

**2011-12 Regional Telecommunications Review**  
**Response by the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL)**

This response was prepared on behalf of CAUL (Council of Australian University Librarians) by the CAUL Learning and Teaching Advisory Committee.

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## Introduction

The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) is pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the 2011-12 Regional Telecommunications Review and submits this response.

It welcomes this review as it sees the strengthening of telecommunications services to world standard particularly in regional Australia as a way to increase productivity and create opportunities for Australians, Australian business and public institutions in a highly competitive international environment.

CAUL supports the initiative to connect 93% of Australians homes, schools and businesses to a world competitive high speed telecommunications network, and in particular the commitment to build the fibre in regional areas as a priority. It also commends the other initiatives designed to bring high quality telecommunications to regional Australia: the Long Term Satellite service, the next generation fixed wireless service, the Regional Backbone Blackspots Program and the trials in educational programs using technologies.

CAUL recognises the challenges to communities and individuals in regional Australia who lack the reliable and fast internet connectivity that is taken for granted by many people in city areas. Limited or no access to the internet means limited or no access to the digital economy, which is rapidly becoming the hub of commerce and retail activity in Australia, along with the delivery and consumption of education and health services.

CAUL is particularly interested in the potential educational outcomes that can be achieved through high speed telecommunications networks. Libraries in schools, institutes of TAFE, universities and local communities are important cultural and educational facilities which are accessible to large numbers of people. Through their adoption and championing of the use of new and innovative information and communications technologies, libraries contribute to significant educational outcomes in regional Australia.

Local public libraries are now making electronic books (e-books) available for loan. This is an exciting initiative, allowing people unable to visit a library in person to access a wide range of the latest book titles. However, access to e-books requires a reliable and fast internet connection. The demand and availability of e-books is an increasing trend, as evidenced in university libraries in Australia, many of which are now spending as much or more on e-books as they do on printed books.

Along with e-books, electronic journals and other rich media resources can provide remote access to vast amounts of educational scholarly information to students – students who have a reliable and fast internet connection.

## General comments

CAUL wishes to highlight the important role of online learning and access to information for the higher education sector to remain competitive both nationally and worldwide.

Blended and flexible education models in Universities have developed in response to the learning needs of students on the move, students with responsibilities to earn a living, to care for family members. These 'non-traditional' models of education involve varying degrees of online learning, ranging from *web facilitated* (1 to 29% online), *blended learning* (30 to 79% online) and *fully online* (80 to 100%).

In the USA in 2009, there was a 21% increase in student enrolments in fully online courses compared to a less than 2% increase in overall higher education enrolments. (Allen 2010 pp 5,

8) There is a similar rate of growth in Australia. The Australian Bureau of Statistics publication, *Online @Home*, reports that in 2010, Open Universities Australia, a major provider of fully online courses, had more than 49,000 student enrolments, 32% greater than in 2009. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011) This growth is expected to continue or increase. There are at least two new Open Universities Australia competitors: Swinburne Direct and Curtin Online. In 2010, Swinburne University achieved a 100% growth in online education enrolments (Lane, 2011).

Other indicators of the rapid growth in online education are national survey results which show that 39% of Australians, when using the internet, do so for education or study purposes. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011) DEEWR's latest data shows that the number of students currently studying in external mode is 146,274 i.e. 12.3% of the total.

University libraries throughout Australia have been moving their provision of information resources from print to electronic steadily over at least 12 years. As an example of this at Victoria University 71% of the Library's acquisition budget is now spent on electronic resources and there has been year on year growth in access to these electronic resources, where by contrast, use of paper and other physical resources has decreased year in year out during this time. (Partnering for the Future: Library Strategic Plan 2010-2012)

Online courses are being delivered by some universities into community centres in regional areas. Deakin University's Institute of Koorie Education has been a leader in offering community based learning for many years. From 2012, one of Deakin Health's most popular degrees, the Bachelor of Health Sciences will be delivered from the new Deakin Learning Hub in Dandenong (Deakin University, 2011). It is anticipated that local Dandenong health care providers will more readily take part in further study through the offering of this local program. With the resultant increase in skills, the local region stands to benefit from a higher level of health care delivery.

Community-based learning delivered online enables students' experiences in the classroom to be linked with input from relevant community groups and local industry, and at the same time, offers the flexibility of studying at convenient times and locations to fit in with work and other commitment (ibid). This new program will be supported by a new learning hub providing students with high level connectivity. The successful extension of such programs to more distant regions will depend on access to reliable and fast internet services.

## **Response to Questions 7 and 8**

### **Question 7**

#### **Do you have ideas for ways in which high-speed broadband could enhance the delivery of education and healthcare outcomes in regional communities?**

High-speed broadband could enhance the delivery of education outcomes in regional communities through students having:

- Increased access to and use of social media
- Ability to seek help and assistance through online query and reference services
- Access to rich media technologies such as video streaming of lectures, tutorials, demonstrations and other academic presentations
- Interactive (individual and group based) synchronous video sessions involving learners:learners and learners:teachers in collaborative activities and consultations
- Rapid transfer of large files, eg medical images, databases, documents, research data



## Question 8

**The committee would like to hear from individuals and organisations about their participation in, experiences of, and expectations about, online health and education services.**

CQUniversity, like a number of other Australian universities, is a long-term provider of distance education to regional students throughout Australia.

CQUniversity Library has extensive experience delivering library resources in both print and electronic formats and providing library support via physical and virtual channels. The capacity of the Library to deliver advanced student services such as interactive video support or to deliver large file images and documents has been hindered by the lack of bandwidth available to students. The learning experience support for on campus and off campus students is not equitable at the moment. With the implementation of the Regional Technologies Review initiatives which are designed to bring high quality telecommunications to regional Australia, the opportunity to deliver more value added collections and information services to students and staff will increase, enabling university libraries to provide equitable levels of service to students wherever they are located, within the coverage zone.

Charles Darwin University Library is a regional academic library service that faces constant challenges in providing equitable services and support to students located off campus. CDU's current student profile includes 62% of HE enrolment being external on a unit attendance basis (Self assessment portfolio, 2011, p.11). External students have become the dominant segment of the HE cohort at CDU, and yet the NT is less well serviced than other states and the ACT in terms of bandwidth infrastructure. This limits the sort of delivery we can provide.

To meet the challenge of providing library services, both resources and support, in this environment, CDU Library Services, like all academic libraries, is building up a suite of resources for the online environment: online databases, eJournals, eBooks, online tutorials, online reference services, information literacy sessions delivered online using webconferencing technologies. Such services need to be fully interactive in order to enhance the student learning experience and a high speed internet connection for students is an essential first step.

## Endnotes

Allen, I E and Seaman, J. (2010) *Class Differences: Online Education in the United States*, The Sloan Consortium, November, 2010

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011) Australian Social Trends, 4102.0 Online @Home, June 2010

DEEWR. 2010 Full Year Student Summary tables

<http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Publications/HEStatistics/Publications/Documents/2010/SummaryTables.xls>

Deakin University (2011) *Health Sciences at Dandenong*, Retrieved 22 November 2011: <http://www.deakin.edu.au/hmnbs/hsd/dandenong/>

Lane, B. (2011) *Swinburne University of Technology to go it alone with its online courses*, The Australian, 19 January, 2011

Victoria University (2010) *Partnering for the Future: Library Strategic Plan 2010 – 2012*, Victoria University Library

