established and new regional research centres would allow Queensland to maximise the benefits from its regional communities.

Naturally, sustainability is more than environmental sustainability and the continued success of regional communities relies on growth of social capital. Engagement and funding for cultural outlooks in regional communities will also assist in the sustainability of these communities through increasing knowledge and human capital.

Flexible learning solutions will enable Queensland to produce the skilled population needed to maintain employment and maximise the potential that future industry and business brings. Research and education will bring immediate benefits through employment opportunities, decreasing underemployment in the State and will bring mid and long term benefits via leading research innovations and a widely educated and adaptable population.

Education

As Queensland's employment landscape evolves, increasing participation in higher education will be essential for fundamental skill development. But increased participation in higher education will have greater and multiple benefits, both short term – as Queensland emerges from the global financial crisis; and longer term, as the employment landscape matures.

As can be seen with this period of economic adjustment, those with University degrees have had a lower unemployment rates than those without university training³. This can be attributed, in part to

¹Reference: Bradley, D, "Review of Higher Education in Australia, Final Report", Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra, 2008, downloaded from <http://www.deewr.gov.au> on 07 August 2009

^{2,3}Reference: Economic Development Committee Issues Paper No 1 – July 2009, Legislative Assembly of Queensland, p7

graduate attributes, like those of USQ⁴ which sees elements like workplace adaptability engrained in student outcomes via lifelong learning and global citizenship.

By increasing the proportion of the population with University degrees, in line with or exceeding the recommendations found in the Bradley Report, employment sustainability is likely to be improved into the future. Additionally, with immediate funding made more readily available through the latest Commonwealth Budget to support flexible learning options with Universities, the current issues related to underemployment may be partly resolved.

USQ is already engaged in contributing to the State's response to the growth targets set out in "Transforming Australia's Higher Education Sector"⁵ through its membership of the Minister's Higher Education Forum. It is abundantly clear that distance and flexibly delivered higher education will provide a major and cost-effective means of Queensland meeting the anticipated rise in demand.

With State support, expansion of flexible learning options will greatly aid regional communities. Queensland's regional communities and regional business provides significant economic benefits to the State. Enabling regional residents to study from their home town will be an important step in providing skilled employees for regional areas and up-skilling townships, while not impacting adversely the human capital. Additionally, if people can study in their own regions, there is a higher possibility that they will remain to pursue their career in a regional setting⁶. Advances in technological, cultural and other infrastructure would also enable Queensland to capitalise on the economic potential of regional communities.

Targeting programs at educationally disadvantaged and socially disadvantaged residents would allow some people to break the cycle of unemployment. Through targeted training and cultural connections, core skills could be taught to individuals and communities which would assist transition into successful employment. USQ has developed the most successful on-line tertiary preparation program (TPP) in Australia and now offers the second largest on-campus TPP program.

Additional programs encouraging lifelong learning would also assist Queensland residents to continually upgrade their skills, enabling them to move into emerging fields. Lifelong learning through flexible learning options would allow those in regional communities to maintain competitiveness in industry as changes occur in the future. Additional training and investment in technology infrastructure in health and allied health services would enable service improvement and assist in staff retention in regional areas.

In combination, flexible learning, staff retention in regional areas and investment in regional culture would allow social capital to be built and sustainability of regional economies and regional areas would be improved.

⁴Reference: University of Southern Queensland "Qualities of a USQ Graduate", Toowoomba, 2009, downloaded from <http://www.usq.edu.au> on 07 August 2009

⁵Reference: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations "Transforming Australia's Higher Education System", Canberra, 2009, downloaded from <http://www.deewr.gov.au> on 07 August 2009

⁶Reference: Dunbabin J & Levitt L, 2003, "Rural origin and rural medical exposure: their impact on the rural and remote medical workforce in Australia", Sydney, downloaded from <http://www.rrh.org.au> on 07 August 2009

USQ has a stated goal to ‘...provide the basis for major contributions by the University to its local regions’⁷. Sustainability through research and the use of emerging technologies will assist the agricultural, mining and regional businesses. The basic infrastructure for much of this research is already in place in institutions across Queensland. Regionally, research centres like the Centre for Rural and Remote Area Health and the Australian Centre for Sustainable Catchments could be engaged to provide research and technological resources for regional organisations and communities to appreciate the benefits of the end of the current global financial state.

Agriculture has been one of the most important industries in Queensland and is likely to continue to be so in the future. Continual research and use of technology in this area will enable Queensland to remain at the forefront of this global industry, enabling economic growth and employment sustainability.

In order for Queensland to benefit from the future economic upturn, investment in research for the next generation of agricultural equipment, resource usage minimisation and procedures is needed. This investment should assist the industry to maximise future economic and employment opportunities while minimising environmental impacts. To fully benefit from research, a combination of state funded and privately funded research would be ideal.

Technological infrastructure will be important business and knowledge growth throughout Queensland. As study opportunities increasingly move online, widespread availability of technological infrastructure, including broad band internet, will improve opportunities for regional communities to improve its knowledge resources.

Regional areas have much that to commend them for Queensland’s expanding research and technology industries. As demonstrated at the University of Ballarat and Deakin University’s technology precincts, regional areas can engage successfully in significant research and technology arrangements. This has also brought significant economic effects to their regions.

Given the experiences at Deakin University and University of Ballarat, regional Queensland would be suited to an investment in technology and research precincts and if so would provide opportunity to implement a network of towns to benefit from the precinct’s research and products. By increasing technology and research infrastructure in this way, the Queensland Government and private industry would enable the State to develop significant parallel economies of natural resources and ‘knowledge’.

⁷Reference: “USQ Strategic Plan 2009-2013” Toowoomba, 2009, downloaded from <http://www.usq.edu.au> on 07 August 2009

USQ has made sustainability a key organisational aspiration. It is an underlying theme of our Strategic Plan 2009-2013 and carbon neutrality is an aim of USQ for 2020. By becoming an exemplar, the University's sustainability push can assist Queensland in achieving sustainability in its employment and future economic health.

Queensland has a need to extend the economic life of its primary-industry-based economy but also a need to nurture alternatives. Higher Education and research is the key to both. Fundamental research and research training, positions the State to respond to and take a lead in emerging technologies. Investment in the learning and research industries will provide the skills needed to assist Queensland business and industry to meet the knowledge demands of becoming a State operating at optimal capacity.

The success of regional Queensland in the future will also rely on the 'liveability' of towns and centres. As the ease mobility of people, particularly young people, continues to increase, regional businesses will need to rely on abilities to make their town innovative and liveable. This would require not only sporting outlets but cultural outlets as well. Most Queensland towns began their existence as key strategic points for transportation, agricultural or mining purposes. These towns now serve of historical significance to Queensland and many continue to offer essential services to the State. Supporting the sustainability of these communities is vital and enhancing the cultural infrastructure of these towns will be vital to encouraging their economic success and growth in human capital.

It has been found that supporting cultural aspects of a community, allows it to entice people to settle in the community and for these people to provide a meaningful contribution to the community⁸. When combined with a welcoming environment and change ready leadership, regional communities can become innovative communities where business and employment can thrive. With adequate funding to arts and educational institutions that support regional communities, a cultural capital could be built to sustain a town's population and economic growth. Funding provided for these activities would allow many Queensland communities to position themselves well for the end of the global economic crisis.

Cultural funding and infrastructure also has the potential to engage with disaffected citizens of regional communities along with metropolitan centres. Working with arts and educations, institutions cultural engagement could occur in order to teach appropriate work practices, assisting those to exit the unemployment cycle.

Sustainability of employment can impact the success of health services in local communities. A link has been established between training medical professionals in regional areas and for those people to then seek employment in those regions once graduated. It would also be important to fully utilise technological infrastructure that assist in 'just in time' learning. Through high-speed broadband networks and use of portable technological devices, regional institutions, including health institutions, could improve services to their communities, a vital aspect in the continued sustainability of regional Queensland and the businesses that operate in those regions.

⁸Reference: Plowman I, 2003, "Innovation in rural Queensland: Why some towns thrive while other languish" Queensland, downloaded from <http://www.plowman.com.au> on 07 August 2009

Conclusion

Learning, research and research training are vital in enabling Queensland to successfully emerge from the global financial crisis.

Building technological infrastructure and social capital will be vital to the sustainability of regional communities.

Increasing Queensland's capability and capacity in these areas will require the commitment of additional resource to the higher education sector from the State Government.

The Queensland economy has a strong underlying higher education sector and expansion of this will satisfy State and Federal demands for increased University participation and research.

The flow down effects of the training, research and cultural engagement will mean that the community and business capital will increase significantly, achieving economic sustainability for the State and the people, business and regions which operate within it.
