Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

PURE Regional Profile

DARLING DOWNS, AUSTRALIA

Appendix 1

Region:

Darling Downs, Australia

Principal PURE contact:

Glen Postle

Title:

Professor

Institutional base with full postal mailing address:

**University of Southern Queensland,
Toowoomba, Queensland
Australia**

Contact Details:

Email:
Tel: **+**61 (0) 746 362 331
Mob:

Name of main collaborating region:

Darling Downs

*Suggested members of your Regional Co-ordinating Group (RCG***)** (between 3 and 5 Persons):
Name, organisation and email:*

1. **Glen Postle, Hon Prof, USQ**
2. **Prof Jim Taylor, Head of Australian Digital Futures Institute, USQ**
3. **Dr Lorelle Burton, Associate Dean (Learning & Teaching) Faculty of Business, USQ**
4. **Prof Mark Toleman, Head of Information Technology, Faculty of Sciences, USQ**
5. **Prof Grace Pretty, Professor (Psychology) Faculty of Sciences USQ**
6. **Maryanne Walsh, Principal of Centennary Heights High School, Toowoomba**
7. **Dr David Douglas, President-elect of the Rotary Club of Toowoomba East**
8. **Carole McGowan, General Manager, The Older Men's Network, Toowoomba.**

Suggested Peer Reviewer from region:

Glen Postle

'Identity' of Region (eg. governmental admin. region; special development zone; informal 'working reality' region, etc)

Located in south-east Queensland (Australia) the region is west of one of the fastest growing urban areas of Australia. It competes for funds for infrastructure with the developments which are occurring in the narrow coastal strip from the Sunshine Coast in the north to the Gold Coast in the south. It is a rich agricultural area but specialisation in 'primary production' has seen the disappearance of the small 'family property' and an increase in large holdings which rely more on advances in technology and agricultural science to increase efficiencies and profits. Unfortunately this has started to impact upon the number of people employed in the agricultural industries. Many of the small towns in the region are losing young people who are moving to the expanding coastal strip for education, employment and a different lifestyle. Toowoomba, the largest city in the region is an 'education city' (private & public schools, Technical & Further Education, University) and has a large number of 'retired' people. Culture and Tourism are very important.

REGIONAL PORTRAIT
(Please list key issues of interest and relevance to PURE)

(i)   Approx. population and any key features: (e.g. new migrant numbers)

Approx 227,000 in the region. Around 3% of the population are indigenous and it is an area that has been targeted as a location (viz Toowoomba) for Sudanese immigrants. In the south of the region (Stanthorpe) there is a   large number of first and second generation Italians who own orchards and wineries.

(ii)   Other essential geographical features:

The Darling Downs Statistical Division was made up of 19 local government areas with a total area of 90,238.7 square kilometres, or 5.2% of the total area of the state of Queensland. These 19 shires were recently amalgamated into four new regional councils. The region's estimated resident population at 30 June 2006 was 227074 persons , or 5.5 per cent of the total Queensland population.

(iii)   Economy, industries and employment features:

Manufacturing, mining, food production, energy, hospitality, finance, health and education are all employers in the region and these industries create demand for a range of professional and trade skills. The top five industry sectors by employment are: Agriculture, forestry & fishing (12%); Retail trade (12%); Health care & social assistance (11%); Manufacturing (11%); and Education and training (9%).

The Darling Downs region has had a number of skill shortages particularly in trade areas over a long period of time. However, due to a large number of project developments in the Surat Energy Resource Province (SERP) these skill shortages are growing in the construction, civil construction, electrical and automotive industries. Relatively high labour participation and low unemployment levels continue to inhibit business growth.

Growing manufacturing businesses such as Major Metals in Dalby that announced in December 2007 an investment of $20M to expand their workshops and employment of 35 new workers will find it difficult to recruit workers. Worker and attraction issues are significant in rural and remote areas.

Attracting professional or specialist people when required is extremely difficult for the region, particularly outside Toowoomba.

Since the last Census there has been a decline in the percentage share of employment in the Agribusiness sector from 14.9% to 12%. Nevertheless it is still equally the biggest industry by the number of people employed in the Darling Downs. Main drivers of change are: climate change, water reform, market forces (both within Australia and globally) and drought. Despite the recent rain return to full production is not guaranteed. Of major concern to this industry is the loss of rural labour to mining and energy industries.

The Toowoomba economy is based around education (mentioned above) and an Army base at Oakey some 20km west of Toowoomba. Aged care is a 'growing industry' (retirement villages and nursing homes). Other industries which may emerge in this centre in the next few years include 'fibre composites' and tourism. However, proximity to the growing urban area could mean that these are 'centred' elsewhere. Agriculture and related industries continue to have an influence but these do not figure as prominently as they once did in the local economies of centres on the Darling Downs. The smaller centres are 'dying' as people move out.

KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES CONFRONTING THE REGION

(i)   Economic issues:

1. **Employment – young people moving away from the region to go to 'the big smoke' and to a more diverse lifestyle. Professional people are not attracted to move to rural areas.**
2. **Infrastructure funding for the region (ICT, transport, health services) / competition with infrastructure requirements in coastal/urban areas and mining developments.**

Key websites for more information:

1. **http://www.toowoombarc.gov.au/**
2. **http://www.clubsqld.com.au/www/docs/Queensland%20State%202008-09%20Darling%20Downs%20&%20West%20Moreton.pdf**

(ii)   Social issues including health:

1. **Health-care provision – infrastructure funding, staffing (nursing / general practitioners / specialists) in 'rural areas'.**
2. **Issues associated with an ageing population – demographic 'imbalance', funding retirement and health care, marginalised older people.**
3. **Increasing numbers of disenfranchised/marginalised youth who through situation or circumstance have not accessed educational opportunities.**

Key websites for more information:

1. **http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B8JGC-4TOVRI**
2. **http://202.6.74.101/news/stories/2007/04/12/1895304.htm**
3. **http://www.gg.gov.au/governorgeneral/speech.php?id=218**
4. **http://www.tomnet.org.au/index.html**

(iii)   Environmental issues:

1. **Provision of water for the population.**
2. **Conservation of natural resources (rainforests, wildlife, dryland salinity, effects of mining, location of coal-fired power stations).**

Key websites for more information:

1.   **http://www.toowoombawater.com.au**

(iv)   Cultural issues:

1. **Integration of indigenous in the community – education and health of indigenous.**
2. **Integration of immigrants – Sudanese**.

Key websites for more information:

1. **http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2007/10/05/2052475.htm**

(v)   Other issues or dimensions:
(e.g. political & administrative, civic and participation)

1. **Emergence of Regional Councils - 19 shires reduced to 4 Regional Councils.**
2. **Funding of Regional Councils.**

Key websites for more information:

1.

2.

UNIVERSITY AND OTHER HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIs) PORTRAIT
(Please describe in a few words the HE system operating in the region, in terms of any important matters, the following):

(i)   *Structure, legal and financial status of HE system*

The University of Southern Queensland opened in 1967, originally as an Institute of Technology and later developed as a College of Advanced Education. It was redesignated as a university in 1992. The USQ has changed significantly since that time – building its research and postgraduate programs, expanding its international profile, and growing as a multi-campus institution. USQ has a main campus in the city of Toowoomba, and many regional support offices throughout Australia and in other countries where it offers awards programs. There is a campus at Hervey Bay, serving the Fraser Coast region and a growing campus at Springfield near Brisbane.

The University's governing body is the Council. The Vice Chancellor and senior management are responsible for overseeing the operation of the University.

Members of the Council are appointed under State legislation and represent University and community interests, contribute to the overall governance of the University by helping to set strategic directions and develop policy. The University of Southern Queensland Act 1998 establishes the Council and defines the functions and powers of the Council and the University, and sets limits on what the University and its authorities may do.
The Vice Chancellor is the University's chief executive officer and responsible to the Council for the overall direction of the academic, administrative, financial and other affairs of the University. The Vice-Chancellor is supported by an Executive to whom most of the University's organisational units report.

(ii)   *Main priorities for the HEIs in the region*

The main goal of USQ is to be recognised as a world leader in open and flexible higher education. Considerable progress towards such a goal is found in the recent history of USQ where it has been awarded the Commonwealth of Learning Award for Excellence for Institutional Achievement at the third Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning, in July 2004. Other awards include the Joint Winner of the Good Universities Guide's University of the Year: 2000-201 Award and in 1999, USQ won the Inaugural Award for Excellence from the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE), as a world leader in 'dual mode'(on-campus and off-campus) education.

The University has strong research programs in such areas as sustainability, rural health, innovative fibre composites technologies, systems biology and computational engineering. It is also well known for its performing and visual arts programs.

(iii)   *Relevant recent changes and developments in policy and/or practice*

USQ has recently undergone a 'restructuring' and several programs considered 'not viable' were dropped. In line with the Commonwealth Government's push for 'greater efficiencies' in the higher education sector USQ has undertaken a review, 'Realising Our Potential'. See more at:

http://www.usq.edu.au/newsevents/news/vcstatement.htm

At a recent 'strategic planning meeting' the following goals were emphasised:

- To be recognised as a national leader in the provision of vibrant and contemporary programs responsive to the professions.
- To be acknowledged leaders in applied research and research training, with a particular emphasis on research in sustainable futures.
- To maintain a profile of domestic and international educational partnerships that enhances USQ's position as a successful and leading higher education provider.
- To broaden equitable participation by students and staff and to encourage the development of a University culture that values diversity, multiculturalism and social inclusiveness.
- To derive mutual benefits for the University and its external stakeholders through engagement and development.

(iv) Ways of organising and managing within the HEIs

There are five faculties at USQ, which are responsible for implementing the academic programs offered by the University. Each faculty is headed by a Dean, who may be assisted by one or more Associate Deans. USQ's faculties are:

- Faculty of Arts
- Faculty of Business
- Faculty of Education
- Faculty of Engineering and Surveying
- Faculty of Sciences

Other sections of the University that offer programs and courses and provide support to students include:

- Learning and Teaching Support Unit
- Centre for Australian Indigenous Knowledges
- Distance and e-Learning Centre

Read more at: **http://www.usq.edu.au**

HEIs in REGION

1. **University of Southern Queensland**
   Main campus at Toowoomba with campuses at Fraser Coast and Springfield
   Professor Bill Lovegrove – Vice Chancellor, lovegrove@usq.edu.au

2. **Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE**
   Toowoomba
   New Director appointed recently

PURE Regional Profile

DARLING DOWNS, AUSTRALIA
Appendix 2

Regional Aspirations and Agenda

1. *What aspects of regional development and the role of higher education in particular do you wish to engage with, focus on and improve, through your involvement in PURE?*

   (a) *From the point of view of the region and its priorities, objectives and ways of working?*

   Sustainable community engagement.

   (b) *From the point of view of the higher education institutions and their priorities, objectives and ways of working?*

   The Darling Downs region is typical of many Australian regional communities with regard to the economic, social and environmental challenges that need to be confronted. The pressures associated with adjusting to economic, technological, social and government-induced change has spawned a range of community problems. Issues involving youth figure prominently in this regard. Father Chris Riley's submission to the Federal government's 20/20 summit earlier this year paints a grim picture of the extent and severity of problems involving young people in communities across the nation. The statistics are frightening. The aged constitute another group in communities that face severe challenges. The statistics are worrying here as well. For example, older men are a group within communities that have a suicide rate which is the second highest of any other group. There is also some evidence to suggest that many in our communities are failing to keep pace with the rate of change in technology, particularly in terms of the potential it offers in enhancing communication and lifelong learning. The 'digital divide' is still very much in place for many individuals and groups in society.

   The Darling Downs regional community, through a number of initiatives, is beginning to show considerable leadership in how communities might address such concerns. Among other things these initiatives are focussing on more effective mobilisation of local resources and are clearly demonstrating that where the sustainability prospects of these initiatives are enhanced there is a greater likelihood of positive gains in social capital. These initiatives represent the emergence of socially valuable processes which have the potential to encourage stronger community connections and build reservoirs of trust and mutuality between key players at the local level.

   It is proposed that a cluster of projects already underway or planned is positioned to address these issues through their focus on a number of community initiatives in the Toowoomba region. These initiatives are the following:

   - **The Toowoomba FlexiSchool[1] is a unique community-based initiative that has been successful in creating alternative educational opportunities and pathways for homeless, disadvantaged and disenfranchised young people in Toowoomba since 1998.**
   - **The Older Men's Network (TOMNet) aims to enhance the social networks of older men and to address risk factors for suicide. Identifying, accessing and connecting with**

emotionally and socially older men, and establishing support groups in regional, rural and remote communities have been the principal functions of the organisation.

- **GraniteNet Project:** Typical of smaller, rural communities west of the 'great divide', Stanthorpe has an ageing community, a low median income, a lower proportion of the population with post-compulsory education qualifications and lower use of information communication technologies (ICT) in comparison with urban settings. These are considered risk factors in terms of the community's continued prosperity and longer term sustainability. The use of ICT was identified as a potential tool for supporting the learning community initiative and proposed the re-development of GraniteNet – an existing but disused virtual community portal.

Community Garden Project: Based on USQ's mission to develop, enrich and serve its regional community, the initiative aims to build a community-based space for engagement on sustainability and foster research into joint community and business sustainable initiatives. The focus is on building strong community networks through gardening and environmental activities to address the diverse needs of a wide range of people. The project is based on the community of practice principles of building community, growing capacity and sharing practice, with a parallel/distributed leadership adapting existing models of governance of community space. The aim is to work in partnership with the community, industry, council and government bodies to develop a range of community projects utilising the land and embrace the concept of Toowoomba as a "*City of Green*" (2050 Toowoomba Community Plan) or "*Eco Garden City*".

Each of the community initiatives identified will provide a contributing case study for the overall project. These initiatives clearly represent 'successful' community projects and will be used in order to gather information around a clearly defined set of research questions.

Research questions:

- *What do the practical solutions as perceived in selected community initiatives offer in terms of different perspectives about and models of community?*
- *Do these solutions provide information about the sustainability of change?*
- *How might this link to enhancing perspectives of social capital in communities?*

The University of Southern Queensland (USQ) is well placed to coordinate the study. This is based on a prevailing view which suggests that *…an emerging political and intellectual agenda around communities and the social benefits of higher education has begun to emphasise the accountability of higher education institutions for their responsibilities to the communities they wish to serve. By focusing on their areas of research strength universities are in a unique position to transfer knowledge and skills into initiatives for environmental improvement and community development'. This approach defines community engagement as 'the mechanism through which universities achieve the goals they have articulated in relation to specific communities in terms of their trinity of basic functions, i.e. teaching, research and service.*

Attachment 1 provides an overview of what the overall project aims to do. The four case studies will be the main foci for the collection of data. A doctoral candidate will work with a supervisor from USQ on each of these. The data from these case studies will be 'grist for the mill' in developing a template for the analysis and interpretation of data from the different community initiatives. The Australian Digital Futures Institute (ADFI) at USQ will work in conjunction with PASCAL to generate a metadata schema model reflecting the emerging conceptual frameworks and associated research outcomes. The ADFI team will use this metadata schema model to create an open access repository for effective

dissemination and collaboration associated with the work of PASCAL. This part of the project will have a doctoral student attached to it. Finally, it will be the overall aim to generate key principles underlying sustainable change in regional communities and demonstrate how these principles might contribute to positive social capital outcomes.

2. *In terms of the wider global, political, administrative, economic and environmental setting it was agreed at the PURE Glasgow working meeting (September 2008) that the following aspects (included in Briefing Paper No. 3) were of wide general significance for the PURE project as a whole:*

   (a) *What role are strong national and/or regional policies in favour of third mission playing to overcome barriers for PURE work in regions?*

   There is very strong support from the region and the university to cooperate. A Memorandum of Understanding between the university and 'Flexi School' has been established and several initiatives have come from that already. The Vice Chancellor is establishing a Regional Community Engagement group. The local politicians(State and Federal) have strongly endorsed the initiatives.

   (b) *Will strong national and regional policies in favour of sustainable development have an impact on PURE activity on environmental issues?*

   The potential of social capital gains in addressing such community issues involving youth, aged and other disenfranchised groups would be enormous.

   Governments at all levels would find such principles very useful in determining more 'evidence-based' policies for addressing contemporary community issues.

   (c) *Will strong policies on implementing LLL at national and/or regional levels have an impact on PURE activities? (LLL = life long learning?)?*

   Lifelong learning initiatives are at the core of what the project is about.

   (d) *Will strong national and/or regional innovation and research policies have as impact on PURE activities?*

   Apart from the focus on youth/aged areas in terms of social capital (regional/national reports have identified these as priority areas) the development of the metadata schema model to create an open access repository for effective dissemination and collaboration of studies associated with the work of PASCAL should have a significant impact on PURE activities.

   (e) *Will strong and/or regional policy on administrative and governance issues have an impact on PURE activities?*

   The recent restructuring of local government in Queensland (Regional councils replaced Shire/City councils) provides opportunities to assist with the development of policies at regional level.

   (f) *How is the third mission seen and developed, and how central is it to the future especially of non-elite universities?*

   USQ is in close proximity to a number of larger universities in urban /coastal Queensland. Competition for students is keen. USQ has gone down the path of 'flexible learning' and the

majority of its students are studying at a distance. Building strong relationships with the region is central to the university's future and central to its building a reputation that attracts potential students.

(g) *Is the globalisation of the economy changing regions' ecological, social and cultural policies? If so, how will it impact on PURE activities in the region and the university?*

Globalisation is having a significant effect – the diversity that international students bring to the community, the integration and acceptance of immigrants, the pace and scope of changes in ICT to name a few. These are manifest in problems experienced by the region (many communities in fact) in areas including education, ageing, and enterprise and healthcare provisions. These can be attributed to 'globalisation influences associated with adjusting to economic, technological, social and government-induced change.

3. *At this stage, do you have a clear sense which subject(s) of special interest you would like to concentrate on in a PURE regions sub-group; for example – ecotourism, SME development, mega-events like the Olympics, cultural development and creative arts, etc?*

We would be interested in the following sub-group specialism(s):

4. *Are there any other points that you wish to mention at this stage?*