

# **Reconciling International Aspirations with Regional Responsibilities: The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) as a Case Study for a Regional Transnational University**

Lovegrove W J\* & Clarke J R

University of Southern Queensland, Australia

## **Abstract**

The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) is a non-elite regional Australian university approaching its 40th year of operation. During its development, USQ has continually expanded its horizons, developing a flexible learning program from the 1970s that resulted in a growing proportion of its student body being made up by non-locals studying at a distance — with external students now representing 75 per cent of student enrolments — and expanding naturally into international education from the 1980s, with over 25 per cent of student load now made up by overseas students studying in their country of origin.

Particular models for regional engagement predict that a university with USQ's profile would undergo a weakening of its engagement with its regions because of a lowering of its dependence on local on-campus students. In fact, USQ's experience is that its development as a national and international flexible education provider has served as a basis for strengthening its ties with its regions.

The factors underlying USQ's position as a regional transnational university are analysed and discussed. It is determined that USQ has been able to reconcile its national and international aspirations with its responsibilities as a regional university because of the bond that has been created with the local communities. This bond derives from such factors as:

- USQ's strong regional identity
- USQ's service culture as a flexible learning provider
- the strength of the interdependencies between USQ's transnational and regional engagement activities
- the depth of affection and ownership felt by the local community for the university over its history
- the degree to which USQ's transnational interest and the interests of its communities are intermeshed
- the degree to which local staff with a genuine passion for the regions influence organisational behaviour and culture.

USQ has recently reaffirmed its vision to be Australia's leading transnational educator. Transnational encompasses the notion of an organisation that operates in a number of locations — as at home locally as it is nationally and internationally — and one that rejoices in

the diversity of its staff and students. USQ's strong grounding in its regions and its aim to bring the benefits of internationalisation to its regions are an important aspect of its vision.

### **Keywords**

University, region, community, engagement, transnational

### **Introduction**

A pronounced phenomenon of the last few years has been the increased national awareness in Australia of the value of regional universities and campuses. These institutions have always been highly valued within their own communities and regions but have gone through long periods where they have appeared invisible to urban-based higher education policy makers and power brokers. Perhaps typically, it has taken a rural crisis to bring about a re-emergence of regional higher education institutions into the national consciousness. A growing appreciation of the negative impact of Australians' obsession with urban and coastal living has obliged policy makers to look to strategies to quell the tide of regional depopulation and to again support regional development. In this context, regional universities or the regional branch campuses of urban-based universities have tended to feature prominently. As Garlick (2000, p. 17) noted:

“There are few organisations outside the university or higher education institution today that have the interest, independence, authority, networks and information, critical mass and longevity of existence to take on an economic development leadership role in the region, free of outside organisational controls.”

In holding this position, regional universities in Australia are, in fact, tapping in to a long established Western tradition for universities serving as agents for regional development and the pursuit of local political interests. For example, Scott (1995, p. 1) noted that:

“Most of the universities established in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were closely bound up in the formation of ... nation states. Nineteenth century universities were created to meet the urgent need for an expanding industrial economy. The universities of the twentieth century were designed to satisfy the growing demand for higher education in a complex modern society.”

There is naturally an interest in the factors that drive universities to engage with their communities. Garlick (2000) developed a typology for university engagement based on structural features of the campus concerned. In his typology, Garlick categorised the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) Toowoomba campus as a Category II campus being a:

“... major campus with a relatively high proportion of external students ... a relatively lower proportion of internal full-time students and a higher proportion of institutional expenditure to asset ratio” (Garlick 2000, p. 43).

Garlick went on to say that:

“Campuses in this category are likely to have a weaker engagement with their regions compared to Category I campuses [with a high proportion of full-time students and a low university expenditure to assets ratio] because of their lower reliance on local internal students and their less flexible financial situation.”

Garlick’s premise is perfectly reasonable and logical. However, for the case of the USQ this typology does not accurately predict the nature of the relationship between USQ and its local community which has actually strengthened as the university has developed as a national and a transnational higher education provider through flexible and distance learning. A consideration of the reasons for this form the basis for this paper, and involve a discussion of the factors that have influenced the special relationship that USQ has with its local community that span beyond considerations of local enrolments or financial flexibility and the dynamics of transnational activity. These factors are discussed in terms of:

- the strength of USQ’s regional identity
- the nature of the interaction between on- and off-campus study and the culture of service that has developed as part of USQ’s development as a flexible education provider
- the specific dynamics of USQ’s engagement with its own communities

leading to a discussion which reconciles USQ’s transnational vision with its role as a regional university.

### **Regional identity as a driver of institutional culture and behaviour**

The notions of regional identity, regional focus and regional consciousness within the context of Australian higher education was slow to develop. Prior to World War II Australia had just six universities — the Universities of Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Western Australia and Tasmania — all urban-based, all formed in the period 1850–1911, and all generally operating as elite institutions remote from their surrounding communities. Despite post-war development that saw the establishment of six additional universities over a 20-year period and some opening up of the university sector to the broader community, prior to the release of the Martin Report in 1964 (Martin 1964), Australia could boast just one university located outside of a (state or national) capital city. This was the University of New England; which had been formed in 1938 as a university college affiliated with the University of Sydney but which was granted autonomic status in 1954.

The Martin Report released in 1964 was a watershed for post-school education in Australia; particularly through its recommendation to establish a ‘binary system’ in Australia through the establishment of the College of Advanced Education (CAE) sector to complement the university sector as a strategy for meeting the growing demand for professional education. In

the decade or so following the release of the Martin Report the situation with regional campuses changed dramatically. During this period the number of universities in Australia almost doubled and included a number, such as Newcastle, Wollongong, James Cook and Deakin, which were located outside of the capital cities. At the same time, the introduction of the advanced education sector saw the establishment of a significant number of regional colleges which would either themselves become regional universities when Australia's binary higher education system was abandoned during the Dawkins reforms in the late 1980s (Dawkins 1988) or which were to form the nucleus for the regional campuses of urban-based universities through the institutional amalgamations forced by the Hawke government around the same time (DEST 1993). Hence the foundation for higher education's physical presence in regional areas were largely set during the period from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s, based on policies designed to expand the higher and advanced education sectors, broaden educational opportunities and widen participation. These policies sought to address the growing demand for higher education resulting from the labour needs of post-industrial Australia but were also concerned with the pursuit of egalitarian goals.

Further significant regional campus developments occurred through the first half of the 1990s by universities wishing to broaden their student recruitment base in order to grow. This activity was encouraged by generous capital grants schemes at the time as well as the Higher Education Equity Framework put in place by the Hawke government that encouraged enrolments from low SES and rural/isolated postcodes (DEET 1990; Martin 1994; DEST 2003). As noted by Garlick (1998, as cited in DEST 2003, p. 214):

“By the end of the decade [1990s], most universities had undertaken some form of regionalisation, with many stating their main reason being to enhance university access opportunities in non-metropolitan areas.”

Stevenson et al. (1999) reported that of the 150 campuses in the Australian higher education sector in 1999, 48 (32 per cent) were located outside of the metropolitan areas. Ten (21 per cent) of these 48 non-metropolitan campuses were main university campuses, 18 (38 per cent) were secondary campuses of these same institutions, and 20 (42 per cent) were secondary campuses of universities with their main campus located in a metropolitan area.

Moves by the Commonwealth in 1999 to afford identified institutions Regional Protection under the Knowledge and Innovation reforms, and the advent of 'regional loading' as part of the Backing Australia's Future reform package (DEST 2004) has sparked considerable debate on the question of what constitutes a regional university. Although promoted by considerations of eligibility for special funding, this debate has been extremely constructive in teasing out the various facets of what it means to be a regional university.

The definition of regionality that emerged from the Backing Australia's Future Reforms was as follows:

“For the purpose of the CGS regional loading, a regional campus will be a campus located outside a mainland capital city other than Darwin and in a population centre with fewer than 250,000 people (with the exception of Wollongong). Having satisfied the initial test of regionality, a campus would be recognised within one of five bands, established according to two criteria: distance from the closest mainland state capital; and size of institution” (DEST 2004).

The definition captures three distinct characteristics — disadvantage (through distance from infrastructure), size and location. The emphasis on disadvantage reflects the nature of the exercise to determine eligibility for special Commonwealth funding to compensate for higher operational costs in regional areas, but it also reflects a key feature of what it means to be regional in a land as vast and highly urbanised as Australia.

Size has always been an important consideration for locating campuses in regional areas in Australia. Since the time of McKinsey et al. (1994) it has generally been argued that a regional campus requires the support of a local population in the order of 150,000–200,000. (The scarcity of such concentrations of population outside of metropolitan areas in Australia has obliged regional campuses to adopt particular strategies to support their operations, such as the use of distance education to broaden the enrolment base or entering into multi-partner arrangements to produce economies of scale.)

Defining regionality on the basis of geographical location appears obvious enough. However, defining regional universities strictly in terms of their geographical location masks many important aspects of what it means to be regional or to be engaged with a regional community. Firstly, although it is true that regional campuses typically have rural and isolated students as a high proportion of their student body, no regional institution can lay claim to having a monopoly on servicing any particular region. Cumpston et al. (2001) produced a list of the ‘top 50 postcodes for exporting students’. Significantly, of the top ten institutions on this list, no fewer than eight are areas where a regional campus is present. (Toowoomba, where the main campus of USQ is located, heads this list, although Toowoomba is a significant net importer of students overall.) Clearly, student mobility is a fact of life in the regions. DEST (2003, pp. 214, 215) noted that:

“In ... [1999] over 63,200 students who were 19 years of age or less, enrolled at Australian universities, 7100 of them [11 per cent] changed their location to attend university, 1,921 came from metropolitan areas and 5155 [representing 73 per cent of movers] from non-metropolitan areas. However, only about 2600 of these students did not have a university within 50 kilometres of their home and just under half of all movers had a university within 25 kilometres of their home. It is clear from the pattern

of movement of these students that factors other than access are likely to be important.”

DEST (2003) goes on to describe the importance of factors such as subject choice, subject concentration and reputation in the decision of students to move. However, local knowledge suggests that the large metropolitan centres in themselves hold a strong draw for rural school leavers. Clearly substantial numbers of rural and isolated students continue the time honoured tradition of travelling to the major urban centres to study and get a taste for big city life. (Significantly, while the highest probability for mobility is associated with poor school performance for students from metropolitan areas, it is associated with the higher performing students from non-metropolitan areas (DEST 2003).) Hence, a definition of ‘regionality’ based on serving regional communities through affording educational opportunities would need to encompass a consideration of many urban-based universities as well — both in terms of their maintaining regional campuses (as is acknowledged by the commonwealth in awarding regional loading to institutions such as La Trobe University) and in terms of their attracting regional students to their metropolitan campuses.

It is also apparent that many of the issues that concern USQ as a regional university — such as serving an historically undervalued community, seeking to improve traditionally low educational participation rates, contributing to regional development in economically depressed areas, etc. — are shared with some urban-based institutions — particularly those situated in the outer suburban areas of the larger cities. It is significant that as part of its own activities to benchmark its performance, USQ often utilises a benchmarking group that it refers to as ‘community-focussed universities’ that includes representatives from both regional and outer-suburban institutions. Hence, definitions of ‘regionality’ based on this type of analysis of organisational function raises different issues again concerning what it means to be regional.

In fact, the notion of equating ‘regional’ with ‘non-metropolitan’, which just a few years ago would have gone largely undisputed, has in the modern era created much interesting debate about the existence of ‘metropolitan regions’, of regions extending beyond Australia’s national boundaries and, ultimately and positively, of the need for all Australian universities to engage with the community, regardless of whether it may possess a ‘regional’ campus or not and regardless of how it might define its local or ‘regional’ community. Such debate has led to a view of regionality that is based on the nature of the *relationship* between a university and its local community and to how the university *identifies* itself with its region.

USQ has strongly internalised its own regional identity. Having been identified as a regional institution since its establishment as a regional campus of the Queensland Institute of Technology in 1967, having two campuses in regional locations (Toowoomba and Wide Bay)

with traditionally low educational attainment rates, and recruiting over 55 per cent of its domestic student body as people from rural and geographically isolated areas, a regional identity has been strongly engrained in USQ's organisational psyche; as has the requisite responsibilities that come with it of serving a diverse student constituency, a strong involvement in flexible educational delivery, leading technological innovation in the offering of professional education, forging partnerships for regional development, and engaging in regionally relevant research. At USQ this regional focus manifests as a dominant aspect of the institutional culture. For example, during extensive staff consultations conducted during 2003–04 to develop the university's strategic roadmap USQ Directions (USQ 2004), two issues noticeably stirred the passions of USQ staff more than any others. One was the need to ensure a continued strong research profile, and the other was the importance of USQ's status as a regional university.

This strong regional identity represents a basic factor underlying all of USQ's activities. An emphasis on service, a branding strategy based on 'community' and 'relationships', a research profile centred on regional relevance, and ultimately, as discussed below, a transnational vision based on a mission: "to develop, enrich and serve its local and global communities" (USQ 2005a).

### **Distance education as a driver of institutional culture and behaviour**

To practice flexible learning well requires a strength in culture of service and a degree of discipline and client focus that is not fully appreciated across the higher education sector. However, such has been apparent from the beginning of distance higher education in Australia.

Australia had a history of 'correspondence education' as a strategy for widening participation to senior and higher education by people in regional areas dating back to as early as 1911 with the pioneering efforts of the University of Queensland Department of Correspondence (later External) Studies and as adapted later by the University of Western Australia (White 1982). From the beginning, correspondence education represented a marked departure from the elitist paradigms that dominated higher education thinking at the time, and which still persist to some extent today. The motivations for correspondence education were largely egalitarian; to provide higher education opportunities for rural-based professionals — particularly school teachers — within the context of the newly established universities in Queensland and Western Australia:

“... states that were huge in area, thinly populated, economically reliant on primary industry, and politically dominated by rural voters who were suspicious of urban interests, and belligerently egalitarian and utilitarian in mood and ideology. Not for them the dreaming spires of Oxford and Cambridge; they wanted universities serving

government and industry interests throughout the whole state, and especially responsive to the needs of the rural population (White 1982, p. 256).”

The approach taken by these pioneers also differed markedly from normal university practice. In seeking to address the challenges created by the tyranny of distance, early correspondence educators needed to adopt what would be called today student-centred approaches (perhaps the first example of such approaches being used in Australian higher education), needed to utilise emerging technologies (with the Australia’s School of the Air representing a prime example of this) and ultimately needed to adopt a strong service culture. Despite the many inherent difficulties faced by correspondence education before its successful evolution into distance and flexible education in the 1970s, student centeredness, innovation and service have featured strongly in the cultures of the best of the flexible learning providers to this day.

The value of external studies started to become more fully appreciated through its use by all universities to retrain ex-service personnel after World War II and in overseas aid efforts from the 1950s. The concept was also given support by Australia’s Murray Report in 1957, which resulted in external programs being introduced in the newly established Monash and Macquarie Universities to take up shortfalls in external provisions identified in the states of Victoria and New South Wales respectively. However, both part-time and external study were treated with contempt in the Martin Report — which referred to the former as “inefficient and wasteful” and the latter as “not a proper function for universities” (White 1982). Despite these views gaining little support from the Menzies government at the time and being reversed by subsequent authorities, such as the Karmel Report, which embraced open tertiary education in the 1970s based on egalitarian grounds (Karmel 1975), those old urban-based universities that had not opted out previously generally started to give up external study offerings from the late 1960s. While some newer universities remained engaged, two types of organisations stepped in to fill the void. One was made up of the large technical institutes such as the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) and the Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT), which led a significant increase in the range of technological and technical courses offered through external studies. The other was the newly established advanced education sector, which embraced the concept wholeheartedly to broaden its recruitment base and better serve its constituencies (White 1982).

The degree to which the advanced education sector embraced distance provision is reflected in the following statistics. In 1971, over 8300 students were studying externally in universities (representing 6.8 per cent of the higher education student body at the time) and 1400 students were studying externally through colleges (representing two per cent of the students in advanced education). However, by 1975 external enrolments had risen to 9000 students in universities (six per cent) and 8400 in colleges (6.7 per cent), and by 1980 to 14,000 students

in universities (8.7 per cent) and 21,300 students in colleges (12.9 per cent) (White 1982; DEET 1993).

Distance study has gone through several important developmental stages since then — from a period in the late 1970s when a general levelling off of student demand prompted most universities and colleges to branch out into external studies as a means of securing much needed student enrolments (including Deakin University, which employed distance study as a major focus upon its establishment in 1977), through the attempt from 1989 to 1994 to rationalise distance provision through a system of eight to ten nominated Distance Education Centres (DECs), to the modern appreciation of the wide benefits and utility of ICT-based flexible learning which has gained momentum since the mid 1990s (White 1982; DEET 1993; Taylor 1995, 2001; Van Dusen 1997).

“The involvement of Australian universities in distance education provision has been heavily influenced by government pressure to meet national political and social objectives, and growth in higher education external enrolments has typically been associated with government and national priorities supporting rural interests from the 1910s, national reconstruction in the 1940s, overseas aid from the 1950s, adult education and open learning from the 1970s, and sector expansion since the 1990s. In the process, distance and flexible education has come to provide a consistent model for ‘student-centred’ education — the design of educational programs intended to meet the individual needs of a diverse range of students studying in isolation. This approach and mindset is in direct contrast to traditional university teaching which, until quite recent times, had been largely grounded in a Victorian-styled lecture/tutorial system based very much on the convenience of academic staff and to which the student was simply expected to comply. That distance educators have continually turned to emerging technologies for solutions to the educational problems in which they have been faced has meant that innovative and individualised solutions have been hallmarks of this approach. The role of employing ‘distance education-style’ practices as strategies for efficiency and effectiveness across the board in higher education is a relatively recent, but significant, phenomenon” (Taylor 2001).

USQ’s distance education operations are described as a case study in Back et al. (1996). USQ’s antecedent institution first became involved in correspondence education in 1969 (just two years after its establishment), offered its first degree-level distance offering in 1974, established a centralised distance education centre in 1978 and by 1980 first began to see its distance enrolments exceed its on-campus enrolments. Its ability to offer full professional programs by distance study enabled it to become an early entrant into offshore delivery from the early 1980s, and this has formed the basis for USQ attracting one-third of its student load as international students. USQ has since been widely recognised as a leading provider of

distance and flexible learning; for example, as joint winner of the University of the Year Award in 2000–01 for its development as an e-university. Based on 2004 figures, USQ is the second largest higher education distance education provider, commanding 13.4 per cent of external student enrolments, behind Charles Sturt's 18.5 per cent (DEST 2005) and with the highest proportion of its student body studying externally of any Australian university, at around 75 per cent.

Moving beyond the statistics, it is important to appreciate that USQ's development as a major distance provider, particularly coming to this position from a history in the advanced education sector, has been associated with the development of a particular culture involving a focus on the student, innovation and flexibility in approach, and a strong culture of service. This culture, in itself, has a major influence on USQ's approach to learning & teaching across the board and to the way in which USQ approaches all of its activities, including those involved with regional engagement. The implication of Garlick's typology that a lower reliance on internal local students could somehow result in a lowered commitment to local interests runs counter to this culture. It also needs to be appreciated that the internal and external offerings of a flexible learning university such as USQ are closely intermeshed, involving the same academic staff, having the same programs offered in multiple modes, sharing technologies and materials, and creating synergies at all levels. In fact, rather than competing with off-campus delivery, it can readily be said that the life's blood of a flexible learning institution is its on-campus program. A vibrant, dynamic and exciting on-campus environment stimulates innovation and excellence in all areas of USQ's operations. In turn, USQ's role as a provider of excellent higher education programs to a national and international market has made USQ a more diverse and dynamic institution that is better positioned to serve its local communities.

Additional factors play a role which strengthens USQ's commitment to its on-campus program and its local community. One is the impact on organisational behaviour sparked by the relative risks of distance offshore delivery. The West Review of higher education financing and policy (Committee of Review 1998) made a point of describing the jeopardy that it perceived regional universities to be in due to their heavy reliance on distance education enrolments because of the relative ease with which these students could be poached by low cost overseas providers. Such considerations give a particular importance to the maintenance of a healthy on-campus population — which is more stable, relatively more profitable and contains relatively fewer risks than off-campus delivery — as a core funding base for these institutions. As has been proved by the power wielded by the commonwealth in securing massive reforms to higher education in recent times while controlling only 40 per cent of the sectors operating budget, all significant sources of institutional income can and do have a significant influence on institutional behaviour.

There is also the need to dispel the myth that external students necessarily come from far-off remote areas. Distance remains an important factor in flexible learning provision but with improvements in flexible pedagogy and educational technologies, convenience is increasingly the basis for students choosing to study off-campus (Taylor 2001). A very high proportion of USQ's domestic external students (approaching 80 per cent) are over 25 years of age with concomitant family and employment responsibilities. For these students off-campus flexible learning serves a similar role to the urban-based programs serving adult part-time learners attending evening and weekend classes on some of the larger metropolitan campuses. Some nine per cent of USQ's domestic external students live in Toowoomba, 15 per cent live on the Darling Downs and 25 per cent live in greater Brisbane (where USQ maintains a study centre and where the university will be opening a new campus in the city's southwest at Springfield in 2006). Hence, up to half of USQ's external students may be considered as 'local' students residing directly within USQ's regional consciousness.

The intermeshed and synergistic nature of external and internal learning and teaching programs has meant that being regional and being transnational are mutually-supporting and mutually-benefiting goals and this has a profound influence on the nature of USQ's engagement with its local communities. USQ's on-campus international program provides an excellent case in point. USQ is recognised locally as a leading exporter and is able to use this position to assist the local community to participate in the knowledge world. USQ's engagement in offshore programs has also enabled it to develop a large on-campus international program at Toowoomba. The presence of these students has, in its turn, changed the nature of the traditionally conservative Toowoomba community in some very fundamental and positive ways that reach well beyond purely economic considerations — as evidenced by the recent opening of the USQ Multicultural Centre as a vehicle for linking with the community on multicultural issues. However, USQ's ability to attract and support this large on-campus international student population would not be possible if the Toowoomba community was not fully engaged and committed, infrastructure rich or culturally integrated. Regional engagement and development cannot be separated from USQ's transnational activities as deficiencies in one would inevitably result in major gaps in the other.

### **The dynamics of USQ's engagement with its communities**

Several factors have supported USQ developing a special relationship with its local communities. The bond created with the local communities that derives from USQ's strong regional identity, its service culture as a flexible learning provider and the interdependencies between USQ's transnational and regional engagement activities have already been discussed. Other important factors relate to the ways in which the institution has engaged with its communities since the time of its establishment.

Strong ties with the local community arose from the institution's very beginnings. A Darling Downs University Establishment Association was set up in the early 1960s by community members and with strong support from the local community at large for the purpose of lobbying for a university presence in Toowoomba. The importance of the impetus for the establishment of a university coming from the local community itself cannot be overstated. It contrasts strongly with the establishment of Australia's original universities which were established by society's elite under considerable community criticism. As Davis (1985, p. 28) noted:

"On its foundation in the 1850s the University of Melbourne was denounced as 'a costly toy'; Queensland Labor politicians, when a university was mooted in the 1890s, objected to institutions which were not for 'the children of men who wear moleskin trousers and blucher boots'."

and further:

"From [its establishment in] 1893, ... the University [of Tasmania] maintained a precarious hand-to-mouth existence in the face of a generally apathetic and sometimes actively hostile local community. In 1903 the University survived an abolition debate in the Tasmanian House of Assembly by the narrow margin of 15 to 13."

Groundswell movements for establishing post-school education institutions have not been uncommon in regional areas since the 1950s. However, Toowoomba's movement arose as much out of a sense of its own heritage as a major educational centre serving southern and western Queensland through a large number of high quality residential primary and secondary schools, as it did out of a consideration of the positive economic impact that a university would have on the region. With dogged persistence and some fortuitous federal policy developments by way of the Martin Report in the mid 1960s, a regional branch of the Queensland Institute of Technology being established in Toowoomba in 1967, which would become the USQ exactly a quarter-of-a-century later. The strength of feeling and interests that motivated the local community to successfully lobby for a university presence on the Darling Downs have, if anything, increased in their depth and relevance over the years. Throughout its almost forty year history the institution has enjoyed a strong sense of affection and ownership from the local community. This represents a relationship with as much an emotional element as a practical economic one; and the power of the bond that this has created has persisted and deepened over time. It is notable that the strength of this relationship was highlighted by the Australian Universities' Quality Agency (AUQA) through a commendation in its report of the audit of USQ made as recently as 2002 (AUQA 2002). Put simply, the local community would not allow USQ to disengage from this relationship even if it were to wish to.

It also needs to be appreciated that regional campuses are not simply located in geographical areas, they exist within their local communities in complex and interlinking ways to the degree where it is impossible to separate a consideration of regional development from that of institutional development. For example, a campus located in a depressed region which is undergoing depopulation, poor economic prospects and declining physical and technological infrastructure will find it difficult to attract and retain high quality staff if their families do not wish to move there; nor attract highly lucrative on-campus international education revenue because of the relative unattractiveness of the local environment and the lack of opportunity for casual work. Just as regions in declining economic circumstances would look to regional campuses to provide an impetus for regional development, it would work against the campus's best interests if such calls were left unheard.

Adding to this bond is the fact that USQ staff are themselves a part of the local community. A great many staff have been recruited locally and many others have come to Toowoomba or Wide Bay and made their homes there. Statistics that accredit ten per cent of employment and ten per cent of retail sales in Toowoomba directly or indirectly to USQ (Elvidge and Temple-Smith 1995) do not simply reflect the impact of the university on the local economy through its employment and purchasing influence. They represent just how integrated the university is within its local community and the strong bonds that tie the university and local community together. A very similar relationship has also developed between USQ Wide Bay and its local community and is expected to be a feature of USQ's presence in Springfield from 2006.

Hence, the implication from Garlick's typology that an institution thriving on national and overseas distance education income could begin to separate itself from engagement with its community and concerns about regional development is untenable. It should come as no surprise that a national and international focus adds to, rather than detracts from, USQ's commitment as a regional university to its local community. USQ's regions are its bedrock, its consciousness and the basis for its foundation values and principles, as well as its home.

### **Reconciling USQ's transnational vision with its role as a regional university**

USQ has adopted as its Vision: "to be Australia's leading transnational educator" (USQ 2005a):

- strongly grounded in its regions
- operating locally, nationally and internationally
- involving people from a range of social, cultural, language and locational backgrounds
- developing graduates who are global citizens.

The term 'transnational' is frequently being used as a synonym for 'international' or 'offshore'. However, it refers literally to 'across nations'. It describes operations that extend beyond

national boundaries to operate in more than one country and to operations involving persons of many nationalities. In short, it describes perfectly USQ's position as a regional, national and international provider of higher education. The list of implications for USQ as published in *USQ Directions* (USQ 2004; and refer to Appendix 1) reads as follows:

- A commitment to international best practice
- A striving for leadership in application of and research on pedagogy
- A striving for leadership in systems and processes for learning
- A university which welcomes students and staff from diverse backgrounds
- An emphasis on learning and teaching practices for a diverse student body
- An emphasis on graduates who are global citizens and can work worldwide
- A large and robust international education program, both on- and off-campus
- A significant national and global presence with prestigious partners
- Bringing the benefits of internationalisation to its students and its regions
- A commitment to building leading 'University Cities' involving strong community partnerships and engagement, with strong on-campus presence.

USQ's transnational vision is therefore inclusive of its responsibilities and sensibilities as a regional university. No contradictions or tensions are perceived in this position; in fact, the university perceives the successful marriage of these two concepts as integral to its modern identity. Its success in this area is widely recognised. For example, in its audit of USQ in 2002, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) examined USQ's community engagement activities and: "concluded that linkage with the community is one of USQ's greatest strengths" (AUQA 2002, p. 29). This report determined that:

"The key to USQ's success in engaging its community is attributable to:

- recognition and celebration of the fact that USQ is a regional University;
- understanding that development of community engagement requires exceptional personal skills; and
- developing multiple pathways to engagement.

Strategies that the University uses for engaging with the community include a successful Corporate Club, which provides networking opportunities between business and the University; inclusion of external parties in Faculty Advisory Committees and similar bodies throughout the University; joint ventures (ranging from research centres to the Japanese Gardens); the hosting of student placements; and public commentary and extensive support of public art and performance. Such mechanisms provide genuine two-way benefits" (AUQA 2002, p. 29).

A summary of how USQ's transnational activities serve to position USQ to better support its local communities and the ways in which the local communities support these activities at USQ is provided as Appendix 2.

USQ seeks to engage with its communities in ways that are not dissimilar to the ways that it engages with business and industry. That is, a relationship that brings benefits to all parties concerned. Importantly, though, USQ fully appreciates the value of the returns from its investment in its community partnerships. Community engagement is not something that is seen as requiring to be subsidised by the university as part of a community service role. Rather, the very real benefits that USQ derives from accessing social and intellectual capital, through resource sharing, and through the ability to focus teaching and research around local characteristics is fully appreciated and valued. Likewise, the nature of the partnerships that are developed prompt local communities to appreciate and value the benefits that come from their regional university beyond simply the multiplier effects of being an employer and purchaser of goods to the benefits of knowledge creation and other outcomes of the university's core business.

The future will see USQ continue to foster communication channels with its communities, to continue to explore ways in which mutually beneficial partnerships can be forged and to build these considerations more centrally into the University's strategic and tactical planning. A major recent development has been the establishment of the role of Pro Vice Chancellor (Community Engagement & Social Justice). This new executive portfolio is directly concerned with building community partnerships, working within these partnerships to position all parties involved optimise their benefits — particularly in relation to how the outcomes of the university's core business can contribute to regional viability — and to move community engagement even further away from the project-based, individual-driven, outreach-oriented set of practices of the past and more towards an integrated and strategic consideration for both the university and its communities. This will all occur within USQ's transnational vision.

## **Conclusion**

As has been noted, USQ's external enrolments have exceeded its internal enrolments since 1980 and USQ's international program has grown from its beginnings in the early 1980s to now represent one-third of USQ's total load, with over 80 per cent of these students studying outside of USQ's Toowoomba and Wide Bay campuses. Both of these student streams account for very significant proportions of USQ's income. Nonetheless, in 2002, in its detailed audit of USQ, AUQA afforded the university the following commendation:

“8. AUQA commends USQ for its highly successful engagement with its communities through an extensive array of mechanisms ... [and concluding] that linkage with the community is one of USQ's greatest strengths.” (AUQA 2002, p. 29).

This paper has explored the impact that USQ's transnational vision is having on the university's level of engagement with its communities. The starting point for this discussion was the implications from a typology described by Garlick (2000) that USQ's transnational

activities should have led to a lowering of its level of engagement with its regions: “because of [a] lower reliance on local internal students and [a] less flexible financial situation” (p. 243). Arguments have been raised to suggest that, contrary to this expectation, the level of engagement between USQ and its regions has actually been enhanced by its transnational activities. This has occurred because of the bond that has been created with the local communities that derives from:

- USQ’s strong regional identity
- USQ’s service culture as a flexible learning provider
- the strength of the interdependencies between USQ’s transnational and regional engagement activities
- the depth of affection and ownership felt by the local community for the University over its history
- the degree to which USQ’s transnational interest and the interests of its communities are intermeshed
- the degree to which local staff with a genuine passion for the regions influence organisational behaviour and culture.

In a wide range of ways, USQ’s vision to be a leading transnational educator occurs with the full involvement and to the benefit of its local communities — creating connections to the knowledge economy, providing access to human capital and resources, and informing regional development. In turn, USQ’s local communities underpin and support USQ’s transnational vision through professional partnerships and collaborations, access to support and investment, and through the provision of a strategic focus and relevance.

## **References**

Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) 2002, *Report of the Audit of the University of Southern Queensland*, <<http://www.auqu.edu.au>>.

Back K, Davis D & Olsen A 1996, *Internationalisation and Higher Education: Goals and strategies*, Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra.

Committee of Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy 1998, *Learning For Life: Final report*, DEETYA, Canberra.

Cumpston A, Blakers R, Evans C, Maclachlan M & Karmel T 2001, *Atlas of Higher Education: A community focus*, Department of Education, Science and Training, Canberra.

Davis R 1985, ‘Free academics or council servants? Tasmanian University staff before the Murray Report’, *Vestes*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 28-34.

Dawkins J S 1988, *Higher Education: A policy statement*, White Paper, July, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

Department of Education, Science and Training 2003, *National Report on Higher Education in Australia 1991-2001*, DEST, Canberra.

Department of Education, Science and Training 2004, *Our Universities: Backing Australia's future: Fact Sheet 4: Regional Support*, March, DEST, Canberra.

Department of Education, Science and Training 2005, *Students 2004: Selected higher education statistics*, DEST, Canberra.

Department of Employment, Education and Training 1990, *A Fair Chance for All: Higher education that's within everyone's reach*, AGPS, Canberra.

Department of Employment, Education and Training 1993, *National Report on Australia's Higher Education Sector*, AGPS, Canberra.

Elvidge N & Temple-Smith R 1995, *The Economic Impact of the University of Southern Queensland on Toowoomba*, USQ Press, Toowoomba.

Garlick S 2000, 'Engaging universities and regions: Knowledge contribution to regional economic development in Australia', Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra.

Karmel P 1975, *Open Tertiary Education in Australia: Final Report, Committee on Open University to the Universities Commission*, AGPS, Canberra.

W K Kellogg Foundation 2002, *Engagement in Youth and Education Programming*, <<http://www.wkkf.org>>.

Martin L H 1964, *Tertiary Education in Australia: Report of the Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia to the Australian Universities Council, Volume 1*, August, Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra.

Martin L M 1994, *Equity and General Performance Indicators in Higher Education: Volume 1 Equity Indicators*, AGPS, Canberra.

Murray K 1957, *Report of the Committee on Australian Universities*, September, Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra.

Scott P 1995, 'University-State relations in Britain: Paradigm of autonomy', in eds J E Mauch & P L W Sabloff, *Reform and Change in Higher Education*, Garland, New York, pp. 1-21.

Stevenson S, Maclachlan M & Karmel T 1999, *Regional Participation in Higher Education and the Distribution of Higher Education Across Regions*, DETYA, Canberra.

Taylor J C 1995, 'Distance education technologies: The fourth generation', *Australian Journal of Educational Technology*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 1-7.

Taylor J C 2001, *Fifth Generation Distance Education*, Higher Education Series, Report No. 40, DETYA, Canberra.

University of Southern Queensland 2004, *USQ Directions*,  
<<http://www.usq.edu.au/vc/directpp/default.htm>>.

USQ 2005a, *USQ Vision, USQ Mission, USQ Values*,  
<<http://www.usq.edu.au/planstats/VisionMissionValues.htm>>.

USQ 2005b, *USQ Strategic Plan 2005–2009*, <<http://www.usq.edu.au/planstats/Planning/>>.

Van Dusen G C 1997, *The Virtual Campus: Technology and reform in higher education*, ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, The George Washington University, Washington DC.

White M 1982, 'Distance education in Australian higher education: A history', *Distance Education*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 255-78.

## **Appendix 1. Extract from *USQ Directions, 2004***

### **Key Strategic Area (KSA) 1: USQ as Australia's Leading Transnational Educator**

**Aim:** To pursue a core focus for USQ to drive institutional development.

**Background:** USQ's strengths lie in its strong community-centred base, its established culture of student-centred education, its expertise and experience in flexible and e-learning, its ability to provide for the needs of a highly diverse student body, its commitment to excellence in scholarship, and its willingness to innovate. These strengths have arisen through USQ's history, the persistence of a strong set of core foundation values, and the high quality of its staff.

It is desirable for a complex and diverse organisation such as USQ to adopt a core focus as a basis for securing a shared vision and direction. It is proposed that USQ seek to be *Australia's leading transnational educator*, building on the following factors:

- USQ is a significant contributor to the increasing presence of cultural and linguistic diversity in its regions.
- USQ is an acknowledged award winning leader in flexible and e-education.
- USQ has amongst the largest off-shore international programs of any Australian university, and enjoys a strong reputation in this regard overseas. Locally, USQ has been a frequent recipient of education exporter awards.
- USQ has a strong culture and tradition of supportive student-centred learning and teaching — as a university that supports and value-adds to students.
- USQ has a strong tradition in professional education and USQ graduates are highly regarded by employers.
- USQ has shown considerable leadership in the area of multiculturalism — developing the first policy on multiculturalism of any Australian university and being the recipient of Queensland Government multicultural services awards.

**Planning Principles:** It is proposed that USQ strive to be *Australia's leading transnational educator*. In practice this will mean:

- A commitment to international best practice.
- A striving for leadership in application of and research on pedagogy.
- A striving for leadership in systems and processes for learning.
- A university which welcomes students and staff from diverse backgrounds.
- An emphasis on learning and teaching practices for a diverse student body.
- An emphasis on graduates who are global citizens and can work world-wide.
- A large and robust international education program, both on- and off-campus.
- A significant national and global presence with prestigious partners.
- A commitment to building leading 'University Cities'; involving strong community partnerships and engagement, with strong on-campus presence.
- Bringing the benefits of internationalisation to its students and its regions.

**Appendix 2. Examples of the intermeshing of USQ's transnational vision with its regional activities**

<b>Factors *</b>	<b>Transnational USQ to Community</b>	<b>Community to Transnational USQ</b>
Economic competitiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff with global experience and expertise</li> <li>• International networks</li> <li>• Information and technology transfer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local networks and expertise, including Corporate Club</li> <li>• Access to intellectual capital</li> <li>• Partnerships – engineering in agriculture, wine, regional health</li> </ul>
Urban and rural regeneration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USQ as a major employer, consumer and business focus</li> <li>• Informed outreach and consultancy</li> <li>• R&amp;D and environmental management</li> <li>• Social development, equity and social justice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong base for recruitment and retention of quality staff</li> <li>• Investment and business activity</li> <li>• Outsource for service provision</li> </ul>
Regional labour markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational participation and employment</li> <li>• Skills development and retention</li> <li>• Locally relevant programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment</li> <li>• Partnerships</li> <li>• R&amp;D focus</li> </ul>
Access to learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational opportunities and pathways</li> <li>• Create opportunities for community learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important stable income base</li> <li>• Create opportunities for institutional reciprocal learning</li> <li>• Hosting of student placements</li> </ul>
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culturally-based learning programs</li> <li>• Local events and performance</li> <li>• Bringing the benefits of a global culture to the local community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to social capital</li> <li>• Public commentary and patronage</li> <li>• Focus for relevance and application / service</li> </ul>
Health and social wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A major learning &amp; teaching and R&amp;D focus</li> <li>• Supporting and enhancing basic health services</li> <li>• Regional health planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practicums and secondments</li> <li>• Infrastructure</li> <li>• Cooperation and collaboration</li> </ul>
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training and best practice</li> <li>• Good citizenship programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships and infrastructure</li> <li>• Volunteerism</li> </ul>
Regional governance and Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational leadership</li> <li>• Information and skills</li> <li>• Networking, representation policy and planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community involvement in governance and decision making</li> <li>• Partnerships eg. Toowoomba Education Coalition</li> <li>• Strategic focus and regular re-evaluation</li> </ul>
Network building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local cross-disciplinary linkages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborations and partnerships</li> </ul>
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint marketing and promotion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community culture</li> </ul>
Sharing of facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology transfer and sharing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilities and resource sharing</li> </ul>
Community attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generate positive community attitudes to learning</li> <li>• Nurturing of the win-win relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community support</li> <li>• Value diversity</li> </ul>

\*Adapted from Cumpston et al. (2001)