*PASCAL UNIVERSITIES REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT PROJECT (PURE)*

*PURE Briefing Paper No. 5*

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## 1. The Seminar

1.1 Seventeen people took part in an invitation seminar at RMIT University of 7th November to take up the implications of the PURE Briefing Paper 4 and the related planning work for the Pascal Universities Regional Engagement (PURE) project at Glasgow in late September. They included five Board members and two other Associates. Four of the 8 Australian States and Territories, and five universities from these places, were represented. Apologies from others involved in Pascal included four further Australian Pascal Associates.

1.2 The meeting was called to report on and discuss the development of the PURE project at and arising from the September 2008 Planning Meeting in Glasgow, and to consider further its take-up in Australia. Bruce Wilson and Chris Duke briefly reviewed the development of work in higher education and regional development in Australia from 2002. The major OECD conference which took place in Melbourne followed on work from European-based work in earlier years to which Chris Shepherd made a large contribution. The emergence of the concept, methodology and planning of PURE were reviewed, referring to the four PURE Briefing Papers so far prepared. Following a focused discussion of how PURE might best be taken up and involve more participants within Australia, the seminar turned to wider consideration of Pascal in Australia and its own wider region.

## 2. The PURE Project – Australian Interest

2.1 Chris Shepherd reported on discussions about PURE in the UK and the prospect of a cluster of regions within the one country, prompting consideration of a similar cluster of Australian participating regions. It was noted that if, as is now expected, two cohorts begin within six months of each other, it will be possible for them to coalesce for some purposes, and for specialist sub-groups to draw members from both cohorts.

2.2 In this context, participants spoke about prospects and an interest in participation.

2.3 Sunshine Coast in Queensland took part in the earlier OECD 14-regions study. The **Darling Downs-Toowomba** appears likely to take part in PURE, animated by the **University of Southern Queensland**, which was marginally involved in the earlier work.

2.4 David Adams spoke about the situation and interest in **Tasmania**, where work has been done to examine and compare what the many different interested entities say about region and regional advantage, in their mission statements and plans. Changing demographics emerge of very important for Tasmania, with loss of young people as well as ageing. There are concerns about population imbalance echoing concerns in other regions eg. Varmland, loss of capital and asset control, water and energy.

2.5 Universities are felt to be remote and hard to access for the engagements that people seek. Only informal relationships seem to work well. He also spoke about the concern of universities as to what is in it for them, and the need for convincing answers. One answer has to do with regional advantage in the flow of local students into higher education, and promoting an acknowledged regional centre of excellence.

2.6 Other possible interest in joining PURE in **Queensland** was mentioned by Peter Kearns and Denise Reghenzani. spoke from a **Ballarat** regional perspective (note here also a possible future **SW Victoria** interest).

2.7 From the **ACT** a possible interest emerged, expressed by Carolyn Broadbent (ACU). [Leone Wheeler subsequently brought this to the attention of ACT Associate Vanessa Little; Steve Garlick would also be involved. The involvement of at least the University of Canberra would be essential for this to proceed.]

2.8 Steve Garlick, who was heavily involved in the 2004-07 OECD 14-regions reviews, referred to a possible interest from the University of **Newcastle**, perhaps centred on the **Hunter Valley**.

2.9 The host region of **Melbourne** was represented in the meeting through David Campbell and Helen Steel from OKC (the Office of Knowledge Capital), together with Helen Hayes, University of Melbourne, and Bruce Wilson (RMIT). It appears likely that the Melbourne region will be a PURE participant together with the City, city-based universities, and the Committee for Melbourne. Some specific project priorities are under discussion, for example the La Trobe Valley as a unique natural laboratory. David Campbell saw the UK, through cities such as Manchester, as a relevant model for Melbourne learning exchange. [This could for example mean reciprocal twinning of region reviewers.]

2.10 It was left to Chris Duke, Bruce Wilson and Steve Garlick to follow up these expressions of interest, region by region.

3. **Wider considerations**

3.1 In discussion arising from these points, the importance of encompassing all of technical, further and higher education in PURE was agreed, ie. tertiary education. The significance of short-cycle HE for some other regions was noted.

3.2 The identity and definition of regions happened in different ways, such as the catchment of local newspapers, as well as in formal administrative authority terms. This 'organic' self-identification was important, at times contrasting with bureaucratic, top-down governance which was now seeking to be more joined up across portfolios.

3.3 The marginalised situation of regional and rural 'fringes' to metropolitan regions such as Melbourne was recognised as a very common problem for many countries.

3.4 More broadly an argument was made for PURE to include a wide diversity of regions, and to build on existing inter-regional connections. Chris Shepherd illustrated the diversity of regions with the large economically determined (but non-Authority) Thames Gateway region linking to two English Authorities (Kent and Essex) to cover together then larger natural and economic region of the greater Thames estuary. The West of England region might encompass the M4 corridor running east as far as Swindon, and the South England region straddles several different Authorities sharing a common coastal regeneration challenge.

3.5 There was lively discussion of the vital importance of sustainability especially in terms of the natural environment, and the responsibility of local authorities in this regard, also linking the local with the global. It was hoped that Pascal through PURE would take this forward. The concept and widening take-up of the 'ecoversity' concept was mentioned here.

3.6 Also noted, as important and problematic, was how to use the findings of PURE to lobby and influence the understanding and policies of national governments that set the larger policy environment for sustainable regional development. The reality of informal connections and influencing, in Australia as elsewhere, was observed.

3.7 It was also recognised that the cost and time of travel especially for Australians to distant venues presents a problem for some participants. In addition to the use of modern communication technologies, it may prove fruitful to have national and similar clusters of regions within Australasia for example, and the UK maybe with neighbouring countries such as Ireland, to work and exchange experience etc more intensively, while ensuring that the benefits of fully international exchange, networking and benchmarking are not reduced. The problem of distance (christened the tyranny of distance in Australia by Geoffrey Blainey) may be acute in the case of Vancouver and Botswana, and strategies need to be developed to work around this.

4. **Pascal, the wider region, an Australian PENR3L?**

4.1 In the final session the seminar turned to broader matters to do with Pascal in Australia and beyond, noting the success of the recent PENR3L EU fund-supported European network, and the intention to continue this under the Pascal umbrella.

4.2 This was discussed in the context of developing an Australian or wider regional network, perhaps encompassing at least the western side of the 'Pacific Rim' as far north as China. The merit of this required further consideration involving at least New Zealand and East Asian colleagues.

4.3 It was recognised that several relevant national networks were represented in the meeting. These had to do with adult and community learning and learning regions (Leone Wheeler, Peter Kearns, ALCN, ALA), and with the engagement of Australian universities (Steve Garlick, AUCEA). What should be the relationship between an 'Australian PENR3L' on European lines and these and other existing networks to do with similar issues? There were also various other learning community and learning town initiatives, some of which Pascal Associate Norman Longworth had been central in developing. One obvious answer was to optimise effort and networking via the Pascal Website.

4.4 These matters were left to be taken up separately by Pascal Board members Bruce Wilson and Steve Garlick, perhaps meeting soon in Canberra and leading to a national meeting early next year. It was hoped that Mary Serafim, who organised the seminar and to whom warm appreciation was expressed, would be support and such Australian or wider Australian-based network through the RMIT Pascal office.

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