

New campuses?

by John Ross | *The Campus Review* 21 Feb 2011

Several towns could gain university campuses, if SAF applications go their way.

The Commonwealth “is not so interested in lots more bricks and mortar”, according to University of Ballarat vice-chancellor David Battersby, with TAFEs expected to host higher education’s expansion across regional Australia.

But some universities are hoping to buck this trend. The University of Canberra, for example, is seeking structural adjustment (SAF) funds to establish new campuses at Goulburn and Cooma.

Pro vice-chancellor Monique Skidmore says there’s a strong case for a campus at Goulburn. “It’s at the bottom of the only inland NSW growth corridor,” she says.

“The whole south side of Goulburn has been reinvigorated. There’s something like 900 people commuting from Goulburn to Canberra. We have 100 students a day coming to UC from Goulburn. It’s about 50 minutes away - our staff can travel there daily if they have to.”

CSU’s SAF bid involves establishing new higher education facilities at TAFE campuses. But it’s also looking at the higher education needs of the NSW mid north coast centre of Port Macquarie, in a joint project with the University of Newcastle, UNSW, North Coast TAFE and Port Macquarie-Hastings Council.

Deputy vice-chancellor Ross Chambers says the group is “trying to work out the best model” for Port Macquarie, and he doesn’t want to pre-empt the outcomes. “But from CSU’s point of view, we are very happy to consider developing another part of our network there.

“We’re very comfortable with a network of strong, equal regional campuses. Port Macquarie has the potential for that. We could bring perspectives about how you make higher education work in cities of that size.”

Other regional centres are also looking at developing their own higher education facilities, but haven’t reached the stage of formal grant applications. This month’s forum at Busselton, near WA’s south-western corner, attracted CSU vice-chancellor Professor Ian Goulter as well as three Perth-based university chiefs.

The co-organiser, Forrest MP Nola Marino, says it’s just the start of the process. The two local councils are preparing a preliminary report on the area’s higher education options. But Marino isn’t letting a lack of imagination get in the way.

“It’s not just about what you can offer locally, it’s about who you can attract,” she says, talking up Geographe Bay’s attributes as part of a recognised biodiversity hotspot.

“We’ve just refurbished the longest jetty in the southern hemisphere.

“If the federal government helped to finance an underwater observatory at the end of the jetty, you could take a little train out, all 1600-plus metres of it. You’d walk down, surrounded by the marine environment, you’d get to the bottom and sit at your desk with your computer and tutor, in the underwater observatory - can you imagine that? And wouldn’t you want to do it?”