

GERALDTON COMBINED UNIVERSITIES CENTRE FOR RURAL HEALTH —  
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM

**287. Hon KEN BASTON to the minister representing the Minister for Education and Training:**

I refer to the Geraldton Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health and the decision by Curtin University of Technology to cancel the early childhood education program at the combined university and replace it with an online course.

- (1) Is the minister aware that 16 students from regional Western Australia have been disadvantaged by this decision?
- (2) Has the minister been provided with the reasons for the change in the mode of presentation; and, if yes, what are those reasons?
- (3) If no, will the minister be seeking an explanation from the university?

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH replied:**

I thank the member for some notice of this question. In view of the length of the answer, I seek leave to table the answer and have it incorporated into *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

[See paper 3860.]

The following material was incorporated —

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**I thank the Hon. Member for some notice of this question.**

Curtin University of Technology has been delivering its teacher education courses, including its Early Childhood Education programme, through the Geraldton Combined Universities Centre for a number of years. Locally employed tutors have been available to deliver face-to-face instruction to students in the units in which they enrolled. It is understood that this year the University has changed the mode of instructional delivery to 16 students enrolled in the first year of its Early Childhood programme. The change involves the discontinuation of face-to-face tutorials and the introduction of “blended learning” which is a scheme which uses new technologies to link the students to the University’s School of Education on its metropolitan campus.

1. The Minister is aware that students have been affected by this decision by the University. The Minister has received correspondence about this matter and has also seen the article published on page 9 of the *Geraldton Guardian* on 22 March 2007 which noted that some students have expressed concern.

2. While University curriculum and delivery mode does not fall directly under the jurisdiction of the State, the Minister has forwarded concerns about the new mode of delivery to the Department of Education Services for follow up. Remarks made by Dr Christopher Brook, however, in the *Geraldton Guardian* article suggest that Professor Brook considers the new form of delivery to be equivalent to the service offered to students at the University’s metropolitan campus. The article also states that there is a local facilitator to assist students in their work under the new system.

3. Under its Act of establishment, decisions regarding the University’s mode of delivery of its courses are the responsibility of the University itself. However, while the Minister expects that the University will respond appropriately to any concerns about being disadvantaged that the students have expressed, the Minister is very concerned that the amount of funding available to Western Australia’s universities from the Commonwealth to support regional delivery of their programmes is inadequate. The Commonwealth’s regional loading scheme disadvantages our universities compared with other those in other States. This is an issue that will be put forcefully to the review of higher education recently announced by the Federal Minister.

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