

Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education



DISCUSSION PAPER
JULY 2017

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Discussion Paper

Author: Emeritus Professor John Halsey

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“In a very fundamental sense, we are what we pay attention to...Our attention is precious and what we choose to focus it on has enormous consequences... [our] choices change the world.”

(Fleischner, 2011, p. 9)



Education equips young people with the knowledge, skills and dispositions they need to become autonomous, responsible and productive citizens. High quality education and further study is essential to ensure that young people can fully participate in a dynamic and increasingly complex world. In other words, education is critical for developing and nurturing human agency.

The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*¹ agreed to by all Ministers of Education in December 2008 sets out two goals:

- » Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence, and
- » All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

Through the *Melbourne Declaration*, Australian governments committed to working with all school sectors to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged young Australians, including those from remote areas.

¹ The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008) replaced the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century (the Adelaide Declaration, agreed in 1999), which superseded the original National Goals for Schooling in Australia (Hobart Declaration, agreed in 1989).



The Review aims to identify innovative and fresh approaches to support improved access and achievement of students and their transition to further study, training and employment.



1. Background

In June 2016, the Australian Government announced the \$152 million Regional Student Access to Education package comprising four elements, commencing in 2017–18:

1. Reducing the period regional and remote students need to be employed under the self-supporting criteria under Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY living allowance, from 18 months to 14 months
2. 1,200 new rural and regional enterprise scholarships for undergraduate, postgraduate and vocational education students to undertake science, technology, engineering and mathematics studies
3. 50 per cent increase in the Assistance for Isolated Children's Additional Boarding Allowance
4. An independent comprehensive review into regional, rural and remote education.

On 2 March 2017, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon Barnaby Joyce MP, and the Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, announced the review into regional, rural and remote education (see **Appendix 1** for Terms of Reference).

The Review will consider the key issues, challenges and barriers that impact on the learning outcomes of regional, rural and remote students.

More importantly, the Review aims to identify innovative and fresh approaches to support improved access and achievement of these students in school and in their transition to further study, training and employment.

A report will be provided to the Government by the end of 2017.



2. Purpose of the Discussion Paper

The Discussion Paper has two main purposes.

The first is to stimulate thinking about what needs to be done to increase and expand the aspirations, achievements and opportunities of regional, rural and remote students.

The second is to encourage submissions about innovative and fresh approaches that are improving (or could improve) student achievements and their transition to further study, training and employment.

Innovation is often thought of as something which is ‘brand new’ or particularly special and big. An innovation, however, can also be something that is quite small, relatively subtle, cost neutral overall but which delivers a significant impact.

The paper provides a number of examples of innovative practice that are having a very positive impact on student aspirations and achievements.



3. Framing the Paper

In addition to the aim of the Review and its Terms of Reference, the Discussion Paper is informed by five convictions:

- » vibrant and productive rural communities are integral to Australia's sustainability and prosperity—socially, economically and environmentally
- » focussing on ideas and options for re-thinking and reframing education in regional, rural and remote areas is likely to be more productive than simply concentrating on 'the problems'
- » student achievements and beyond-school opportunities are shaped by a diverse blend of in-school and community and home factors, as well as interactions between them—context and relationships are always important
- » government and departmental/sector policy settings are very significant in developing possibilities for change together with the work of parents and communities
- » improvement in education is achieved by exploring how existing resources can be used more effectively, not just by allocating more of them.

The paper is not an exhaustive treatment of everything that impacts on the achievements of students and their options and opportunities when they leave school.

Instead it focuses on nine important themes and the issues, challenges and opportunities associated with them. The themes were identified from an extensive literature review of regional, rural and remote education covering the last decade or so, and the knowledge and experiences of the author. The themes are:

- » Curriculum and assessment
- » Teachers and teaching
- » Leaders and leadership
- » School and community
- » Information and Communication Technology
- » Entrepreneurship and schools
- » Improving access—enrolments, clusters, distance education, boarding
- » Diversity
- » Transitioning beyond school

If there is an area of concern or potential for improving education in regional, rural and remote areas which has not been included, readers are strongly encouraged to raise it via the submission process at www.education.gov.au/independent-review-regional-rural-and-remote-education.



4. Context

The challenge of improving outcomes for regional, rural and remote students and their beyond-school opportunities is significantly impacted by historical, current and likely future changes and developments. Included are:

- » demographic changes and especially the flow of young people from rural areas into urban areas
- » the closure of many services once ‘taken for granted’ like banks, post offices, the local hospital and sub-regional work depots, all of which helped add to the viability of a community and provided local employment opportunities
- » the mechanisation of farming and the introduction of high-end technology into almost all stages of primary industries production cycles leading to bigger farms, fewer people and especially children per farm, and therefore fewer children for the local school
- » the growth of cities and their capacity to generate economic, social and cultural advantages, plus the spread of regional service and shopping centres and the impact of these on small country towns like the closure of the one remaining grocery store or bakery
- » the introduction of secondary education and combined primary/secondary schools which has brought major educational benefits, but also hastened the closure and consolidation of hundreds of small schools
- » the introduction of required subjects for university entrance and their impact on curriculum
- » two of globalisation’s most pervasive and powerful features—information and communication technology (ICT) and the use of markets and competition to deliver essential human services.

Together with the changes and developments briefly outlined above, it is also important to acknowledge there are areas of regional growth and leading edge development in education, jobs and lifestyles. One of the challenges of the Review is to hear and understand more about these and how they can inform dealing with the key issues, challenges and barriers that impact on the learning outcomes of regional, rural and remote students.

4.1 Current environment

Australia's schooling system has three sectors, each with different funding and organisational arrangements—state and territory owned and run government public schools, Catholic schools and independent schools. Together these sectors educate 3.8 million students in over 9,000 schools annually.

In 2017, 65 per cent of students are estimated to attend government schools, 19 per cent attended Catholic schools and 16 per cent attended independent schools.

State and territory governments have primary responsibility for policy, funding and delivery of school education. Each state and territory determines its policies on organisation of schooling, curriculum development and implementation within the context of the Australian Curriculum, course accreditation, student assessment and certification.

Constitutionally states and territories are the majority public funder of government schools providing around 64.8 per cent of total public funding in 2015 while the Australian Government is a minority public funder of the government sector. For government schools, Commonwealth recurrent funding is passed directly to the state and territory governments. This is because states and territories are best placed to make decisions on how to use funding for their schools, together with their own funding (see Table 1 Share of total public funding, by sector, 2015).

The Australian Government has historically been the majority public funder of non-government schools. This reflects the Government's commitment to support parental choice and diversity in the schooling system and will continue under new arrangements.

Table 1 Share of total public funding, by sector, 2015

| Sector | Commonwealth funding (%) | State/territory funding (%) |
|-------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Government | 18.4 | 81.6 |
| Catholic | 76.6 | 23.4 |
| Independent | 74.6 | 25.4 |
| Total | 35.2 | 64.8 |

Source: ACARA, My School 2015 financial data. Released March 2017

Commonwealth funding for non-government schools is passed by the state and territory governments to the approved authorities for each school. Non-government education systems operating in the various states and territories are responsible for distributing the Commonwealth recurrent funding they receive to their member schools based on their own needs-based distribution.

Notwithstanding the Constitutional limitations to its powers, the Australian Government has a significant role in schooling. The Government plays a lead role in national policy development and implementing nationally agreed reforms, leads Australia's international engagement on educational matters, makes a contribution to funding for government schools and is the primary funder of non-government schools.

The Government funds schools (\$17.5 billion in 2017) on the basis of need under the *Australian Education Act 2013*. The Commonwealth recurrent funding for regional schools in 2017 is approximately \$4 billion. Funding per regional or remote student has grown by 25.1 per cent over the 2014 to 2017 funding period.

From 2018 onwards, Commonwealth recurrent funding for all schools is transitioning from levels under previous funding arrangements towards the Schooling Resource Standard funding arrangement levels.

Funding comprises a base per-student amount plus loadings to target both student and school disadvantage. For most non-government schools, the base amount is discounted by the anticipated capacity of their school community to financially contribute towards the school's operating costs.

Loadings reflect that some schools and students need more support. There are six loadings:

- » student level loadings—for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, students with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with low English proficiency
- » school level loadings—for school size and location.

The location loading recognises that it generally costs more to educate students going to school in regional and remote areas than it does for students in city-based schools. The location loading is calculated based on the remoteness or accessibility of each school to ensure additional support is available where it is needed most.

Over the current funding period (2014–2017), the Government will provide an estimated \$1.4 billion through the location loading, for students going to schools in regional or remote areas. This is estimated to grow to \$2.0 billion provided over 2018 to 2021.

While Commonwealth funding is calculated based on the entitlements of individual schools, schools in government and non-government systems distribute their funding to their member schools according to their own allocation models.

In May 2017, the Government announced the *Quality Schools* package which sets out Commonwealth recurrent funding over 2018 to 2027. Recently introduced legislation proposes that all schools transition to consistent Commonwealth shares of the Schooling Resource Standard by increasing Commonwealth funding:

- » from an average of 17.0 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard for government schools in 2017 to 20 per cent in 2027, reflecting the Commonwealth's role as the minority public funder of this sector
- » from an average of 76.8 per cent in 2017 for non-government schools to 80 per cent in 2027, reflecting the Commonwealth's role as the primary public funder of this sector.

Commonwealth funding for regional and remote students will grow from \$3.9 billion in 2017 to \$7.2 billion in 2027, an increase of 84 per cent. Over that period, per student funding will grow on average by 4.9 per cent a year, compared to average annual growth of 3.9 per cent for students in metropolitan area, and a national average of 4.1 per cent for all students.

4.2 Definition of regional, rural, remote

In Australia numerous terms are used for communities and locations 'beyond the city'. These include the three used for this Review—regional, rural and remote—as well as country and isolated and then some of a more vernacular kind such as 'the bush' and 'the outback'.

In the context of this paper, the terms 'regional, rural and remote' refers to all schools and services which are not located in the major cities of Australia. The word rural when used by itself includes regional and remote unless otherwise stated. Additionally, country is also used as a collective term for regional, rural and remote.

Also unless otherwise stated, data in this paper is drawn from national collections that use Education Council endorsed geolocation classifications, namely the Australian Bureau of Statistics Australian Statistical Geography Standard Remoteness Structure.

4.3 Schools profile

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has five mainland remoteness categories based on road distances between locations and five different sized service centres, namely Major Cities, Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote Areas and Very Remote Areas.

Table 2 shows the full time equivalent (FTE) student enrolments in each of these geographic locations by schooling sector. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2016 there were 3,786,420 FTE students. Whilst most FTE students are enrolled in schools in major cities, those in other areas account for 29.3 per cent or 1,107,639 FTE students. The percentage of enrolments in government schools increases substantially from major city to very remote locations.

Table 2 FTE enrolments by geographic location and schooling sector, 2016

| | Major City | Inner Regional | Outer Regional | Remote | Very remote |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Government | 1,696,408 | 475,898 | 238,157 | 36,628 | 25,577 |
| Non-government | 982,373 | 233,331 | 83,891 | 10,601 | 3,556 |
| Total | 2,678,781 | 709,229 | 322,048 | 47,229 | 29,133 |
| % Government | 63% | 67% | 74% | 78% | 88% |

Source: ABS (2016) Schools Australia 2016, cat. no. 4221.0, Table 46a

Table 3 shows the number of schools by geolocation in 2016. According to the Australian Government Department of Education and Training, there were over 4,400 non-metropolitan schools, accounting for 47 per cent of all schools in Australia. Government schools provide the majority of the education for students outside the major cities. In very remote areas, government schools make up 84 per cent of all schools operating in those locations.

Table 3 Number of schools by geolocation (2016)

| | Major City | Inner Regional | Outer Regional | Remote | Very remote |
|----------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|------------|-------------|
| Government | 3,225 | 1,702 | 1,188 | 262 | 251 |
| Non-government | 1,757 | 628 | 309 | 56 | 48 |
| Total | 4,982 | 2,330 | 1,497 | 319 | 299 |
| % Government | 65% | 73% | 79% | 82% | 84% |

Source: Australian Government Department of Education and Training

Changes in government data collection methodology have improved the quality of data on regional, rural and remote students, enabling more accurate capture of student enrolments and improved processes for calculating income support entitlements.

In 2016 school sector national reporting changed to use the ABS Remoteness Structure for reporting student and school related data by region, enabling comparisons with other regional reports based on this structure. The methodology of determining remoteness to assess Youth Allowance and other entitlements previously relied on home postcodes, but is now based on the recipient's geo-coded home address which more accurately places an address in a remoteness area.



5. Student Results Profile

Test results in Australia and from overseas show a significant difference in education achievements of students from regional, rural and remote Australia compared to their city peers.

While it is important to have a clear picture of the test results that are frequently discussed in the media and elsewhere, it is also important to be aware that when large numbers of test results are added together and averaged out, achievements tend to be 'smoothed out'.

One effect of this is high scores (as well as low scores) are essentially 'hidden'.

Take the example of a cricketer who scores the following runs in 8 innings—48, 59, 28, 12, 0, 97, 110 and 54. The total of 408 is an average of 51 runs per innings. What this 'hides' is a duck, a very good century, another near century, and a lean patch.

It is very important that the Review hears about schools and communities in regional, rural and remote areas that are achieving high student results and successful progression to further education, training and employment.

5.1 NAPLAN

An important national strategy designed to give schools and teachers information about their students' progress is an annual assessment for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 known as the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).

All NAPLAN test items are aligned to the Australian Curriculum, particularly in English and Mathematics, and the reports offer detailed feedback that can inform effective support for young learners.

Since 2008, NAPLAN has been used as a robust indicator of students' learning outcomes, including the capacity to make comparisons between similar groups of students and schools across Australia. The general trend for 2016 is for decreasing attainment with increasing remoteness:

Across all five achievement domains, there is a consistent pattern in the results for Australia overall. Students from major cities geolocations have the highest mean scale score, followed by students from inner regional geolocations, then students from outer regional geolocations, then students from remote geolocations, and then students from very remote geolocations...The distributions of students in achievement bands are similar. For Australia overall, the highest percentage of students achieving at or above the national minimum standard attend schools in the major cities and the lowest percentage attend schools in very remote geolocations (ACARA Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016, p. 64).

5.2 International results

Two international tests of school students' learning are receiving increasing attention in Australia and globally: the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) noted what they termed an “urban advantage” in student performance in PISA results from 2009 (Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation, 2013, p. 1). In a more recent document it was reported:

that children from poor households, ethnic minorities or rural areas are significantly less likely to make the transition from primary to lower secondary school and from lower to upper secondary school, and are more likely to be delayed in their progression through the grade levels (Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation, 2016, p. 210).

In the Australian context of PISA, students were classed according to three geolocations: metropolitan, provincial and remote. The report of Australian students' performance on the 2015 assessment indicated that as distance from metropolitan centres increased, scores decreased:

Students from metropolitan schools achieved significantly higher scores than students from provincial schools or remote schools. Students from provincial schools and students in remote schools did not score significantly different to each other (Thomson, De Bortoli, & Underwood, 2016, p. 56).

This can be seen in the following three tables adapted from Thomson, De Bortoli, & Underwood (2016, Figure 10.1).

Table 4 Average scores and proficiency levels in scientific literacy, by geographical location

| Geographic location | Average Score | SE | Confidence interval | Difference between 5th and 95th percentiles | Proficiency level— Low performers | Proficiency level— Middle performers | Proficiency level— High performers | Students at or above the National Proficient Standard (%) |
|---------------------|---------------|------|---------------------|---|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Metropolitan | 517 | 1.9 | 514-521 | 336 | 16 | 72 | 12 | 64 |
| Provincial | 491 | 2.9 | 485-496 | 327 | 23 | 70 | 7 | 53 |
| Remote | 473 | 14.7 | 444-502 | 343 | 28 | 65 | 7 | 47 |

Table 5 Average scores and proficiency levels in reading literacy, by geographic location

| Geographic location | Average Score | SE | Confidence interval | Difference between 5th and 95th percentiles | Proficiency level— Low performers | Proficiency level— Middle performers | Proficiency level— High performers | Students at or above the National Proficient Standard (%) |
|---------------------|---------------|------|---------------------|---|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Metropolitan | 511 | 1.9 | 508-515 | 335 | 16 | 72 | 12 | 64 |
| Provincial | 480 | 3.3 | 474-486 | 337 | 24 | 69 | 7 | 51 |
| Remote | 465 | 15.2 | 436-495 | 338 | 28 | 66 | 6 | 44 |

Table 6 Average scores and proficiency levels in mathematical literacy, by geographic location

| Geographic location | Average Score | SE | Confidence interval | Difference between 5th and 95th percentiles | Proficiency level— Low performers | Proficiency level— Middle performers | Proficiency level— High performers | Students at or above the National Proficient Standard (%) |
|---------------------|---------------|------|---------------------|---|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Metropolitan | 502 | 2.1 | 498-506 | 305 | 19 | 68 | 13 | 64 |
| Provincial | 473 | 2.8 | 468-479 | 298 | 29 | 64 | 7 | 51 |
| Remote | 460 | 10.7 | 439-481 | 289 | 33 | 62 | 5 | 44 |

SE is the Standard Error which indicates the reliability of the average or mean score. The smaller the SE, the greater the reliability.

Similarly for TIMSS, with increasing distance from metropolitan centres Australian students demonstrated lower scores for Years 4 and 8 levels of Mathematics and Science (Thomson, Wernert, O'Grady, & Rodrigues, 2016, pp. 25–26, 44–45, 63, 82).

5.3 Year 12, higher education and vocational education and training

In terms of successful completion of year 12 or equivalent qualification (at the level of Certificate III or higher) by the age of 19, there is the same pattern of outcomes as those already reported in this section; namely, a marked decline from 78 per cent for Major Cities to 43 per cent for Very Remote, with the difference between Inner Regional and Major Cities being 14 per cent (Mitchell Institute, 2015).

In relation to transition to university and the proportion of persons aged 25–34 years with a bachelor degree or above, there is also a decreasing trend with increasing remoteness. In 2014, the proportion of residents holding a degree was: Major City 42.2 per cent, Inner Regional 21.8 per cent, Outer Regional 19.5 per cent, and Remote and Very Remote 17.8 per cent (Universities Australia, 2015, p. 8).

For vocational education and training (VET) non-metropolitan participation rates are comparable with urban rates and completion rates for Certificate 3 exceed urban (38 per cent compared to 35 per cent), but at the diploma level the situation is reversed (10 per cent compared to 16 per cent) (Macintyre, 2017).

The national statistics show there is a persistent relationship between location and educational outcomes when data for the various measures are aggregated.

The national statistics also raise very important questions about innovative ways to increase VET and university qualification rates with courses and programs that enhance the capacities of graduates to be creators of employment opportunities as well as consumers of them. Section 6.6 on entrepreneurial education takes this challenge up in more detail.



6. Raising Achievements

There is a diversity of factors, relationships and resources required for a student to learn, successfully complete school and commence a pathway beyond school which is personally rewarding and also makes a contribution to the wider society.

In practice, the contexts, factors, relationships and resources that impact on learning and opportunities don't exist as discrete entities. Their interactions influence the learning, growth and nurturing of students from their early years through to school graduation and beyond.

The following section discusses nine key themes that significantly impact student achievement. The themes are not presented in order of priority. Rather, consideration is given to factors that occur within schools, those that extend beyond the school gate into the domain of the broader community and, very importantly, the interactions between them.

6.1 Curriculum and assessment

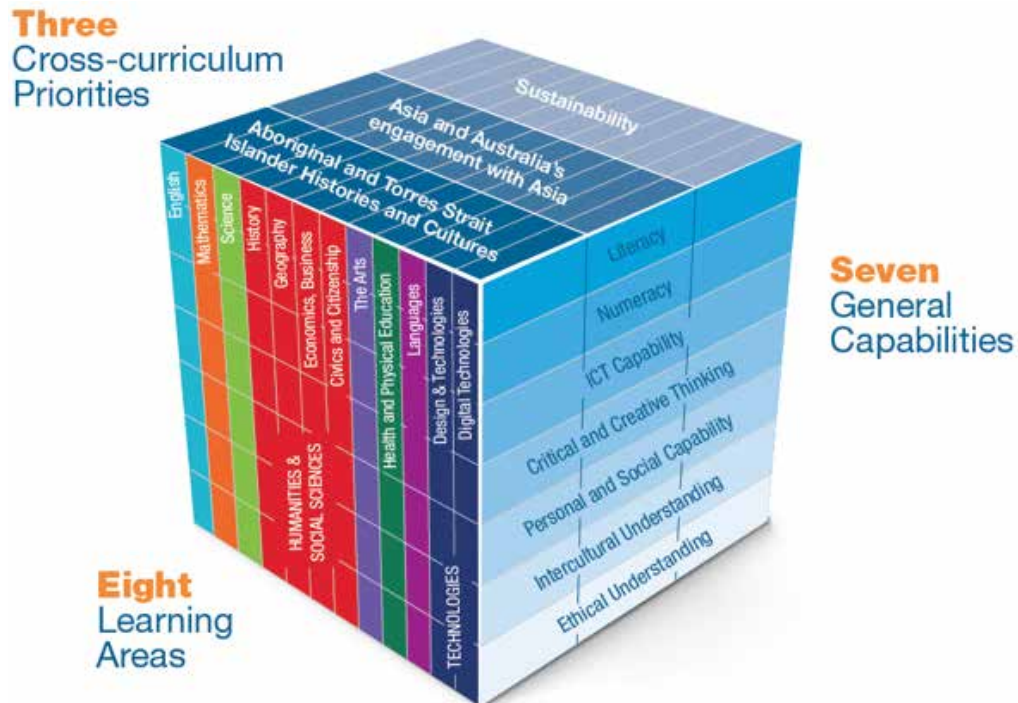
A recent and powerful strategy for ensuring the flexible and equitable delivery of high quality education has been the development of a national curriculum.

The Australian Curriculum for Foundation to Year 10 has been endorsed by all states and territories. It sets the expectations for what all Australian students should be taught, regardless of where they live or the background from which they come. Each state and territory is free to deliver the Australian Curriculum in ways that are best suited to the students in local schools; this is true for regional, rural and remote areas.

Flexibility is also reflected in the Australian Curriculum's recognition of student diversity, including students with disability, gifted and talented students, and those who speak English as an additional language or dialect.

The Australian Curriculum has a three dimensional structure that is intended to meet the learning needs of all students and to provide rigorous, relevant and engaging learning experiences across all areas of the curriculum. This design provides a strong foundation in the eight learning areas of English, Mathematics, Science, Humanities and Social Sciences, The Arts, Languages, Health and Physical Education and Technologies.

The Design of the Australian F-10 Curriculum



With 21st century learners in mind, the Australian Curriculum includes seven General Capabilities that enable students and teachers to focus on Literacy, Numeracy, ICT, Critical and Creative Thinking, Intercultural Understanding, Personal and Social Capability and Ethical Understanding.

A third dimension of the Australian Curriculum recognises Australia's unique geographical location and heritage. The three Cross-Curriculum Priorities are Australia and Australia's Engagement with Asia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, and Sustainability.

On 18 September 2015 all Education Ministers agreed to revisions in the Australian Curriculum. The changes address two themes—'resolving the overcrowded curriculum' and 'rebalancing the curriculum' for the eight learning areas. The streamlining of the Australian Curriculum ensured a focus on the basics without compromising the breadth of coverage.

Curriculum is a critically important and an intensely contested aspect of education. There are many reasons for this but chief among them is that curriculum plays a defining role about what is taught and learnt in schools. A curriculum is selected from an almost infinite array of knowledge, skills and experiences. Many decisions have to be made about what to include, what to exclude and what to make optional.

Guiding these decisions are beliefs and values about the fundamental purpose of education and what constitutes worthwhile knowledge for a given society.

Assessment focuses primarily on finding out whether students have learnt what it is intended they learn. Like curriculum, assessment plays a very crucial role in the lives of students and a society more broadly because it identifies and rewards successful learning.

Bringing curriculum to life in ways that deeply engage students together with authentic, valid and reliable assessment can be a major challenge for education in rural contexts.

This is because at the heart of rural education is a critical question about its purpose, and as a student might ask, ‘am I learning so I can leave my community, am I learning so I can stay locally, or am I learning so I have a real choice about what I do?’

So are there changes which should be made and could be made to curriculum and assessment to improve the achievements of rural students and their transition to further study, training and employment?

As well, how a school uses curriculum and assessment to engage and motivate students has a great impact on their learning and their achievements.

6.1.1 The Australian Curriculum and place

For some, the Australian Curriculum has been perceived as having a city-centric orientation which pays insufficient attention to the contexts in which students (and schools and teachers) are located (Roberts, 2013).

As well, there is a perception that schooling in a rural context is about ‘learning for leaving’. In other words, the main focus of education “is geared to mobilize its products away from the margins and into the cities” (Corbett, 2016, p. 271).

Importantly, the Australian Curriculum is monitored and changes are made when evidence shows they are required. Following the review of the Curriculum, changes to address overcrowding and to rebalance content meant the needs of those jurisdictions with large Indigenous populations in regional and remote locations that required more flexibility were met. Rural schools, while supportive of a national curriculum, believed that there was too much content. The difficulties of handling so much content in any kind of sequential fashion in remote areas, often in multi-year classes, was complex and often unmanageable.

The importance of place in education is embedded in the first goal of the Melbourne Declaration along with a list of other values. It states “all Australian governments and all school sectors must provide all students with access to high quality schooling that is free from discrimination based on gender, language, sexual orientation, pregnancy, culture, ethnicity, religion, health or disability, socioeconomic background or *geographic location*” (2008, p. 7, emphasis added).

The rationale for place-based learning is expressed in the second key point under the first goal, namely “ensure that schools build on local cultural knowledge and experience of Indigenous students as a foundation for learning and work in partnership with local communities on all aspects of the schooling process...” (p. 7).

6.1.2 Flexibility

For schools, the authority and resources to flexibly interpret and implement the curriculum are crucial to meeting and challenging student learning needs and interests.

Another way of representing this complex challenge is to think about it in terms of achieving an appropriate balance between a range of competing curriculum demands and expectations while also maintaining a strong focus on 'basics' like literacy and numeracy.

In the early primary years for example, determining this balance might focus around how children should be taught to read and write and 'learn their number work'.

For secondary education and particularly years 11 and 12, finding the 'right' balance of subjects, topics and projects could be significantly impacted by how many students are enrolled. This is because enrolments play a very critical role in determining the number and kind of subjects and pathways available for students.

Currently, having 'a choice about what I do' mostly means a student has to be successful in their education as defined by the existing ways of measuring learning and, as already shown, rural students overall are not as successful as those who attend city schools. However, 'hidden' within the aggregated data are results which are as good as or better than some of the best in metropolitan schools.

Important questions related to this include how are 'against the trend' results happening, and would individual and overall results for rural students improve if there was more of a rural emphasis in the National Curriculum?

In addition, would rural students, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who live in remote communities, be able to show higher levels of learning if the assumptions upon which schooling is based were modified to be more aligned with their contexts and traditions? An extract from *Red Dirt Curriculum* (Lester, Minutjaker, Osborne, & Tjitayi, 2013) captures the essence and significance of this question:

...the logic for [mainstream] educational success is repeated by teachers across remote schools: if you come to school every day, you can learn to read and write, finish school, maybe go away to boarding school or university and then you'll be able to look after yourself and come back and help your family and community (see for example Burns, 2012; Elks, 2011). But through interviews and discussions held with remote Aboriginal community members, we continue to see that this thinking can be somewhat foreign and the value of learning, knowledge, aspiration, imagining and identity remain firmly grounded in the Red Dirt context of the community (p. 6).

High achievement via shopping and learning

For over 20 years, a shop has been at the heart of education at Mypolonga Primary School in South Australia, a small, high achieving rural primary school with a waiting list out to 2020 and beyond.

The shop's motto is 'OK Isn't Excellent'. Run by students under the supervision of teachers and the principal, the shop is located in the school grounds which has increased the flexibility of the program and allowed the school garden to be a part of the experience.

The shop sells high quality local crafts and produce to tourists who visit each week as part of their paddle steamer itinerary down the Murray River.

Each student involved with the shop keeps a computer inventory for each of their suppliers. They rotate through various jobs, including chocolate coating dried apricots and bagging them; serving and greeting tourists when they arrive and presenting complimentary samples; ensuring shelves are well and attractively stocked; accurately counting, recording and reconciling takings; and keeping the shop garden in good shape.

Senior students supervise younger students and are assessed on this and all of the other tasks. From the beginning of the program, students have used 'mental arithmetic' to work out the cost of purchases and the amount of change required to complete a transaction. The school does this to help students develop their math skills and transfer them to their everyday learning.

Assessing learning outcomes against established criteria makes the practical day-to-day running of the shop much simpler and also makes the learning intentions clear to students. Each rotation has assessment criteria to determine achievement and assessment is cumulative. However, only assessments which are rated as excellent can be accumulated. Students move through a series of coloured badges until they reach gold. After gold, students attain 'Quality Assurance' which enables them to assess others.

NAPLAN Year 7 numeracy results are consistently outstanding with a number of students achieving above the Year 9 national average. It is rare for students to make poor progress from Year 5 to 7 in numeracy.

Questions

- 6.1.1 Is the Australian Curriculum meeting the learning needs and interest of regional, rural and remote students?
- 6.1.2 Do current assessment processes help to improve the achievements of regional, rural and remote students?
- 6.1.3 How can schools be supported to deliver the Australian Curriculum in a flexible way to meet local needs?
- 6.1.4 Are there other examples of innovative ways in which curriculum is being delivered in regional, rural and remote schools?

6.2 Teachers and teaching

Research identifies quality of teachers as one of the main ‘in school’ impacts on student learning (Hattie, 2009). It follows from this that having a highly competent teacher workforce for country schools is critical to improving the achievements of students in these schools and their transitions to further study, training and employment.

Schooling in Australia, including the preparation of teachers and the teacher workforce, is the constitutional responsibility of the states and territories. State and territory teacher regulatory authorities accredit initial teacher education courses and set requirements for teacher registration. Once teachers are working in schools, teacher employers (state/territory governments and non-government education authorities) are responsible for setting conditions of employment, including provision of, and resourcing for, professional development.

The Australian Government has a leadership role including supporting national policy reform. A key priority for the Government is to work with all education ministers through Education Council to progress national objectives to improve the quality of the teaching workforce.

Significant effort has been made by Australian governments to improve teacher quality—both pre-service and in-service. A key national development is the *Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures, endorsed by all state and territory education ministers*, which set high level requirements to ensure that all initial teacher education graduates meet the requirements of the Graduate career stage of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*.

Governments are also investing in programs and incentives to place quality teachers into regional, rural and remote schools. For example, Western Australia offers additional allowances of up to \$20,870 a year, relocation and housing expenses and additional leave to encourage teachers to move and work in regional, rural and remote schools.

The Australian Government is funding the Teach for Australia (TFA) program which fast-tracks high calibre, non-teaching graduates, known as Associates, into disadvantaged schools through two years of intensive teacher training. TFA partners exclusively with schools serving low socioeconomic communities, including schools in regional and remote communities. To date over 230 Associates have been placed in schools in regional and remote communities, filling hard-to-staff teaching positions.

Notwithstanding the efforts of governments, attracting and retaining the best teachers for regional, rural and remote schools continues to be one of the most persistent challenges on the ‘education agenda’.

Another apparently very persistent aspect of staffing rural schools is a belief (which influences practice) that ‘the country is a good place for a teacher to *start* their career but not to *devote* their career to’.

This is not part of a call to stop appointing newly graduated teachers to regional, rural and remote schools; rather it is intended to raise questions about the levels and mix of teaching experience required in schools to help raise achievements. As well, not all country locations have difficulty attracting and retaining experienced, high performing teachers.

Incentives—financial, accelerated promotion, rental and housing subsidies, guaranteed rights of return and extra professional development—are among those used to attract and retain teachers for rural schools.

Incentives help to fill vacancies. They do not, however, ensure that ‘top teachers’ are appointed to schools where they are most needed.

Teachers acquire and develop skills, knowledge, assessment expertise and passion for teaching through a combination of pre-service experiences (study and practicum) and then employment (professional development).

There are university topics and initiatives that explicitly focus on preparing and supporting teachers for living and working in country schools and communities, including remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ones. However, studying them is mostly, if not always, optional.

A very effective way for pre-service teachers to gain in-depth experience of what it would be like to be a teacher in a regional, rural or remote school is through a teaching practice placement, and preferably one that runs for an extended period, say a full term.

Currently there are significant barriers to all undergraduate teachers having the choice of an extended rural placement as part of their degree completion and graduation requirements. The main ones are the costs—transport, accommodation, loss of income from a job (the vast majority of students rely on this to pay their living expenses)—and managing the disruption to their normal living and/or family arrangements.

Notwithstanding, those who take an extended placement most often report that it greatly benefited their professional growth and understanding of being a teacher in a country school and community.

For employed teachers, timely access to high quality, relevant, regular and affordable professional development is crucial for building and sustaining their effectiveness. This is particularly important for teachers who have to teach outside their field of professional preparation, which can be quite prevalent in small rural schools, as are multigrade classes.

Many early career teachers are young and of those in the youngest age group (25 or younger), less than half are in ongoing/permanent positions.

Overall casualisation of the teacher workforce is also increasing, but a survey of graduates teaching in rural Australia (Plunkett & Dyson, 2011) showed that around 70 per cent of them would like to continue in their current school for at least three years or more. Whilst attachment to students and community is a main factor in teachers’ choice to remain, short term contractual arrangements hinder this development from both the teachers’ point of view and that of the school community.

Whilst some attrition in a workforce is both healthy and necessary, a high loss of new graduates and early career teachers is not. It also results in higher staff turnover which impacts negatively on developing long term relationships with students and families, both of which contribute to learning outcomes.

Another issue bearing on attracting and retaining teachers for country schools is that teachers' pay has a relatively flat structure which does not adequately recognise or address the contexts of 'hard to staff' schools. In addition, many specialist teachers (such as mathematics and science) can obtain higher rates of remuneration in other industries.

Questions

- 6.2.1 What key initiatives are helping to attract 'top teachers' to regional, rural and remote schools?
- 6.2.2 How can we improve retention of 'top teachers' in regional, rural and remote schools?
- 6.2.3 What professional development should be available for teachers, schools and communities?
- 6.2.4 What innovative approaches could be taken to support a high quality teaching workforce for regional, rural and remote school communities?

6.3 Leaders and leadership

Research shows that school leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all in-school related factors affecting student learning (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2015, Effective Leadership, Learning Curve, Issue 10). School leaders play a key role in improving outcomes through their influence on the motivation and capacity of teachers, the school climate and environment and through engaging with school communities.

Substantial effort has been made by all governments to assist aspiring school leaders to develop the skills and knowledge they require to become effective school leaders.

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has developed the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* which acknowledges that context is a crucially important factor for leadership, namely:

...context often affects the choice of leadership emphasis. Changed circumstances, such as appointment to a new school or implementation of a new policy directive, demand that leaders suit their leadership to their situation. Effective principals will apply the appropriate leadership emphasis that a school context demands (AITSL, 2015, p. 24, emphasis added).

AITSL has also developed leadership profiles that build upon the principal standard and provides a developmental framework and what it means to be a highly effective school leader.

A national principal certification process for all aspiring principals is also being developed to enable aspiring leaders to demonstrate their expertise, experience and proficiency against the Australian Professional Standard for Principals and show they are effective leaders and ready to meet the challenges of being a principal.

The capacity of leaders to form and sustain relationships which directly and indirectly contribute to the learning culture of a school is crucial, especially in locations where there is effectively no other option for families than the local school.

As well, principals contribute to the culture of a school through developing and driving a vision of education that 'energises' learning, and by making the organisational arrangements of a school work effectively, efficiently and inclusively.

Principals in small schools (say <100 students) are frequently required to teach the equivalent of at least one day per week. Juggling being a teacher and being the leader of a small school can be very demanding, especially if enrolments are in decline and a school's viability is being questioned.

Being a country educational leader often means taking on an extensive range and diversity of responsibilities in addition to being responsible for the quality of teaching and learning. Some of the major ones are school bus transport including route determinations and recruitment of drivers, staff housing and accommodation, and community organisation leadership expectations like serving on a local hospital board, becoming a member/player of a team and joining a service club.

Decisions about bus routes can be especially charged and contested. Having a bus stop at the farm gate is much more convenient than children travelling 10 kilometres or more to catch their bus. As well, bus routes, especially for schools where most or all students are 'out of towners', determine enrolment catchments for schools which in turn directly impact on their viability.

Attracting and retaining school leaders for regional, rural and remote schools, as with teachers, is a major challenge for most education systems. There are exceptions to this, as well as initiatives which have been developed to optimise effective leaders being appointed to schools regardless of location.

An array of incentives is used to ensure that regional, rural and remote schools have a principal. The range includes extra salary, subsidised rent or cheaper housing, funded return trips to a 'home town' or capital city, guaranteed rights of return after a 'tour of duty', extra leave provisions for very remote locations, and locality allowances to compensate for extra day-to-day living costs.

Alongside incentives, as already flagged, is the equally important matter of the specialised education and preparation of principals and leaders via post graduate programs which result in a deep understanding and appreciation of regional, rural and remote contexts and develop the knowledge, skills and relationships for effective, efficient and pro-active leadership.

In addition, mentoring support from an experienced principal and detailed knowledge about a school and its community prior to appointment also help to optimise the success of a school leader.

On a more personal level, principals must know when they accept an appointment that there is good quality housing available for them at an affordable cost. The transition to principalship of a school is complex and demanding enough without having to devote time and emotional energy to finding somewhere reasonable to live. And the tensions around this can be compounded if access to quality housing is also an issue for staff more generally.

In addition to using a raft of incentives, education systems in Australia generally view principalship of a regional, rural or remote school as the 'natural starting point' of a career pathway to senior levels of urban educational leadership.

Colloquially put, 'you go to the bush to prove yourself as an educational leader to earn the right to be considered for an urban principalship'. The tradition of appointing (mostly) the least experienced educational leaders to some of the most isolated, complex, demanding and challenging schools and contexts is arguably the exact opposite of what is really required to improve the achievements and regional, rural and remote students.

Questions

- 6.3.1 What needs to occur so regional, rural remote principals can devote most of their time and attention to student achievements in and beyond school?
- 6.3.2 What changes could be made to attract and retain experienced educational leaders for country schools?
- 6.3.3 What innovative approaches could be taken to support high quality leadership for regional, rural and remote school communities?

6.4 School and community

Families and communities play an enormous role in the lives of young people because they are such a potentially rich source of nurturing, encouragement and role modelling for students, which in turn contributes to how they value themselves and grow to understand who they are and can become.

Families and communities also play a vital role in building the culture of a school principally through the way they express how they value their school. And yes, criticism and dissatisfaction from time to time is also 'part and parcel' of the life and growth of a school.

As George Otero has found from running well over a thousand community and school workshops in Australia, the UK and the USA, "when a community and its school work together, especially in what seem to be difficult social and demographic contexts, education happens in many new ways. Interventions do not happen just at school, these happen in a community which loves and cares for people by providing a multitude of educational options in partnership" (2012, p. 9).

While the culture of a school is something that is very 'real', it can also be quite difficult to describe. It is often something people feel rather than see, though signage, décor, symbols, traditions and spaces and their uses all contribute to the 'culture of a place'. So too do the beliefs, values, relationships, conventions and practices of those who belong to a school—staff, students, parents and community.

For students, a very important aspect of a school's culture is the messages they 'pick up' directly and indirectly about their worth and their ability to learn and be successful.

Saying and doing things which create a sense of hopefulness in students is very important. Hopefulness is at the heart of building and nurturing students' aspirations and expectations.

Central to building and maintaining a supportive school culture is trust. Trust between and among those associated with a school takes time to build (and just moments to destroy) and needs to be constantly attended to. This is especially the case in small population centres 'where everyone knows everyone else' and there can be a strong sense of 'who is an insider, who is an outsider', or who is a 'local' and who is a 'blow in'.

Creating opportunities to build school, family and community relationships are very important to improving the core business of a school - teaching and learning. They can include staff, students and parents participating in regional Farm Fairs and visiting Arts performances, catering for local functions, being on the gate roster for a sports carnival, agreeing to host a special ANZAC Day commemoration, and providing a venue for NAIDOC Week celebrations.

Working together on projects and events builds social capital. The essence of social capital can be summed up as 'relationships always matter'. As Field (2003) explains, "by making connections with one another [through working on common ideas, projects and events], and keeping them going over time [building valued traditions], people are able to work together to achieve things that they could not achieve by themselves, or could only achieve with great difficulty" (p. 1).

As already stated, student achievements and beyond school opportunities are shaped by a diverse blend of in-school and community and home factors, as well as interactions between them and knowledge of opportunities and what is happening in the wider world.

Common sense and research shows that children who grow up in a family where they are loved unconditionally, are safe, healthy and well fed, and are encouraged to explore ideas and possibilities, are more likely than not to be successful.

For some children and students, there are home and community factors which impact negatively on their success. Included here are poor health and a lack of regular nutritious food. It is very hard, or perhaps impossible, for students to concentrate on learning if they always feel hungry and are frequently unwell or 'out of sorts'. These factors are compounded if their home life is very stressful, there is a long history of unemployment and underemployment, and there is always a looming sense of another problem being just around the corner.

The Dropping Off the Edge Report (Vinson, Rawsthorne, Beavis, & Ericson, 2015) provides one of the best insights into the profound impacts of multiple disadvantage which occur in some regional, rural and remote locations. These include high rates of criminal convictions and juvenile offending, long, short term and sporadic employment, lack of formal qualifications and deficit education generally, low family income, domestic violence and mental health problems. They often combine to produce a “*web of disadvantage...* in which the opportunity constraining effect of one form of disadvantage can reinforce the impact of one or more other forms of disadvantage” (p. 10).

The philanthropic sector can play an important role in working with regional, rural and remote communities to address disadvantage, including in the education space. For example, Australian Schools Plus was established in 2013 with \$5 million seed funding from the Government to help disadvantaged schools attract support from philanthropists and the private sector. The organisation also attracts and facilitates the distribution of funds to support schools and school communities facing disadvantage to improve education outcomes.

Origin Foundation, the Sidney Myer Fund and The Myer Foundation, the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal and the Thyne Reid Foundation are other examples of organisations with a commitment to improving opportunities through funding education and community initiatives.

The National School Improvement Tool includes a highly relevant and very useful resource to help schools and communities build, sustain and evaluate partnerships for raising achievements and improving opportunities. The National School Improvement Tool was developed by ACER (2012, p. 18) for the Australian Government. It was endorsed by the then Education Council in 2012 and is available to all schools for use in their school improvement planning.

| Action/indicator | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » the school builds partnerships with parents, families, local businesses and community organisations (including allied health, family support, counselling and rehabilitation services) to improve opportunities and outcomes for students; |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » the school identifies potential community partners on the basis of their capacity to contribute to improved student achievement and/or wellbeing |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » identified partners are involved in collaborative planning and are committed to the purposes and objectives of the partnership; |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » the senior leadership teams in the partner organisations are involved, committed and play a role in achieving staff commitment and participation within their organisations |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » there is clarity around partner roles and responsibilities; |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » major partnership decisions are made collaboratively and partnership activities are designed to make best use of partners' expertise; |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » goals, progress and achievements are systematically and regularly monitored and refined as required; |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » adequate resources are committed to ensure the effectiveness and success of partnerships; |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » the school collects evidence to evaluate whether partnerships are having their intended impact in improving outcomes for students; and |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » the school's partnerships are sustainable and have become an accepted part of the culture of the school community and partner organisations |  |

As well, in partnership with families, key community services, philanthropy and others, there are schools working to reduce the impact of multiple disadvantage and helping students learn and experience success. Doing this very important life changing work may not show up in mainstream achievement statistics but for individuals and communities, it 'counts big-time'.

Raising awareness of the diversity of industries and employment opportunities and careers available in rural areas, and the potential for new ones, is also critical for helping students learn and experience success.

Aspects of this could be achieved through a greater focus on entrepreneurial education as outlined in section 6.6 and through initiatives like that being run at the Calen District State College in rural Queensland. In addition skills formation is critically important to provide young people with the resources and confidence they need to seek out and negotiate employment and career pathways, as well as contribute to the overall human capital of communities and society more broadly.

Calen District State College

Calen District State College's *Different Strokes, Different Spokes, Different Folk* programs in rural Queensland are a very good illustration of what can be achieved through reaching out and working with the community.

The school has established a strong partnership with Cummins South Pacific (Mackay branch) to run the Different Strokes: Mechanics Matter program where students work on diesel motors. In addition to learning practical workshop skills, the students also develop their literacy, numeracy and technology skills.

4CRM, Mackay's community radio station, provides students from years 6 to 12 with training in radio broadcasting and station management. The students are actively involved in 'Rhythm and Rhyme', a one hour literature review program, and 'The Human Jukebox', a four hour music request program. Students move on to present their own programs.

Central Queensland University hosts students from year 9 as part of the Career Match pilot study, and years 11 and 12 students are able to study first-year university subjects while still at school.

Overall, year 12 results and progress to further study, training and employment are as good as those of leading large city based schools and colleges.

Questions

- 6.4.1 What new and innovative approaches are you aware of that improve the connection between schools and the broader community?
- 6.4.2 What motivates regional, rural and remote students to succeed and how can they be supported to realise their aspirations?
- 6.4.3 Are there untapped priorities in rural and remote settings which, if utilised, could help students realise their potential?
- 6.4.4 What role does/could the philanthropic sector play in improving outcomes for regional, rural and remote students in relation to school achievement and post—school transition?

6.5 Information and Communication Technology

Information and communication technology is a ubiquitous feature of education.

A range of international agencies and organisations note the broad impact of ICT and endorse the potential of ICT for education:

UNESCO considers that ICTs can contribute to universal access to education, equity in education, the delivery of quality learning and teaching, teachers' professional development as well as improve education management, governance and administration provided the right mix of policies, technologies and capacities are in place (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, n.d.).

A growing number of projects have shown that mobile technologies provide an excellent medium for extending educational opportunities to learners who may not have access to high-quality schooling (Broadband Commission for Digital Development, 2015, p. 50).

Due to location and even weather, access to high speed, reliable and value for money ICT services in regional areas is inherently more difficult than for metropolitan users. In light of this, the Government has committed to prioritising the National Broadband Network rollout to underserved areas where it is commercially and operationally feasible to do so.

Significantly, the rollout is more progressed in regional areas than in metropolitan Australia. At present, over three-quarters (78 per cent) of all homes and businesses outside major urban areas can either order NBN-based services or have new network construction underway. The advanced state of the NBN rollout in regional areas will continue into 2018 as more country towns receive fibre-to-the-node upgrades.

NBN Co Limited (NBN Co) also launched a Sky Muster distance education satellite product in April 2016 to improve access to ICT for students located in the most remote and hard-to-reach homes. This product provides a 25/5 megabits per second (Mbps) service, separate from the standard home service, with additional data allowances. More than 600 homes in rural and remote Australia have already taken up this service.

ICT access is an issue not just for schools, but also for homes with school-aged children who attend day/boarding schools as well as those who study through distance education or approved home-schooling. NBN Co has recently expanded eligibility to include home-schooled students who are isolated for geographic/medical reasons. To be eligible, home-schooled students must be registered with a state and territory education department and receive the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) subsidy.

NBN Co has also developed a public interest premises policy (PIP) for schools in areas serviced by the Sky Muster satellite service. These schools can access extra data allowances and other concessions, with approximately 60 schools now using this service.

One of the priorities for NBN Co is to further improve the delivery of education services over Sky Muster with features including multicast video, video conferencing, pooling of data allowances and un-metering of education content for specified websites. These services are expected to be available in 2018.

Notwithstanding these developments in technology and internet provisions, the level of teacher expertise in delivering lessons using ICT also presents a challenge. These factors impact on regional, rural and remote schools realising the full benefits of ICT and on-line learning. This applies to within school arrangements, between school arrangements focusing on expanding subject and pathway choices through combining and sharing resources and the delivery of 'leading edge' experiences from external centres of excellence. It also applies to students undertaking distance education.

There are examples of highly innovative applications of ICT like that happening at the Our Lady of the River Primary School near Berri in South Australia. The school uses ICT to connect students with a tutor in China. As reported by the principal: "We were unable to attract a LOTE (language other than English) teacher, so we trialled a program that connected our students with a tutor in China" (Bawden, 2016). ICT delivers specialised curriculum and a teacher!

Another example is an initiative in Canada that began in 2002 where small schools in remote villages formed a network to help prevent people leaving villages, prevent the closure of small schools and enhance teachers' professional development and students' learning (Allaire et al, 2011). There are now over 120 schools as part of a remote network. Teachers affirmed the benefits of collaboration and indicated there were advantages for students such as increased motivation, deeper understanding, global awareness and friendships that continue from primary to secondary school (p. 125). Parents see the social benefits of the initiative: "Parents who are the most knowledgeable about the [initiative] see it as a growth opportunity for children to become world citizens" (p. 129).

The all-pervasive presence and power of ICT continues to expand, thereby driving and enabling change on many fronts—modes of learning, curriculum design, assessment, teaching, complex record keeping and many more.

Questions

- 6.5.1 What has to be done to ensure ICT supports education in regional, rural and remote schools and communities like it does in the 'best of the best' city schools?
- 6.5.2 How could ICT be used to improve educational outcomes for regional, rural, remote students?
- 6.5.3 What are the main barriers to regional, rural and remote schools realising the full potential benefits of ICT?

6.6 Entrepreneurship and schools

One of the dominant features of regional, rural and remote Australia is that many, if not most, young people have to leave their community after completing school if they wish to undertake further education or gain employment.

Entrepreneurial education has the potential to improve opportunities for students and youth in regional, rural and remote communities by shifting the focus of education from primarily *preparation* for employment to *creation* of employment.

Entrepreneurial education requires schools to reach out into their communities and beyond to explore and engage with 'real world' possibilities and as well as existing thriving businesses. It provides an ideal way for education to take the lead in building new school/industry/community partnerships and in so doing, contexts are created where aspirations can be challenged and energised because students see first-hand, the link between education and training and economics. Critically important as well is human capital—the knowledge, abilities and skills of people—grows and in so doing, creates momentum for more success.

As argued by the Regions Australia Institute (n.d.):

A region with dynamic Human Capital has a number of advantages. Its labour force is more adaptable, can learn new skills more easily, and work more creatively, all of which makes for a more engaged and productive community. It also means a region is more likely to take advantage of the opportunities created by the future of work, instead of being affected negatively by it. The challenge in developing this culture is that some regions will be better placed than others (p. 5).

Entrepreneurship focuses on *paying attention to possibilities* and embraces risk pro-actively. It particularly zeroes in on how to turn ideas into enterprises.

A culture for learning about entrepreneurship and becoming an entrepreneur is developed through education which is rich in opportunities that:

- » create and reinforce a strong sense of individual ownership, activities and outcomes
- » reinforce associated feelings of freedom and personal control to make things happen
- » maximise the opportunity for individuals to take responsibility for a wide and integrated range of tasks
- » reinforce the notion of responsibility to see things through
- » encourage and support teachers and staff to develop their stakeholder networks in line with strategy
- » tolerate ambiguity and allow mistakes as a basis for learning
- » encourage creative ideas and strategic thinking before formal planning
- » emphasise the importance of personal trust and 'know how' as a basis for management, rather than via formal relationships
- » avoid strict job and task demarcation and facilitate overlap and blending between departments and groups as a basis for generating and developing a common culture of innovation and enterprise (modified from Gibbs, 2007).

Entrepreneurial thinking requires a different approach to pedagogical practice, from teaching as telling to teaching as coaching, mentoring and providing resources such as just-in-time application of technology.

Pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, school design and structures, as well as relationships between teachers, students, parents, community and enterprises are important to mainstreaming entrepreneurship.

The mix and balance of the elements necessary to mainstream entrepreneurship in education varies from school to school, and community to community. There is a rich and valuable diversity of school sizes, types, locations, specialisations and sectors in country Australia to progress entrepreneurial education.

Primary Industries Entrepreneurial Schools (PIES)

According to the National Farmers Federation, Australia's agricultural sector contributes 3 per cent to total gross domestic product (GDP). When the value-adding processes are added in, this rises to around 12 per cent (or \$155 billion). Much of this value adding comes from entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Australian farmers produce almost 93 per cent of Australia's daily domestic food supply and there are over 1.6 million jobs in the agricultural sector of the national economy.

Given the growing world demand, establishing specialist Primary Industries Entrepreneurial Schools (PIES) in rural locations could address some of the drift of youth away from their communities and perhaps attract others into a community.

There are schools around Australia that already have a primary industries focus that would provide a very good base to expand into fully developed PIES. However, most specialist schools are currently located in cities or large population centres. This is not surprising because, with the present arrangements for schooling, enrolments drive curriculum diversity and choice.

Establishing PIES, either individually or as a cluster of programs, provides a way of doing something practical to give rural schools and their communities a much needed boost, and it offers a powerful way to provide a better city-country balance of opportunities for young people.

Exploring new relationships and partnerships between rural education and food and fibre production and security has the potential to build new understandings and practices about them and also generate opportunities for young people and communities, and contribute toward Australia's future.

Putting tourism and the arts into the mix of fine food and fibre would further add to building entrepreneurial education in rural, regional and remote contexts to stimulate new opportunities and pathways for young people and communities, as well as raise achievements.

It is critical that students have the skills to succeed in the world beyond school and that they are prepared for the changing nature of work and the types of jobs that will be available in the future. While governments have been working with school communities and industry to make these connections, ongoing effort will be required to facilitate student transition and success beyond school.

One example of such collaboration is the Pathways in Technology (P-TECH) model funded by the Government. The P-TECH pilot involves the establishment of long-term partnerships between industry, schools and tertiary education providers that enable businesses to play an active role in supporting young people to develop the skills needed for future jobs.

P-TECH offers secondary school students an industry supported education pathway to a science, technology, engineering and mathematics related post-school qualification. Local education and industry partners work together to design and deliver programs suited to local circumstances. There are 14 P-TECH sites across Australia, including three in regional areas—Ballarat in Victoria, Townsville in Queensland and Burnie in Tasmania.

Questions

- 6.6.1 What kinds of support would be needed for a school or group of schools to specialise in entrepreneurial education?
- 6.6.2 What other entrepreneurial education opportunities exist for regional, rural and remote schools?
- 6.6.3 Are there other examples where entrepreneurial education has improved outcomes for regional, rural and remote students?
- 6.6.4 What gaps need to be addressed to help students transition successfully to further study, training or work?

6.7 Improving access—enrolments, clusters, distance education, boarding

A major focus of the 2000–2001 Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry into rural and remote education was *access*.

Access to education along with quality and affordability continue to be very high priorities for regional, rural and remote students, families and communities. As previously noted, the Government provides a regional loading to help schools with the higher cost of education delivery in non-city areas. As well, the Government funds the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme which provides financial support for the families of primary, secondary and certain tertiary students who are unable to attend an appropriate government school on a daily basis because of geographic isolation. The Scheme provides allowances to help families with cost of boarding fees and distance education study.

School enrolments whether primary, secondary, combined, or for specialist services have a very critical impact on the education available in and for a community. This is because schools are essentially funded and resourced on the basis of enrolments—number, age, student learning needs—and school type and location. Put succinctly, the greater the number of students, the greater the funding and resources and therefore the greater the flexibility to offer a range of curriculum and program options.

The impact of the funding/resources/curriculum diversity relationship is particularly acute in the senior years of schooling. This is because what is available, especially in a face-to-face way with a qualified teacher, continues to be a powerful benchmark and signal to students, parents and the community more broadly about the quality of a school's program.

Distance education is used extensively in rural schools to complement what is available in a face-to-face way locally, as well as to provide a 'full' education for students in very remote or isolated areas or those who are highly mobile. Distance education has become inextricably linked to ICT, most particularly in the government sector and is becoming increasingly so in the non-government sector.

In addition to distance education, there are many instances of schools working together to pool resources and work collaboratively for the benefit of all students in a district/region.

School and community clusters and partnerships require time and effort as well as resourcing to get them established and to keep them working well. Very important to achieving and maintaining this outcome is generating a strong shared commitment to cooperation between individual schools and communities.

This can take considerable inter-personal skill as well as time especially given the dominant rhetoric and belief in competition as *the* way to achieve high levels of performance.

As well, in geographically isolated locations, parents continue to have a direct responsibility in education and it has been argued, they do this largely on a voluntary basis rather than for any remuneration or formal industry recognition at the conclusion of say, 15 years of being a home tutor.

To support home-based education of the kind briefly outlined above, there is a range of short term, mobile teacher services which provide a very valuable contribution to students and families.

Boarding schools are another option for some rural students to access the education they require to successfully complete schooling and progress to further study and employment. These are mostly operated by the non-government sectors. Attendance at boarding school is expensive and can be emotionally taxing for regional families who may live too far away to access appropriate secondary education.

Boarding schools mostly deal on an individual student by student basis. However, the combined impact of the loss of a group of students who would have otherwise accessed their education locally on those who remain can be quite significant. Amongst the reasons for this is that one of the very important sources of a student's aspirations and motivation is her/his fellow students.

It is widely recognised that boarding schools do provide some students with opportunities to become deeply immersed in rich and supportive educational environments. However, questions need to be asked around how might the benefits of this approach to accessing high quality education be spread more widely as part of what needs to be done to raise the achievements of regional, rural and remote students, and in turn, more likely result in greater representation in tertiary education.

Questions

- 6.7.1 Are there changes that could be made to the ways schools are organised and function that would improve opportunities for regional, rural and remote students?
- 6.7.2 What could be done to expand the opportunities available to regional, rural and remote students to access high quality education?

6.8 Diversity

A major challenge for schools in regional, rural and remote communities is meeting the diversity of learning needs, interests and aspirations of all students, while at the same time, developing and nurturing social cohesion and harmony.

The Commonwealth, state and territory governments recognise that students who have additional learning needs require extra resourcing. All governments have adopted a needs-based school funding model to address the diverse learning needs of their student population.

At the Commonwealth level, schools attract a base per-student amount plus loadings to address school and student disadvantage. This includes a location loading to assist with the higher costs delivering education in regional and remote locations and extra funding to support students with disabilities, students from a low socio-economic background and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

As declared by ACARA, “all students are entitled to rigorous, relevant and engaging learning programs... [that] “encompass cognitive, affective, physical, social, and aesthetic curriculum experiences”.

Who are “all” students and how might regional, rural and remote schools ensure that the ACARA entitlement is a reality for them?

From an education sector perspective—government, Catholic and independent—“all” students is typically defined by reference to particular groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, gifted students, migrant, refugee or asylum seeker students and students with disabilities. The definition is further enriched by focussing on English languages and other dialect requirements, gender, location, religious beliefs, culture and the impact of poverty/wealth on opportunities.

From a parent’s perspective, “all” students means ‘a school will do whatever is necessary to ensure that my child/children is/are successful and happy’.

Responding positively to the diversity outlined above with dynamic teaching and learning where excellence, equity and inclusiveness are the signature features is crucially important for raising aspirations, achievements and opportunities.

6.8.1 Resourcing individual learning needs

As stated earlier, the size and type of a school plays a very important role in the overall pool of resources allocated to provide education. This is because resourcing is primarily based upon student enrolments.

Linked with the overall allocation of resources are often two unspoken yet very significant assumptions relating to meeting the learning needs of all students.

Firstly, all students are individuals and need to be catered for but, at the same time, class/grade groupings are the main organising basis for progressing individualisation. Secondly, if the resources or expertise, such as speech pathology or career guidance, are unavailable at a school then they should be purchased or sourced from an external provider.

In small and remote communities, purchasing or sourcing specialised services from a provider is often impacted by availability and timeliness as well as cost per service unit. This can result in long delays between the identification of particular learning support needs and the commencement of interventions and programs to deal with them. In some instances, ICT based support, if available and affordable, can help provide the required expertise and services.

The challenge—indeed pressure—on school leaders and teachers (as well as parents and families) regarding students accessing specialist assistance to support their learning and development is an ever present reality of their day to day work.

This was confirmed by research undertaken by the Sidney Myer Chair of Rural Education and Communities at Flinders University in 2010–2011. Rural educational leaders ranked ensuring students with special learning needs and disabilities can access appropriate services as the most demanding part of their role. The next highest job demand ranking was securing adequate funding to address inequities.

6.8.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Improving education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is essential if we want to raise our national average performance.

All governments are working together through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to close the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in health, education and employment outcomes. COAG agreed to four Closing the Gap targets for education:

1. Halve the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20–24 years in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates (by 2020).
2. Halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade (2018).
3. Close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance within five years (by 2018).
4. 95 per cent enrolment for all Indigenous four year olds, extending beyond the expired 2013 target for remote communities (by 2025).

While there are encouraging improvements in some areas, such as Year 12 attainment, the gap persists in other educational outcomes. With two of the four targets expiring in 2018, COAG has agreed to work together, and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, to refresh the Closing the Gap agenda.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to be successful, a culture of high expectations in schools, strong student-teacher and community relationships and support for culture are particularly important—all underpinned by strong school leadership (Productivity Commission, 2016, p. 2).

These ‘essentials’ have been confirmed and elaborated upon through the extensive research and experience of McKinley (2017) who argues that the big challenge “is to place in front of every Indigenous Australian child, every day, quality teachers and quality teaching” (p. 204). Further, doing this means having schools which:

respect and value the individuality of students; link effectively with indigenous families/caregivers and communities; develop an academic curriculum that is demanding but allows for flexibility; demonstrate a high level of tolerance; support innovative teaching strategies and practices, including culturally responsive strategies; facilitate positive relationships between teachers and students, academic and pastoral; and create a welcoming environment that promotes validity and legitimacy of local Australian Indigenous cultures (p. 204).

Bearing in mind the importance of these fundamental requirements, there is also other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education research which is somewhat disruptive (cf disruptive technologies) but also opens up new thinking and ideas that could help improve the educational experiences and outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who live in remote communities.

Before briefly reporting the research, it is important to reflect on the word remote, and specifically a quite common meaning attributed to it by mainstream commentators, namely a person, place or community situated a long way from a capital city or major centre.

Often embedded in the commentary is some sense of judgement about the worth of a remote location compared with an urban or city type location and ‘why people want to be there’. The key point here is that remote is in essence a comparative judgement about one location in relation to another which can mask some of the potential richness and possibilities inherent in ‘being remote’ because the ‘solutions’ to problems and opportunities are frequently framed as being from elsewhere, from outside. This in turn can unnecessarily constrain thinking and options.

The Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation (CRC-REP) conducted a five-year Remote Education Systems research project, the key learnings of which were published as *Red dirt education* (Guenther, Disbray, & Osborne, 2016). An important question guiding the research was “What is education for in remote communities?”. The answer according to those who live there is that “education is not primarily about preparing young people for work; rather, it is to ensure that their language, culture and identity remain strong and that they maintain a connection to their land” (p. 51).

Another important question for the research was “What is educational success in remote communities?”. The investigators found, perhaps unsurprisingly, that “educational success in remote schools is not primarily about Year 12 completion, retention or NAPLAN scores. Rather, it is primarily about parent and community involvement in education” (p. 59). What this underlines is the importance of parent and community involvement as a key to enhancing completion, retention and achievements.

The authors used the term “red dirt curriculum” to signify curriculum that fits the context of a school in a remote community, aligns with the aspirations of remote community educators and can be meshed with the Australian Curriculum (p. 68). As for McKinley, they argue that teachers who work in remote schools need to share in positive relationships with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in schools, along with the students and the students’ parents. “Successful teachers [are those who] bring traits such as passion, care, commitment, patience and respect and the ability to listen” (p. 77).

Training in teaching English as an additional language or dialect has also been identified as especially important to improving the quality and impact of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. As well, extended community-based pre-service practicums “offer opportunities for [teaching] students who are about to graduate to learn in remote communities and engage with community members before they apply for a position” (p. 83). Associated with this is ‘reverse credentialing’ namely:

The real problem in remote communities is the lack of skills that non-locals have—that is, the lack of understanding of language, local culture and environment, relationships and protocols—and we believe that a good induction and professional development approach would allow local people to do the training for non-locals. ... [This idea is] about providing a locally driven process that ensures non-locals have what they need to work effectively in the remote space (p. 84).

Once again the key role of teachers is paramount. The Red dirt education project concluded that teachers need to be “contextually and culturally responsive”. The first aspect requires non-local teachers to reflect on who they are and how they can be flexible in the current situation: “Contextually responsive teachers bring a degree of self-reflexivity to their roles in schools and communities, being aware of the differences that present to them within the context and responding with flexibility” (p. 87).

Secondly, non-local teachers need to recognise the importance of language and culture to local people and actively incorporate these into schooling: “Culturally responsive teachers are those who understand their own culture, privilege the culture in which they work, facilitate use of local languages and involve local knowledge in teaching and learning” (p. 87).

6.8.3 Creating rich learning and challenging learning opportunities

As introduced in section 6 of the paper, there is a diversity of relationships and resources required for students to successfully complete school, commence a pathway beyond school which is rewarding and make a contribution to the wider society.

In terms of schooling, who we learn with is very important and is sometimes overlooked or undervalued in thinking about how to raise achievement levels. Put another way, the composition of a class, a learning group, as well as the enrolment cohort of a school each impact on learning aspirations, achievements and opportunities.

A 'typical' country sporting challenge illustrates the point very well.

In recent years, there has been a steady decline in the number of players available for local teams, especially football (Australian Rules) and netball. This has led in some cases to the amalgamation of leagues. Come finals time (as well as some others), a very common practice is to ensure that a particularly talented player or two is 'recruited' to bolster the chances of winning a premiership.

There are two critically important messages from the illustration to help think about how to improve rural education.

Firstly, having students in a class, or having access to students, who are motivated, widely recognised as capable, who want to succeed and who are prepared to do what is needed to be successful (albeit as defined in quite specific terms) is very uplifting. Having role models is another way of describing this. And yes, there are limits to what role models can achieve and there can also be in the complex interactions of a classroom other behavioural factors to manage—hence the need for 'top' teachers. A quote from a speech by John F Kennedy captures the essence of what usually occurs—"a rising tide lifts all boats".

Secondly, the overall decline in enrolments in many rural schools combined with the rise of government selective schools and the out flow of students to boarding schools presents major challenges around how to create and sustain vibrant, high quality learning environments. The directional flow, in the main, is towards large population centres where there is sufficient critical mass to create competition and choice, two of the key inputs deemed essential for success.

So what can or should be done to address this?

While ICT and distance education are usually offered up as front-line solutions to invigorate learning and to deliver what is not available locally, there are other possibilities for re-seeding diversity to stimulate high learning achievement.

One of these has already been flagged earlier—the further development of clusters and groups of schools. Another is to embrace a rigorous entrepreneurial approach to education with a range of external partners, including businesses and philanthropy, and skill formation and accreditation services.

A third option is a variation on the reverse credentialing idea advocated by the Red dirt research. This would entail developing city to country student learning partnerships and programs to increase both the number and diversity of students a country student learns and interacts with. It is worth thinking seriously about the potential benefits to be gained for rural students from being one in a class or group of 25 studying, for example, history or mathematics instead of say, 6 or 7.

This approach to enriching the learning environments for rural students could also provide secondary students in Australia who attend an urban school with an opportunity to live and learn in a country school and community for an extended period, say a term. This would also over time, increase the pool of youth who have had first-hand experience of rural Australia and therefore may become positively disposed to a career or employment in rural areas and to advocate for rural.

Questions

- 6.8.1 Noting the findings of the Red dirt education project, what do you consider to be the purpose/role of education in remote communities?
- 6.8.2 What does educational success look like in remote communities?
- 6.8.3 How can schools/teachers in regional, rural and remote areas be supported to meet the individual learning needs of all students?
- 6.8.4 How can we create and sustain vibrant, high quality learning environments in regional, rural and remote schools?
- 6.8.5 What can be done to address the directional flow of regional, rural and remote students towards cities?

6.9 Transitioning beyond school

Transitioning from school to further study, training, employment or combinations thereof, is a major event for a young person and their family. For many who live in rural, regional and remote areas, this stage of life can be particularly challenging (as well as highly rewarding) because it often involves having to move away from home, family, friends and the familiarity and support of a community.

Of course, moving out and away from home base can also be a time and opportunity for a 'fresh start' and a chance to review and reflect upon what has been done and achieved to date and essentially, to dream about 'the future—*my future*'.

While there has been growth in the number of people from regional and remote areas undertaking an undergraduate degree over the last decade, they remain underrepresented in higher education. The Australian Government Department of Education and Training research suggests that underrepresentation is more related to the lower likelihood of people from regional and remote areas applying for higher education than their likelihood of receiving or accepting an offer.

Fundamental to pursuing and realising opportunities beyond school is having access to and then being able to effectively use a suite of resources to turn aspirations and interests into reality.

Broadly there are two kinds of resources that are particularly important for regional, rural and remote young people and making decisions about their futures. They can be referred to as soft and hard resources. Soft resources include those which focus on raising aspirations, relationships, networks, values, and reasons for hope.

6.9.1 Building and supporting aspirations

Students' aspirations are shaped by attitudes and beliefs about the value, attainability and relevance of higher education and further education and training. Aspiration is also influenced by a range of factors such as family and socio-economic background and community environment.

According to research conducted by Khoo and Ainley (2005) there is a disparity in educational aspirations between regional students and their metropolitan peers.

Research conducted by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) and Monash University by Webb, Black, Morton, Plowright and Roy (2015) identifies various contributing factors to lower aspirations to access higher education in rural, regional and remote students, including lower levels of parental encouragement to access higher education, less exposure to a diverse range of employment opportunities and general community belief that university courses do not necessarily offer a rewarding career. Parental influence has been identified in research as one of the two strongest predictors of occupational aspirations alongside academic performance.

For many students, including those from regional, rural and remote areas, vocational education and training (VET) provides an important pathway to further education and work opportunities. A range of Australian Government programs are in place to encourage participation by regional students, including additional incentive payments to employers who engage Australian Apprentices in rural and regional areas. Raising the status of VET and promoting greater awareness and recognition of VET pathways to both higher education and careers could increase student aspirations to pursue VET studies as a rewarding post-school option.

Outreach activities are one tool that can be used to build aspiration in regional students. The Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP) is an Australian Government program that provides funding to universities to improve access and participation in undergraduate courses for people from a low SES background.

Under the HEPPP, the University of Western Australia's Aspire program works with partner schools in Perth and Pilbara to raise aspirations of students in year 9 and 10 to access higher education. The university organises incursions at participant schools and excursions to the university. Students get a taste of university life and learn about the benefits of accessing higher education. An evaluation was conducted by surveying involved school staff members. The results demonstrated very high levels of satisfaction with 83 per cent of school staff agreeing that the program has increased the motivation of students to go on to higher education.

Another mechanism that can be used to help build aspirations is mentorship programs. Research conducted by the NCVER and Flinders University by Curtis, Drummond, Halsey and Lawson (2012) has shown that students who receive sustained mentoring have a significantly higher likelihood of enrolling in university. Regional young people identified the potential and importance of a regional mentoring program and were awarded a grant under the 2016 Foundation for Regional and Rural Renewal ABC Heywire Youth Innovation Grants to develop the program Magnify Mentoring.

Magnify Mentoring is a youth-led regional mentoring program in Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Shepparton and Nowra aimed at connecting local role models with students in their final years of high school. The program aims to support students in their transition from school to further study or other employment activities.

6.9.2 Costs and finances

Hard resources are usually of a more quantifiable kind like money and allowances, entry scores for university and training programs, accommodation, availability of part-time work and transport logistics.

The financial burden of moving away from home can be an impediment to regional, rural and remote students choosing to undertake further study or training, or even successfully completing their studies.

The financial costs associated with relocating include start-up expenses for relocation; the costs of living (such as rent and food); the direct costs of education or training (such as tuition fees, textbooks and computer); the cost of travelling home during semester breaks; and the opportunity cost of forgone income while studying. As well as financial costs, the social costs associated with relocating away from networks of family and friends can be significant, particularly for young school leavers.

The Australian Government provides a range of financial support to students and tertiary institutions to increase participation by regional, rural and remote students. Apart from the Higher Education Loan Programme, a range of means-tested payments are available to support eligible students who are undertaking, or planning to undertake, approved post-secondary study or an Australian Apprenticeship. These payments include Youth Allowance, Austudy and ABSTUDY. Higher education students receiving student payments may also be eligible to receive the Student Start-up Loan and the Relocation Scholarship.

Over 2018 and 2019, 1200 Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships will be made available to undergraduate, postgraduate and vocational education students from regional, rural and remote areas to undertake study in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) courses. For the purposes of the scholarships, STEM includes agricultural and health courses, except complementary therapies. The Government has also committed to establishing eight community-owned regional study hubs across regional Australia to support regional students to study courses locally delivered by distance from any Australian university by providing greater access to study support and infrastructure.

Some support is also provided by the non-profit sector. For example, the Country Education Foundation assists rural and regional communities support their local youth to transition from high school to further education, training or employment. Local foundations raise funds to provide grants and scholarships to local youths. The financial assistance helps students in need buy textbooks, laptops, tools and equipment for apprentices and assists with relocation costs. Not only do students receive financial support but they also gain a sense of pride and motivation from the support and investment of their community.

6.9.3 More than finances

In addition to being able to access and use resources and supports widely agreed as being essential for young people to succeed in transitioning from school, there are other factors and considerations that need to be taken into account.

One of these indicated earlier in the paper is a presumption which confronts many rural, regional and remote young people, namely that having to 'go away' is part and parcel of what you have to do for employment and to pursue a career. This can be especially challenging for Indigenous young people in remote communities.

Secondly, and linked to 'having to go away', is the idea that staying local and being connected deeply with place is both an unrealistic option and one which is likely to have more negative than positive consequences for a young person. Further, deficit thinking about 'staying local' can also nourish negativity about any possibility of new developments and innovations taking off.

The counter to this stance is the fact that there are many developments occurring in regional, rural and remote Australia of both large and small kinds, many of which have been catalysed and driven by education and young people. At the time of writing, Cowell Area School in South Australia reported it had successfully installed a data logger as part of its oyster aquaculture lease and is already making important information available to local growers and government departments. This demonstrates the value of connections between school communities and industry to support innovation and skill development for young people.

Making a successful transition is also partly dependent on how the receiving organisation/company/body recognises that regional, rural and remote students are likely to have 'differences' vis-a-vis urban students, not all of which are 'just financial'. In relation to this, research undertaken by James and colleagues in 2010 looked at the differences between urban and rural first year university students. The research found, as reported in a literature review on navigating pathways to higher education by Aird, Miller, van Megan and Buys (2010), that:

rural students were more likely than urban students to report more difficulties adjusting to the teaching style at university (36% versus 28%), more difficulties in comprehending material (23% versus 17%), and to feel overwhelmed by all they have to do (39% versus 33%). Rural students were also more likely to report greater financial stress and more money worries (46%), as well as finding finances to be a frequent source of worry (34%) than their urban counterparts (30% and 25% respectively) (p.46, emphasis added).

Aird et al caution about directly attributing all of the difference to financial matters and propose that the study issues "may potentially be related to a range of other factors such as homesickness, a sense of isolation, and stress associated with differences in rural and city living" (p. 46).

6.9.4 Accommodation

Another key practical matter facing regional, rural and remote students is high rental prices for on-campus accommodation which can also be hard to obtain due to high demand. These students also have difficulty in the private rental market due to their age and lack of rental history.

Government changes to some student payments have gone some way to ameliorate the financial burden faced by students, such as reducing the period regional and remote students need to be employed under the self-supporting criteria for Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY payments. However, accommodation costs remain a challenge for regional, rural and remote tertiary students.

Through increasing university participation rates of both domestic and international students, there is strong demand for affordable student accommodation and shortages in purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) has emerged in some locations. The demand for student accommodation has been recognised by governments, universities and private enterprise, with a significant volume of investment and development occurring in the PBSA sector.

In 2014 the Government conducted a national census of PBSA which identified over 74,000 beds. Of these:

- » 67 per cent were on campus
- » 81 per cent were in metropolitan areas
- » NSW had the largest share (30 per cent), although Melbourne had the largest number (16,393) of any capital city.

An annual stocktake of PBSA beds in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Canberra, Adelaide and Perth saw bed numbers rise from 53,540 in 2014 to 64,141 in 2016. The increase in bed numbers in 2016 incorporated an increase of almost 1,000 beds in Brisbane. This followed Brisbane City Council introducing a range of incentives to encourage more private investment in purpose-built student accommodation. A detailed report on PBSA can be found at: National Census of University Student Accommodation Providers 2014.

Notwithstanding efforts by governments, universities and private enterprise, access to affordable accommodation is an on-going and significant issue for rural, regional and remote students who relocate to regional or metropolitan centres to pursue further study and training.

Questions

- 6.9.1 Are there changes that should be made to education, training and employment policies and practices which would improve post school opportunities for regional, rural and remote young people?
- 6.9.2 Are there innovative models of accommodation delivery that could benefit regional, rural and remote tertiary students studying away from home?
- 6.9.3 What can be done to address the directional flow of regional, rural and remote students moving to cities for further education and/or training?



7. Next Steps

This discussion paper supports a call for public submissions which will open until 5 pm Australian Eastern Standard time, Tuesday 29 August 2017.

The submissions process is a critical part of the Review. All members of the public are invited to take this opportunity to contribute their views on the issues discussed in this paper and, in particular, share ideas and information about innovative solutions that can make a difference to the learning outcomes of regional, rural and remote students and their transition to further study, training and employment.

If there is an area of concern or potential for improving education in regional, rural and remote areas which has not been discussed in this paper, readers are strongly encouraged to raise it via the submission process.

To make a submission, go to www.education.gov.au/independent-review-regional-rural-and-remote-education.

Submissions will be collated and analysed to identify key issues and themes that will inform stakeholder consultations over July-October 2017 and the development of review recommendations. Consultations will occur in key regional, rural and remote locations around the country as well as all capital cities to ensure a comprehensive consideration of this complex issue.

The final product of the Review will be a report to the Government setting out key findings from public submissions and stakeholder consultations, along with recommendations on initiatives to improve outcomes for regional, rural and remote students.

The report, along with the literature review that outlines the evidence behind this discussion paper, will be submitted to the Government by the end of December 2017.

This discussion paper supports a call for public submissions which will be opened until 5 pm Australian Eastern Standard time, Tuesday 29 August 2017.





Appendix 1 Terms of Reference

Purpose of the Review

The Review will consider the key issues, challenges and barriers that impact on the learning outcomes of regional, rural and remote students.

It will provide recommendations on innovative and fresh approaches to support improved access and achievement of these students in school and their transition to further study, training and employment.

Scope of the Review

The Review will investigate:

- » the gap in educational achievement between regional, rural and remote students and metropolitan students
- » the key barriers and challenges that impact on the educational outcomes of regional, rural and remote students, including aspirations and access issues
- » the appropriateness and effectiveness of current modes of education delivered to these students, including the use of information and communications technology and the importance of face-to-face regional, rural and remote education provision
- » the effectiveness of public policies and programs that have been implemented to bridge the divide
- » the gaps and opportunities to help students successfully transition from school to further study, training and employment
- » innovative approaches that support regional, rural and remote students to succeed in school and in their transition to further study, training and employment.

Consultations will occur through a call for submissions from interested parties and face-to-face consultations with key stakeholders, including representatives from the education community, families, employers and employer groups, relevant government agencies and the philanthropic sector.

Schools, communities and individuals will be consulted on what is working and has worked in relation to raising student aspirations and achievements.

A final report will be submitted to the Australian Government Minister for Education and Training by the end of 2017.

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