



Australian Government



Regional
Education
Commissioner

Annual Report

2022





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Regional
Education
Commissioner

Regional Education Commissioner

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The Hon Jason Clare MP
Minister for Education
Member for Blaxland
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Dear Minister

In accordance with the Terms of Reference of my appointment as Australia's first Regional Education Commissioner, I present my 2022 Annual Report. This report covers activities and findings in my first year from December 2021 to November 2022.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Fiona Nash".

The Hon Fiona Nash
Regional Education Commissioner

29 November 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY



The Regional Education Commissioner (the Commissioner) and her office acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia. The Commissioner recognises and deeply respects the strength and resilience of First Nations Australians and their continuing connection and relationship to rivers, lands and seas.

The Commissioner and her office pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to all First Nations people reading this report.

The Commissioner is committed to improving education outcomes for First Nations Australians from regional, rural and remote Australia.

REGIONAL EDUCATION COMMISSIONER'S FOREWORD



I begin my first annual report as Regional Education Commissioner by acknowledging the exceptional work educators, providers and institutions do to support regional, rural and remote students and their communities. It is so important we value the role they play and the enormous contribution they make to creating stronger futures for so many people across our regional communities.

Having spent decades in rural Australia I understand from first-hand experience the vital role education plays right across the regions.

The role of Regional Education Commissioner was created as the result of a recommendation from the Regional Education Expert Advisory Group, that developed the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy*.

They envisaged the Regional Education Commissioner would champion the needs of regional students and provide a national focus on regional, rural and remote education and training outcomes. I have endeavoured to do that every day since I commenced in the role and will continue to do so.

It was important to the Group, and to the many in the education sector to whom they had been speaking, that the role have a broad remit. The role of the Regional Education Commissioner spans early childhood, schools, vocational education and training, and higher education, recognising education and training is a network where the relationship between sectors means improving approaches or outcomes in one sector can influence another. For example, increasing the local training opportunities for early childhood educators can increase availability of care, which in turn may increase the ability for young parents to attend vocational education and training, or higher education.

This has created a rare opportunity to examine and understand regional students' education and training from cradle to career, including mid-career changers. Consulting with many stakeholders this year has highlighted that in every stage of the education pipeline there needs to be flexibility in policy when considering regional needs. Given the diversity in geography, the remoteness of our vast country and the differences between the communities contained in them, we should avoid a 'one size fits all' policy.

My vision is that all people in regional, rural and remote Australia, regardless of where they live and what barriers they face, can access the education they need to reach their full potential.

There is no doubt it has been a tough few years for rural Australia contending with the unforeseen adversities of the global COVID-19 pandemic, on top of drought, floods and fires. These challenges have been in addition to significant existing barriers regional students face, including the tyranny of distance and financial burden when looking to further their education.

While the tireless work of the regional education sector and the support of governments have ensured positive outcomes for many regional students, there are still significant improvements to be made. I fully support the Australian Government's principle of no one left behind and no one held back. When we compare aspiration, access and attainment outcomes between metropolitan students and regional, rural and remote students, the disparity is stark.

High quality education and training are the foundations for a skilled and knowledgeable regional workforce. They are key to regional success; and regional success is a prime contributor to national success. Industries like agriculture, mining, tourism and the growing renewable energy sector are predominantly regionally based, and all require skilled and qualified workers. As does the health sector, which plays such a significant role in our regions.

I see my role as being the conduit between students, stakeholders, industry, communities and governments to keep regional, rural and remote education and training outcomes front of mind for decision makers. Fortunately, by working closely with the Minister for Education, the Hon Jason Clare MP and the Assistant Minister for Education, Senator the Hon Anthony Chisholm, as well as with the Department of Education and other departments, I can ensure the experiences and voices of regional Australians, that I hear every day, are brought to the national conversation. The advice I provide is based on the enormous wealth of knowledge that sits with those in the education sector as well as those who reside in regional, rural and remote communities.

Creating the right circumstances for early childhood, school, and tertiary education to thrive in regional areas is critical for the industries and jobs of the future. Where a student has an opportunity to study or train closer to home this benefits their community.

We often hear about the need to attract workforce to the regions. However, we also need to have a greater focus on 'homegrown', providing opportunity to grow our regional talent and connect that talent with local and broader industry.

I believe linking education and training with local industry and workforce strategies is central to building a pipeline for regional students to move effectively between learning and working, and to give industries confidence in a growing pool of skilled regional employees.

As the adage goes, you cannot be what you cannot see. Better linking industry into education pathways will allow regional students to see future life path opportunities more clearly, and industry the potential to build a local home-grown workforce.

Ensuring people have the right skills mix to seize opportunities in the regions, including in new and expanding industries like green technologies will, without doubt, contribute to Australia's future prosperity.

In 2023, I look forward to working with my fellow panellists, the Department of Education and the sector on the creation of an Australian Universities Accord. The Accord process will deliver a plan for Australia's university system, ensuring it remains world-class into the future. This important work is underpinned by the principles of collaboration and partnership to achieve long lasting reform.

This report reflects my thoughts on the state of the education sector in regional Australia, and outlines activities and research I have undertaken from December 2021 to November 2022. Throughout this time, I have been committed to listening, hearing what the challenges are, and identifying the priorities. Most importantly though, my focus is on solutions that will ensure we improve outcomes in education right across the regions.

Working together, recognising the expertise and knowledge that already exists, and through a shared commitment, we can create and implement those solutions to encourage and harness aspiration and improve access and attainment outcomes for the people of regional, rural and remote Australia.

Finally, and very importantly, I'd like to thank the Department of Education, especially my policy secretariat team, for all their hard work, dedication and support during this first year. They have been outstanding.



The Hon Fiona Nash

Regional Education Commissioner

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION



Early Childhood Education and Care

Consideration 1: The Productivity Commission review into the early childhood education and care sector is an opportunity to consider a range of issues, including the universality of early childhood education and care. The review should explicitly consider RRR access, and progress with an awareness that increased subsidies are less relevant to families without access to early childhood education and care, and 'one size fits all' options often have decreasing practicality as population density decreases. To meet the basic needs of RRR families, the review could examine ways to increase access to early childhood education and care in RRR locations, including by:

- supporting family day care operators to meet qualification and operational regulations and assisting with start-up costs
- expanding mobile childcare services where there is no, or limited, access
- increasing the number of mobile playgroups and giving existing playgroups certainty to invest in equipment and recruitment of skilled workers by offering grants with several years duration.

Consideration 2: Extend the Assistance for Isolated Children - Distance Education (AIC-DE) allowance to 3–4-year olds undertaking an approved pre-compulsory distance education program. This would reduce the financial burden on isolated families who have no option other than to deliver the preschool program themselves.

Schools

Consideration 3: Establish a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) to support Home Tutors educating geographically isolated students via distance education where there are no alternatives. Providing financial assistance to these families recognises the value of their role and co-invests in the education of geographically isolated students.

Consideration 4: Recognising the inequity of access to required subjects in senior school between students in metropolitan and RRR schools, current access to subjects in RRR schools should be reviewed, and consideration given to:

- expanding existing virtual delivery models
- developing a partnership model between two schools, potentially metropolitan and RRR, to deliver virtual elective subjects to RRR students
- delivering senior school subjects through a regional school cluster model sharing teaching and curriculum resources across schools.

Consideration 5: The National Teacher Workforce Action Plan process should consider expanding local delivery of professional development opportunities for teachers in RRR schools, including through a formal teacher to teacher mentoring program (both intra- and inter-school) to enable more experienced teachers to mentor less experienced teachers.

Consideration 6: The Initial Teacher Education Expert Panel process is an opportunity to consider the role of training in encouraging and preparing students to consider a career in RRR teaching. It should include an explicit focus on:

- expanding RRR content within Initial Teacher Education course offerings to better inform and prepare students about teaching in RRR Australia
- increasing RRR placements during study, including early placements, and considering how to support students financially and otherwise during placements.

Consideration 7: Create a Year 12 school leavers Teachers' Aide program for RRR schools to aid schools facing a teacher shortage. Participating Year 12 school leavers would take a gap year to work as a Teachers' Aide in a regional school before commencing their tertiary education. Consideration should be given to HECS relief and VET-FEE HELP, and recognition of prior learning for those who complete the program.

Vocational Education and Training

Consideration 8: Ensure policy and funding decisions in relation to VET have regard to social impact benefit as well as value for money considerations, and also consider the broad range of VET providers in RRR communities who would be assisted by financial supports to effectively deliver education and training for RRR students.

Consideration 9: Incentivise RRR VET providers to align their course offerings with emerging industries in the regions, such as clean energy, modern agriculture, supply chain logistics and digital and cyber security. Increasing the regional skilled workforce for these industries will support growth and allow RRR people to share in the benefits of future employment opportunities.

Consideration 10: Examine transport options in RRR areas for VET students where there are few, or no, public transport options available, effectively limiting their access to further education.

Higher Education

Consideration 11: The Australian Universities Accord (the Accord) process is an opportunity to consider a range of issues as part of a long-term plan for higher education in Australia. It should include an explicit focus on a sustainable and diverse higher education presence in regional Australia and give regard to the needs of RRR students and regional institutions. Specifically, it should include:

- considering whether policy and funding settings for regional universities (such as the Commonwealth Grant Scheme) enable them to meet the skills needs of regional communities, including in areas of national priority such as teaching and healthcare
- a review of the Regional Loading Program to determine whether it is meeting the needs of regional university campuses, recognising the additional costs associated with delivering higher education in RRR Australia
- increasing the allocation of medical Commonwealth supported places to the Murray Darling Medical Network, recognising the importance of regional training in delivering RRR healthcare workforce and the very high student demand for places
- continuing to fund and explore expanding the Regional University Centre (RUC) program, including but not limited to:
 - provision of adequate, timely and ongoing funding for the RUC program including recognition of increased costs in RRR areas
 - considering future establishment of RUCs in small population locations, potentially through a satellite or hub and spoke model
 - expanding the support offered through the existing RUC program to include careers advice available to the broader community
- a recognition that student support is critical for RRR student attainment, particularly from those already disadvantaged such as First Nations students, those from low-SES households and students with disability through encouraging universities. Education providers are encouraged to:
 - review their current practices delivering support to RRR students
 - adopt the Good Practice Framework outlined by the project *Research into Support Services for Tertiary Students in RRR Areas*
 - collaborate and share good practice in student support.

Consideration 12: The second stage evaluation of the Tertiary Access Payment in 2023 should explore removing the 'no gap year' eligibility requirement to improve student access to the program.

General

Consideration 13: Develop a Regional Industry Linkage into Education and Training Pathways program. This would encourage greater mobility between education sectors and improve connectivity between industry, regional universities, VET, RUCs, schools and community by:

- addressing aspiration, access and attainment issues
- improving career options awareness
- providing visible pathways to careers for students
- providing student work placements/internships
- addressing regional workforce shortages through workforce creation.

Consideration 14: Fund the National Careers Institute to:

- develop simple and targeted resources and tools on VET for parents and teachers delivering career pathway advice to students
- expand the School Leavers Information Service to proactively offer career advice to students in regional schools, and improve the quality and availability of career information. This will ensure young people are well informed when making study and career decisions.

Consideration 15: Include a RRR team within Jobs and Skills Australia (established October 2022) to understand the unique labour market and skills supply issues outside of Australia's capital cities.

ACRONYMS AND GLOSSARY



Acronyms and Initialism

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ASGS	Australian Statistical Geography Standard
CGS	Commonwealth Grant Scheme
CSP	Commonwealth supported place
CUC	Country Universities Centre
HELP	Higher Education Loan Program
HEPPP	Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program
ICPA	Isolated Children's Parents' Association
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NBN	National Broadband Network
NCI	National Careers Institute
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
RRR	Regional, Rural and Remote
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
RUC	Regional University Centre
RUN	Regional Universities Network
SES	Socio-economic status
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VETDSS	VET Delivered to Secondary Students

Glossary

Accreditation is formal recognition of a vocational education and training course by the state or territory course accrediting body or the Australian Skills Quality Authority.

Attrition rate is the rate at which people leave. In this report, used to reflect the proportion of higher education students leaving after their first year.

Australian Apprenticeship is a learning pathway that combines paid on-the-job training and formal study with a Registered Training Organisation that leads to a nationally recognised qualification.

Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) is a classification of Australia into a hierarchy of statistical areas. It is a social geography, developed to reflect the location of people and communities. In this report, Remoteness Areas are used where possible.

Clean Energy is energy that comes from renewable, zero emission sources, as well as energy saved by energy efficiency measures.

Commonwealth supported places (CSPs) are places at a university or higher education provider where the government pays part of the student's fees.

Developmental Assessment is a comprehensive evaluation of a child's physical, intellectual, language, social and emotional development. They are usually conducted when a parent, educator or medical health professional identifies that a child is having trouble in one or more of these areas.

Halsey Review refers to the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* released in 2018, chaired by Emeritus Professor John Halsey.

Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) is an Australian Government loan program that helps eligible students pay their student contributions, tuition fees, overseas study expenses and student services and amenities fees.

Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA) provides for the Commonwealth to give financial support for Table A and Table B providers through:

- grants and other payments made largely to higher education providers
- financial assistance to students (usually in the form of loans).

Job-ready Graduates - Higher Education Reform Package commencing from 2021, this package introduced reforms to update university funding arrangements, improve transparency and accountability, and provide more opportunities for RRR and Indigenous students.

Jobs and Skills Australia is an agency announced in July 2022 and confirmed in the October 2022 budget. The agency's remit will include workforce planning and developing closer partnerships with state and territory governments, unions, industry and education providers.

Microcredentials are a certification of assessed learning or competency, with a minimum volume of learning of one hour and less than an AQF award qualification, that is additional, alternate, complementary to or a component part of an AQF award qualification.

Napthine Review refers to the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy* delivered in 2019 focused on improving tertiary education participation and outcomes for students from regional, rural and remote areas chaired by the Hon Dr Denis Napthine.

Online learning is the use of any digital technology or resources to deliver and support specific teaching and learning aims/outcomes.

Preschool Reform Agreement is a four-year national reform agreement to strengthen the delivery of preschool and better prepare children for the first year of school.

Quality Initial Teacher Education Review refers to a review focusing on attracting and selecting high-quality candidates into the teaching profession and preparing initial teacher education (ITE) students to be effective teachers. The final report was released on 24 February 2022.

Recognition of Prior Learning is the recognition of a person's skills and knowledge acquired through previous training, work, or life experience, which may be used to grant status or credit in a VET or university unit of study.

Regional University Centres (RUC) provide facilities for the use of regional and remote students to locally study tertiary courses delivered by distance from any Australian institution. RUCs provide infrastructure including study spaces and internet access, administrative and academic support services, and student support services.

Regional, Rural and Remote (RRR) is a broad term for non-metropolitan areas across Australia.

Registered Training Organisations (RTO) deliver and assess nationally recognised training in the VET sector, issue nationally recognised qualifications and statements of attainment, and receive government funding to provide VET services.

Retention rate is the measure of the proportion of students who continue their studies after their first year.

Satellite campus is a campus of a university physically distanced from the headquartered campus.

Skill shortages occur when there is inadequate supply of an occupation to meet employer demand, and they are unable to fill vacancies, or vacancies with specialised needs, at current levels of remuneration and conditions of employment and reasonably accessible location.

Socio-economic status (SES) is the social and economic position of a given individual, or group of individuals, within society. Common measures are associated with income, consumption, wealth, education and employment.

Table A providers are public universities. They are self-accrediting bodies eligible for all funding under the Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA).

Table B providers are private universities. They are self-accrediting bodies and are not eligible for general Commonwealth funded places. They are eligible for Commonwealth research funding and can be allocated national priority student places in fields such as nursing and education.

Technical and Further Education (TAFE) is a government-run system of education providers in vocational areas.

The Australian Universities Accord (the Accord): The Australian Government is delivering a review of Australia's higher education system, led by an independent expert panel. The review will consider a range of issues such as access and opportunity, investment and affordability, quality and sustainability, and accountability and community, to provide a long-term plan for higher education in Australia.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) refers to the training and qualifications in skills and teaching of knowledge related to occupational skills, trades and competencies.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

"The appointment of a Regional Education Commissioner was a key recommendation of the National Regional Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy. This Commissioner will make a real positive difference delivering greater and more diverse tertiary education opportunities, pathways, supports and outcomes for people, and especially young people, across regional, rural and remote Australia."

The Hon Dr Denis Napthine AO, Chair, Regional Education Expert Advisory Group

The *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* (Halsey Review), released in 2018, found a relationship between location and educational outcomes where attainment decreased while remoteness increased. It found the key challenge for regional, rural and remote (RRR) education is ensuring every young person has access to high quality schooling and opportunities, regardless of location or circumstances.

The Regional Education Expert Advisory Group chaired by the Hon Dr Denis Napthine AO, that developed the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy* (Naphthine Review) found individuals living in RRR areas are less than half as likely as their city counterparts to obtain a university degree by the time they are 35 years old.

Recognising students in RRR areas face challenges and barriers accessing high quality education and successfully transitioning to employment, the Halsey and the Napthine Reviews both recommended appointing an independent Regional Education Commissioner (the Commissioner) to provide a national focus to improve access and outcomes for RRR education and training.



Left to right – Julia Andrews; the Minister for Education, the Hon Jason Clare MP; Vice-Chancellor and President of Charles Sturt University, Professor Renée Leon PSM; Samantha Beresford and the Regional Education Commissioner, the Hon Fiona Nash.

It was important to the Regional Education Expert Advisory Group, and to the education sector to whom they had been speaking, that the role of the Commissioner spans a student's educational lifespan from cradle to career across sectors, tiers of government and education providers. As such, the Commissioner considers regional education from early childhood through to higher education, viewing holistically the efforts of Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments across education sectors to provide an ongoing national focus on RRR education outcomes. This includes

supporting effective implementation of the Napthine Review recommendations through partnerships, and coordinating efforts across governments, local communities, education providers and industry.

The role is focused on collaborative engagement to formulate advice on policy and strategy to improve RRR education and training outcomes.

The Commissioner leads a series of cross-sector research projects to identify and set future policy directions ranging through student support services, geographical classification, internet access and affordability, Year 12 retention and career mapping (Appendix A).

Appointment and structure

The Hon Fiona Nash was appointed as Australia's first Regional Education Commissioner on 13 December 2021 following a national merit-based selection process. Ms Nash has been appointed for a three-year term with the option of extension to five years, following a review in the third year of her term.

The Commissioner is a non-statutory appointment, independent from the Commonwealth Department of Education (the department) and portfolio Ministers. This independent status enables the Commissioner to represent the broad views and experiences of the regional education sector, including peak and professional bodies, education and training providers and students.

The role of Commissioner is guided by published Terms of Reference (Appendix B), and reports to the Commonwealth Minister for Education.

Funding

The Commissioner does not have decision-making or funding delegations.

There is a budgeted allocation of \$6 million over four years (2020-21 to 2023-24) to the Department of Education to establish and support the role. This includes up to \$1.5 million for a series of cross-sector research projects and a formal evaluation of the regional measures announced on 19 June 2020 in response to the Napthine Review.

This funding allocation provides for sundry and travel expenses, a full time Executive Assistant for the Commissioner and a small policy secretariat, based within the Department of Education.

The Commissioner and the secretariat exercise prudent management to minimise impost and cost while ensuring the Commissioner and RRR stakeholders can participate and engage with the primary purpose of improving education and training outcomes for regional people.

Purpose of the Report

In accordance with the Commissioner's Terms of Reference, this formal report to Government on the state of the RRR education and training sector, summarises the activities of the Commissioner and provides advice on ways to improve access to, and participation and attainment in, RRR education in Australia. Specifically, the Report:

- summarises the activities of the Commissioner
- details engagement, consultations and activities undertaken
- outlines themes and observations from stakeholder engagement
- summarise the state of regional education, by sector
- notes outcomes of projects undertaken in response to the findings of the Napthine Review
- provide updates on responses to the recommendations of the Napthine and Halsey Reviews
- suggests issues for consideration on improving access, participation, and attainment in RRR education in Australia.

Definitions

For the purposes of this report tertiary education covers all vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (university).

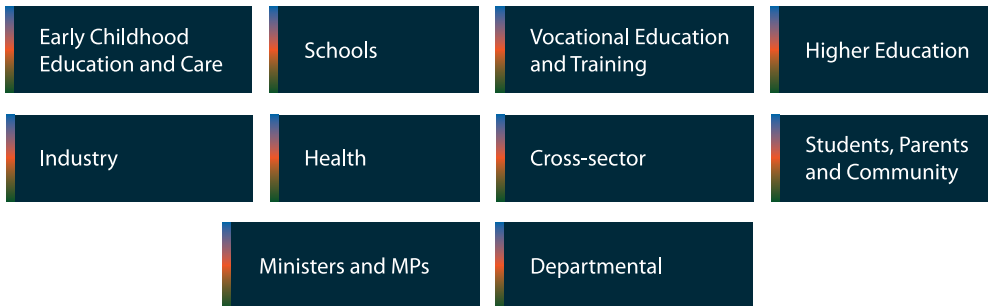
RRR, is used as a broad term for non-metropolitan areas across Australia. Where the terms 'inner regional', 'outer regional', 'remote', 'very remote' and 'major cities' are used, they generally correspond to the 5 classes of remoteness under the Australian Statistical Geography Standard Remoteness Area (ASGS-RA), as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) based on relative access to services.

While communities and individuals frequently identify as 'rural', this term is not explicitly defined and does not correspond to any specific class of area within the ASGS framework.

HEARING FROM STAKEHOLDERS

During this first year, the Commissioner has engaged with over 140 unique stakeholders (Appendix C) and heard about persistent barriers, interconnected issues and innovative solutions. The Commissioner has engaged with a wide range of sectors as shown in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Breadth of engagement across sectors



Roundtables

Industry Roundtable

On 10 May 2022, the Commissioner hosted an Industry Roundtable with stakeholders in regional industries such as agriculture, business, mining, forestry, and health. The roundtable explored industry engagement in RRR education pathways, promoted collaboration and investigated how industry can attract, train, and retain students in regional industries central to Australia's prosperity. Discussion centred around pathways, barriers, and opportunities for industry linkage into education.

Several themes emerged from the roundtable including industry and education linkages, career advice, student aspiration, effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, workforce shortages, targeted support for First Nations Peoples, and internet connectivity. As education barriers are diverse across RRR Australia, the importance of a place-based approach was a fundamental cross-sector theme underpinning all issues discussed. Other central cross-sector themes included improving education access for mid-career changers and recognition of credentials and prior learning, as well as supporting lifelong learning and upskilling.

Follow-up discussion

On Tuesday 18 October 2022, the Commissioner held a follow up discussion to discuss industry linkages into education pathways further as well as outcomes from the Jobs and Skills Summit, and new perspectives following the change in government. Key themes raised include the importance of a place-based approach, community ownership and consultation in regional education programs, and issues interconnected with education such as housing and connectivity.

Local Roundtables

The Commissioner attended three regional roundtables in Rockhampton, Mt Gambier, and Mildura. Locally based education and education-adjacent stakeholders were invited to explore local issues and solutions relating to education and the pathway to employment in the region.

A range of key issues emerged from discussions with communities at these roundtables. A prominent issue felt across communities and sectors, particularly schools, was teacher workforce shortages. Stakeholders reported immense difficulties attracting and retaining teachers in RRR areas and shortages have contributed to teachers experiencing increased stress and performing additional teaching duties outside their expertise. The importance of developing a homegrown workforce and investing in housing for teachers were discussed as measures to address workforce shortages. A second key issue identified was lack of access to allied health, wellbeing and support services for students, families, and education professionals. Stakeholders reported this is interconnected with workforce shortages as teachers are often expected to address the gap in support services being delivered to RRR students. This can lead to high workloads and staff burnout causing teachers to leave the profession.

Regional Australia Institute, Regionalisation Roundtable

The Commissioner attended the Regionalisation Roundtable held by the Regional Australia Institute on 26 May 2022. A prominent issue of discussion was teacher shortages and the additional workloads teachers are managing to deliver careers advice to RRR students.

AgriFutures Australia, Rural Women's Roundtable

The Commissioner attended the Rural Women's Roundtable, Rural Women's Award Alumni State Chairs, held by AgriFutures Australia on 3 June 2022. Key issues discussed included difficulties accessing allied and specialist health services for RRR children; financial barriers for families to support remote learning; a need to increase access to agricultural studies and qualifications, including through careers advice; and the effect of housing on workforce shortages in RRR areas.

Key themes raised by stakeholders

While education issues vary across regions and sectors, some issues have emerged as consistent or growing themes. Often the issues have interdependencies so responding to one issue may mean responding to others. The interlinked nature of these themes illustrates the complexities and difficulties of responding to issues facing early childhood education and care, schools, tertiary education and the workforce.

Workforce

Strong regional education relies on a strong regional workforce. While the Commissioner's remit does not directly include workforce and employment matters, the Commissioner believes creating the right circumstances for early childhood, schools, and tertiary education to thrive in regional areas is vital for future employment opportunities. Unsurprisingly, workforce shortages were a fundamental issue raised by many stakeholders. These shortages are prominent in schools, early childhood education, and medical and allied health sectors. A skilled and homegrown workforce linking industry and education to address shortages is essential. To respond to workforce shortages, some stakeholders suggested using an adaptable process of mature age study and flexible study options through micro-credentials.

Teachers

The attraction, retention, and quality of school teachers in RRR areas were significant issues raised by stakeholders across sectors and regions. Workforce shortages are affecting many sectors. For schools, there is a particular shortage for specialisations such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) teachers. Across Australia, one-in-four Year 8 students are learning maths without a teacher qualified in mathematics.¹ This can exacerbate a lack of subject choices for students in RRR areas, which in turn can affect aspiration and access for further study.

Attraction

Many stakeholders raised teacher attraction in RRR communities as a prime issue. This connects with a range of other issues including housing, workload, access to child care and remuneration. The 2021 Quality Initial Teacher Education Review found the social status and relative attractiveness of the teaching profession were raised by many stakeholders as reasons for declining initial teacher education commencements.² In the general survey, 70 per cent of respondents indicated if teaching was a more highly respected profession it would be a great deal more appealing to both mid-career professionals and school leavers.

1 S Thomson, N Wernert, S Buckley, S Rodrigues, E O'Grady and M Schmid, [TIMSS 2019 Australia. Volume II: School and classroom contexts for learning](#), Australian Council for Education Research, 2019: 47.

2 Commonwealth of Australia, [Next Steps: Report of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review](#), 2021: 12.

These sentiments were reflected at the Mildura roundtable where stakeholders discussed difficulties attracting staff and the contribution this made to staff shortages. A potential solution discussed was to incentivise Year 12 students to work as Teachers' Aides during their gap year to reduce teacher workload.

(Issue for Consideration 7 refers)

A Teachers' Aide gap year program was also discussed at the AgriFutures Rural Women's Roundtable. Other potential solutions raised by stakeholders include providing a salary increase and reducing workload to make the teaching profession more attractive, developing an apprenticeship model, and create 'rural teacher training' pathways.

Retention

Too few people entering the profession regionally is only part of the problem, retention is also a concern. A 2019 Monash University study found only 42 per cent of teachers planned to remain in their profession.³ A large share of surveyed teachers planned to leave the profession, within 5 years (26 per cent), or 10 years (12 per cent). A quarter of teachers responded in more detail; with the majority reporting they would like to leave if they could or were planning to leave in a different timeframe. High attrition rates can contribute to young and inexperienced teachers being overwhelmed by workload and isolated in understaffed schools. This is particularly acute in the regions.

Stakeholders discussed possible solutions including reducing teacher workloads, improving community connections, providing ongoing learning opportunities, and retention payments for teachers to stay in RRR areas. Improving professional development opportunities for teachers could be particularly beneficial. Stakeholders commented teachers struggle to access these opportunities as this requires time away from work in a profession that is already understaffed, and often requires travel to other areas, which can be a financial barrier.

The Fogarty Foundation's EDvance School Improvement Program is a positive example of how teacher retention can be supported through integrated leadership, management, and support programs, tailored to the needs of each school. Community and inter-school relationships are critical to the success of this program and offers a successful model for consideration.

3 A Heffernan, F Longmuir, D Bright and M Kim, '[Perceptions of Teachers and Teaching in Australia](#)', Monash University, November 2019: 15.

Careers Advice

Access to locally and industry relevant careers advice were recurring themes throughout conversations. It was suggested the root causes behind these issues include an understaffed workforce and the time and cost to obtain careers adviser qualifications deterring the workforce from growing. Stakeholders are concerned many RRR students are unaware of employment pathways which can affect aspiration and decision making.

These issues were a focus of discussion at the Industry Roundtable. Stakeholders commented careers information in schools is fundamental, with three primary issues being a lack of awareness of careers in agriculture, connection to industry, and careers advice training for teachers. Stakeholders agreed including careers education in teaching degrees could improve teachers' abilities to provide careers advice to school students. However, teachers already have high workloads and adding extra work reduces their capacity for the core work of teaching and lesson planning. Stakeholders also agreed developing a framework could improve connections between careers advisers and industry catering to school leavers and mid-career changes, who would benefit from locally and industry relevant careers advice.

Financial assistance has been a particular focus of discussion regarding careers advice. Many stakeholders and students reported information on financial assistance to support tertiary study is difficult to navigate, understand and use. The [National Careers Institute \(NCI\)](#) has valuable resources to address these concerns. The NCI provides a free information service for school leavers aged 15-24 years old with a career practitioner via telephone. This service can assist students with their options from career planning and management, training and studying, to looking for work. The NCI has a School Leavers Information Kit with information on finding and applying for jobs, pursuing tertiary education and training opportunities, and accessing financial assistance. The NCI also has resources for teachers, careers advisors, parents, and guardians. The Commissioner intends to support the NCI promoting its work in this area.

Student Support Services

Student support services remain a concern for stakeholders. At the Rockhampton Roundtable, stakeholders reported too few support services to support mental health for students across all education fields. Other stakeholders shared this concern, indicating workforce shortages were affecting their region with regional TAFEs experiencing issues recruiting staff to provide support services for students. Stakeholders have commented school teachers are often expected to provide student support services on top of their regular workload, contributing to existing issues of the well-being, productivity and quality of teachers. Improving support services available for students in their education institutions as well as in their RRR communities would be beneficial.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Australia's RRR communities are an exceptional place to grow up. There are opportunities to enjoy space and natural settings with established communities where residents know and support each other. Where available, the provision of quality early childhood education and care complements a RRR childhood, however, inequality in access and quality are disadvantaging some children before they even start school. Lack of quality early childhood education options has flow on effects for entire communities as early childhood education and care is a key ingredient in the liveability of a region, including the workforce participation of families.

Access to early childhood education and care

"Geographically isolated families face unique challenges accessing early childhood education and care services; what works for metropolitan families does not always work for remote families - more flexibility in the system would support greater equity."

Alana Moller, Federal President, Isolated Children's Parents' Association

Stakeholder discussions this year reflect the impact insufficient childcare can have on a community, leaving carers with little choice other than taking several years out of the workforce. The Mitchell Institute completed research into the incidence of 'childcare deserts' in Australia and, while the childcare desert definition of needing to travel 20 minutes is not as relevant to the regional context, the report found over 300 communities in Australia with a school but no childcare centre.⁴ While some of these locations may not have the population density to sustain a childcare centre, families still require the service, demonstrating the need for policy flexibility in RRR communities to support availability. Supporting smaller operators to open, remain open or offer mobile services will all increase the options available to RRR communities, and benefit those communities more broadly. **(Issue for Consideration 1 refers)**

The skill shortages experienced by regional employers in the teaching workforce has been a recurrent theme in most discussions this year, as it has for other industries seeking skilled workers. Providing the essential service of early childhood education and care to these communities will assist in alleviating these shortages and support greater female participation in the workforce.

⁴ P Hurley, H Matthews and S Pennicuik, ['Deserts and oases: How accessible is childcare in Australia?'](#), Mitchell Institute, Victoria University, March 2022: 22.

As the Productivity Commission works to examine the access and affordability of early childhood education and care in Australia, it is important the unique experience and perspective of RRR communities are captured in the research. Feedback during the year has emphasised the need for early childhood education and care to be provided in culturally appropriate and respectful ways with representation from First Nations educators. This must be considered in discussions of access and affordability.

The year before formal schooling starts (preschool) is a unique and essential year in early childhood education to prepare children for the years of schooling to come. During this year, Australian children are entitled to at least 15 hours of quality programmed preschool education under the Preschool Reform Agreement. However, for RRR children there can be barriers to accessing this entitlement. This is especially true for children who live in remote locations and are unable to attend a physical preschool program. To be equitable and meet our social obligation to these students, funding support to offset the cost of materials and the time required to deliver the education should be provided.

(Issue for Consideration 2 refers)

Commissioner's Note

Children in RRR areas benefit from educational programming through organised early childhood education and care, including preschool programs, and their carers benefit from an increased capacity to work. There is an opportunity to create more equitable access for RRR communities, through helping small operators to start up, providing mobile services and supporting businesses in thin markets during lean years.

Workforce shortages

“Homegrown is a very empowering concept for communities... everyone needs to imagine what’s possible, not just the individual.”

Megan Lilly, Ai Group

The National Skills Commission reported a dramatic increase in the level of skill shortages in Australia in 2022, and neither the education sector nor RRR communities have been immune to this trend.⁵ Workforce shortages are an issue at all stages of the education cycle and raised throughout this report, however, shortages in early childhood education and care have a double impact. Not only does a lack of early childhood educators affect delivery of the service, in turn, availability of skilled workers for other fields is restricted as they are unable to find an early childhood education and care service for their children. Early childhood educators have significant skills with the vast majority of paid contact staff holding a related qualification, and around one in four of these workers are undertaking further study to continue to upskill.⁶ However, training, attracting and retaining skilled workers in a RRR location is a complicated proposition.

Firstly, throughout the year many stakeholders have reflected on the unfortunate consequences a lack of local training options can have. Not only are there barriers to relocating to obtain required training, but when people do relocate to study, they do not always return to the region and bring their newly acquired skills back with them.

Secondly, where there are no locally skilled workers, it can be exceedingly difficult to attract workers to a region. Housing, employment for spouses and partners, and schooling options are practicalities that all weigh into a willingness to move to a RRR location and can be difficult to resolve. Finally, it is widely acknowledged that retention is an issue throughout the education workforce. In the case of early childhood educators this may relate to pay, career progression opportunities and respect and acknowledgment of their role as educators.

Addressing the ability to train locally, and creating a homegrown workforce of people who enjoy living outside cities with the skills and qualifications to support their communities, is an effective strategy within reach.

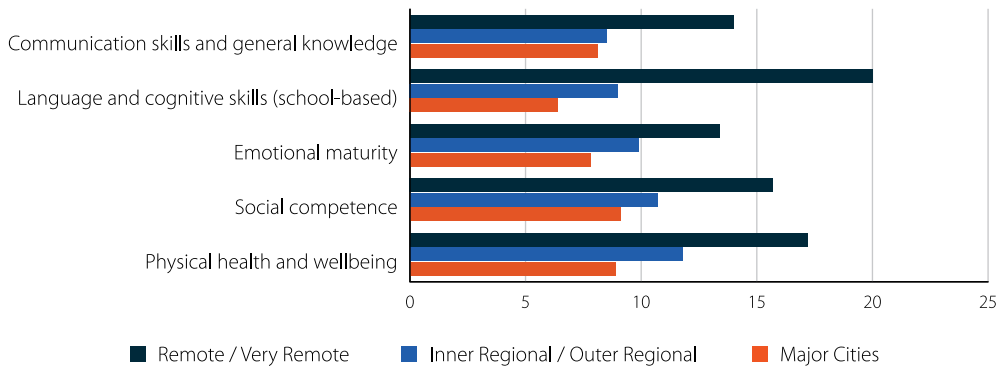
5 National Skills Commission, [‘Skills Priority List’](#), 2022.

6 Department of Education, [‘2021 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census’](#), Canberra, 2022.

Educational outcomes

Children living outside major cities are more likely to be developmentally vulnerable as they start school than children who live in major cities. This is particularly striking in the language and cognitive skills of Remote/Very Remote students, compared to their regional and metropolitan peers.

Figure 2: Percentage of children developmentally vulnerable by domain (2021)



Source: Australian Early Development Census 2021

To ensure students are adequately supported and not disadvantaged during their years of formal education, access to developmental assessments, and early intervention services where required, will increase their chances for academic success. These services should be available to all children who need them, regardless of where they live. It is not currently clear, however, what the availability is for assessments or ongoing intervention across Australia, and this baseline information is an important ingredient for progress.

Commissioner's Note

In recognition of the higher share of RRR children who are developmentally vulnerable, and to ensure they get the support they require, further research into the availability of formal developmental assessments for children in RRR communities would be beneficial.

Impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 appears to have affected RRR childcare and preschool providers in the same ways it did metropolitan providers – notably a rapid and large decline in enrolments following government announcements of necessary shutdowns. The response from the Commonwealth Government was immediate financial support of the sector, including in RRR areas, both through the initial crisis and the transition back to providing regular services to children and their families. This reflects a sometimes unspoken acknowledgement of how essential this service is in Australia, making it only fair that everyone that needs it can access it.

Best practice example – Connected Beginnings

Connected Beginnings draws upon the strength and knowledge of First Nations' communities to increase First Nations children and families' engagement with health and early childhood education and care. The program improves access to existing early childhood, maternal and child health and family support services to ensure children are safe, healthy and ready to thrive at school by the age of five.

Backbone Organisations are funded in each location to co-design goals and solutions to support children, provide referral pathways and link up services so families only have to share their stories once. The program is jointly delivered by the Department of Health and Aged Care that fund Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in each location.

The program currently supports around 11,000 First Nations children across 32 communities and is expanding to 50 sites nationally by 2025 which, once expanded, has the potential to support up to 20 per cent of all First Nations children. The program is embedding the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms through its national expansion and contributes to outcomes under the Closing the Gap National Agreement by lifting participation in early childhood education and care activities and increasing school readiness.

SCHOOL EDUCATION



During the year, when many stakeholders spoke about the difficulties of schooling in RRR Australia, they almost invariably paused before quickly adding a reflection on how rewarding and unique the experience is. This encapsulates the experience for those working in RRR education: barriers, inequalities and distance adding to the challenges, balanced by the gratification of a job well done, witnessing progress, and being a key ingredient to the future of RRR Australia. This demonstrates RRR schools are a microcosm of the regional communities they are found in, with the same celebration and enjoyment of country life, and the same willingness to pull together to overcome adversity. There are several opportunities to tip the balance, decreasing challenges and making it easier for our hard working teachers to achieve the best outcomes for Australia's RRR students.

The Halsey Review

The Halsey Review concisely states, 'the key challenge for RRR education is ensuring, regardless of location or circumstances, that every young person has access to high quality school and opportunities.'

The Halsey Review considered the key issues, challenges and barriers that affect RRR student learning outcomes, and identified approaches to support improved access and achievement of these students in school and in their transition to further study, training and employment. The Halsey Review provided a framework for addressing the recommendations and increasing support for RRR students.

The previous government responded to the Halsey Review and progress has been made across various recommendations, noting many of the recommendations and associated actions cut across existing initiatives, funding arrangements and levels of government. Progress against some recommendations can be attributed to the funded measures in response to the Napthine Review (see Higher Education chapter). An update on progress against Halsey Review recommendations is at Appendix D and against measures implemented in response to both the Halsey and the Napthine Review is at Appendix E.

Access to primary and secondary school

Many Australians have attended a RRR school growing up. Australia's RRR schools are currently providing an education to 1.1 million school students – just over a quarter of all students (27.5 per cent).⁷ There is wide diversity in what these schools look like, from relatively large inner regional public schools, boarding schools, schools with only one teacher, through to children learning on remote stations via distance education or First Nations students learning on Country in Homeland schools. Each of these children deserve equitable access to the same quality education, achieved through flexibility in a model that suits their circumstances.

As regionality increases, access to school becomes more challenging. Choice becomes limited and for many students in locations with no physical school, distance education is the logical choice. Unfortunately, these families bear a financial cost through lost income for the time spent supervising children's learning, or by hiring farm workers or a governess/tutor. Although there is some support provided to families to meet these costs, it could reasonably be extended or adjusted to lessen the burden and increase access (**Issue for Consideration 3 refers**). Additionally, good connectivity is essential for distance education, but is unfortunately lacking in many locations. Increasing the reliability and quality of internet services would improve the delivery of distance education.

For other students living in locations without a physical school, or where the school does not suit the student, boarding school is the best option. The lack of local schooling options being a large motivator for boarding school is reflected in the home addresses for boarding students – nearly three quarters of whom are from RRR areas.⁸ These families also face a financial impact, through boarding fees and travel costs. First Nations students make up a high proportion of boarding students, at around a fifth of all boarding students in Australia.⁹

Commissioner's Note

Many of Australia's remote students have little option other than boarding schools to receive the quality and variety of education they need, especially in their secondary schooling years. This is particularly true for First Nations students. Creating opportunities for First Nations students to board on Country may support connection to country to continue and protect the wellbeing of these students.

7 ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics), '[Schools](#)', Canberra, 2021.

8 Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA), '[The ABSA Census](#)', Brisbane, 2022.

9 ABSA, '[The ABSA Census](#)', 2022.

In some cases, while a school is within traveling distance, it is not large enough to employ specialist subject teachers or provide advanced subjects for those that need them. Some schools have adapted by forming clusters or networks to pool and share teaching resources, and support students to study externally. Speaking with stakeholders has shown access to learning opportunities can often come down to an advocate recognising a student's potential and being willing to pull out all the stops. Leveraging their networks, making calls, connecting with people in cities or other regional centres who can get these children the education they deserve. While this is an example of how passionate and driven many teachers are to help their students succeed, it is not reasonable to expect there will always be the right person with the right connections available. There needs to be a more systematic way to guarantee access to education at an appropriate level, including through improving digital and technological access and affordability. **(Issue for Consideration 4 refers)**

"It is without a doubt that more support and consideration must be given for the development of subject course options for our senior students, these must be specifically co-designed placed based initiatives in partnership with representative bodies such as the NSW AECG Inc.

This support is critical for our Aboriginal students in our regional, rural and remote areas, as it will create opportunities for our students to choose subject options from a wider cross section ensuring their educational journey is completed by accessing specialist studies, support, resources, and courses to enable them to remain at home and On Country."

Catherine Trindall, President, NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

Commissioner's Note

All students, regardless of where they live, should be able to select subjects of their choice, although the method of delivery may vary. Australia's RRR students deserve the opportunity to shine through access to a quality education with options to stretch their talents through access to advanced subjects taught by specialist teachers.

Workforce shortages

It would surprise no one familiar with this sector that the most common theme raised by stakeholders this year is one of the biggest challenges facing primary and secondary schools: a critical shortage of teachers. Although teacher education is the second most common field of study in Australia,¹⁰ there are wide ranging workforce shortages including for primary school teachers, secondary school teachers, and special needs teachers.¹¹ Surveys of teachers in 2022 showed only around 2 in 5 teachers intend to remain in the profession.¹² There is a flaw, or flaws, in the system when such a large pool of potential teachers is unable to keep up with replacing those leaving.

The same three factors affecting the RRR early childhood education and care workforce unsurprisingly affect the RRR school workforce. These are: a lack of local training options creating a barrier to receiving qualifications without moving, and RRR residents who do leave to train not returning; difficulty attracting skilled workers to the regions; and finally, low retention of teachers. The steady increase in school enrolments in RRR areas has created additional pressure and demand while the declining number of individuals graduating from Initial Teacher Education (17 per cent between 2017 and 2020) is further complicating existing workforce issues.¹³

Ensuring new teachers are adequately prepared for the experience of teaching in a RRR school will set them up for success. Passing down knowledge from experienced teachers is always important, however, this needs to be supplemented by real world experience in RRR classrooms through placements during training (**Issue for Consideration 6 refers**). Teaching apprenticeships are another practical way to ensure new teachers have ample on the job experience to compliment academic theory, and earning a wage while learning can ease financial burdens of training. There are models that exist for other professions that could guide greater support, such as the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training program, that bring together a network including RRR training providers, structured placement opportunities, training hubs and local communities. There are also education specific programs such as the High Achieving Teachers Program and bursaries that specifically seek to address teacher shortages.

Commissioner's Note

Initial Teacher Education programs that incorporate on-the-job learning within classrooms for a significant portion of their training may have multiple benefits, ensuring pre-service teachers have significant time to become familiar with a classroom environment and earn a wage while training.

10 ABS, '[2021 Census of Population and Housing](#)', Canberra, 2021.

11 National Skills Commission, '[Skills Priority List](#)', 2022.

12 A Heffernan, D Bright, M Kim, F Longmuir and B Magyar, '[I cannot sustain the workload and the emotional toll: Reasons behind Australia teachers' intentions to leave the profession](#)', Monash University, 2022.

13 Department of Education, '[Selected Higher Education Student Statistics](#)', Canberra, 2021.

Even with better preparation, commencing as a teacher can be very challenging, with a survey in South Australia finding 45.1 per cent of early career teachers reporting they did not receive sufficient team support or mentoring in their initial years in the profession.¹⁴ Several sources point to how difficult the first few years as a teacher are, especially in RRR schools. This intuitively makes sense, especially when a new teacher has moved away from their own support networks to a small RRR school that lacks a peer network of more experienced teachers. Finding ways to support new teachers locally through this transition would increase the likelihood they stay and become experienced, confident teachers. Not only is this important for the classroom, but experienced teachers are also a pipeline for school leaders, who are an essential part of the school system.

Commissioner's Note

Being a teacher in RRR Australia is a unique experience. In smaller communities where local teachers are well known and respected teachers are 'always on.' Ensuring their education prepares them for this challenging but rewarding environment may increase the longevity of new RRR teachers.

Increasing the number of First Nations teachers and support workers would benefit schools and all students. First Nations students would receive culturally appropriate education aligned with community, as well seeing strong role models demonstrating post-school transitions and pathways.¹⁵ The *More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative*, in strong consultation with community, made several recommendations to address First Nations peoples becoming and remaining teachers. The message was clear: creating a culturally diverse workforce meets the needs of a culturally diverse student population.

Aside from increasing the number of teachers, supporting more experienced teachers is vital, as they bring stability, knowledge and understanding to their schools. There is also evidence that while incentivising teachers to move to a RRR school initially increases numbers, financial incentives on their own do not affect retention.¹⁶ Given how difficult it can be to attract new teachers to RRR schools, it is essential those who choose to live and work outside of metropolitan centres are enabled to stay through additional support in the classroom and opportunities for professional development. To put it another way, the teachers will be an important part of the homegrown workforce, who contribute to educating the youth of their community in preparation for further studies or work.

14 J Windle, A Morrison, S Sellar, R Squires, JP Kennedy and Claire Murray. [Teachers at breaking point – Why working in South Australian schools is getting tougher](#), Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion, University of South Australia, November 2022: 2.

15 Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited, [Spotlight: the impact of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators](#), July 2021.

16 NSW Department of Education, [Evaluation of the Rural and Remote Education Blueprint: Final Report: Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation](#), NSW Department of Education, Sydney, May 2020: 6.

Commissioner's Note

As all levels of government work to increase the teaching workforce, investing in the continued growth and development of existing teachers demonstrates a commitment to them and highlights the value placed on their work. Encouraging experienced teachers to stay longer by providing opportunities to grow their skills and advance their careers without the need to move, will also support increasing the teacher workforce. There should also be acknowledgment that teacher salaries tend to plateau mid-career, offering little incentive for experienced workers to remain in the sector when many of their skills are transferable.

This year saw a welcome agreement by all levels of government to cooperatively focus on teacher workforce as a priority, which saw the release of a draft National Teacher Workforce Action Plan. The draft plan is broad and aims to support the teacher workforce from initial training through to experienced teachers, noting it acknowledges the needs of RRR. The Action Plan is timely. Department modelling has previously suggested the demand for secondary teachers will exceed the supply of new graduate teachers by around 4,100 between 2021 and 2025. Even where it does not directly address RRR, this work matters in a RRR context, as shortages in the overall pool of teachers will be felt most keenly in difficult to fill positions including those in RRR settings. **(Issue for Consideration 5 refers)**

Support in the classroom

Teachers are time poor and face an expanding list of tasks to complete. Research by the Grattan Institute noted 86 per cent of teachers said they always or frequently feel like they do not have enough time for high-quality lesson planning.¹⁷ This is despite working long hours; in South Australia, full-time teachers reported working an average of 52 hours a week.¹⁸ This is 14 hours more than a typical full-time job. Teachers in schools without access to high quality curriculum resources are disproportionately affected by the need to devote large chunks of time preparing all lesson plans, rather than adapt existing ones.

The University of South Australia's report to the Australian Education Union found there has been major changes to the nature of teachers' work over the past five years, including increased complexity of student needs and growing focus on student test data.¹⁹ The time teachers have available to address these additional tasks is limited, and gaps are left by necessity. Only 45 per cent of teachers felt the programs and resources at their school can support students with special education needs and disabilities.²⁰ It is imperative students with complex learning needs receive necessary support, and this is less likely where teaching staff are overwhelmed.

Teachers' Aides and learning support staff play a critical role in the classroom, assisting with administrative work and supporting the teacher's lesson planning. Increasing the amount of support staff in the classroom can help reduce teacher workloads. It is also an avenue for people studying Education to get early exposure to the profession. For instance, La Trobe University's Nexus Program allows Master of Teaching (Secondary) students the opportunity to be employed as a Teachers' Aide in the first year of the program whilst studying at university.²¹ **(Issue for Consideration 7 refers)**

Commissioner's Note

Extending opportunities to work as Teachers' Aides to university bound students during a gap year will also provide better support in the classroom while exposing students to the teaching profession, providing a hands-on understanding of what is required as a teacher.

17 J Hunter and J Sonnemann, '[Making time for great teaching – A guide for principals](#)', *The Grattan Institute*, 2022: 4.

18 Windle et al., '[Teachers at breaking point – Why working in South Australian schools is getting tougher](#)', 2022: 17.

19 Windle et al., '[Teachers at breaking point – Why working in South Australian schools is getting tougher](#)', 2022: 19.

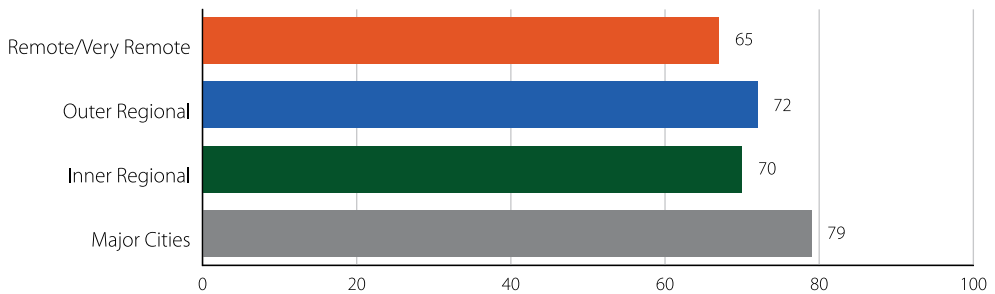
20 Windle et al., '[Teachers at breaking point – Why working in South Australian schools is getting tougher](#)', 2022: 37.

21 La Trobe University, '[Nexus program, School of Education, Preparing educators, Alternative pathways](#)', La Trobe University, 2022.

Education outcomes

RRR students are less likely to remain in school through to completing Year 12 and obtaining their certification than their metropolitan peers. Australian Bureau of Statistics analysis suggests, 'those with Year 12 have a greater likelihood of continuing with further study, particularly in higher education, as well as entering into the workforce.'²²

Figure 3: Year 12 certification by remoteness (2020)



Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Year 12 Certification Rates, 2020*

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is a measure of student performance in literacy and numeracy, with lower average test scores as remoteness increases.²³ A notable example is the percentage of year 9 students meeting minimum standards for reading in very remote locations and major cities (48 per cent and 92 per cent, respectively). This is an unacceptable gap; not helped by shortages and high turnover rates of teachers. While lifting outcomes for these students may be daunting or difficult, regional communities and successful regional alumni are finding ways to give back to the next generations through grassroots programs like tutoring.

²² ABS, '[ABS Australian Social Trends March 2011](#)', Canberra, 2011: 2.

²³ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, '[NAPLAN Results](#)', Canberra, 2022.



CASE STUDY: Regional Education Support Network (RESN)

Grassroots and local initiatives can be the most effective at identifying a problem and stepping in quickly with solutions; for example, online tutoring for RRR students. RESN is an example of this model. Though RESN is relatively new, and work continues on refining its structure and growth, this not-for-profit organisation is improving educational opportunities for RRR students through low-cost, accessible, timely, peer-led, specialised and personalised tutoring services. Students benefit through access to knowledgeable tutors from any location, assessment preparation and exam revision, opportunities to develop leadership skills, a network of volunteers to connect with after school, seminars, and workshops as well as live tutoring services. Teachers also benefit through motivated and well-supported students; further classroom resources and it reduces the burden of marking essays and practice exams.

Career advice

The Napthine Review collected clear evidence of the need to improve the quality and availability of career information and advice from stakeholders, with nearly a third of submissions addressing the topic. During the year, stakeholders from all levels of education, industry, business, and parents have continued to reiterate this; emphasising how transformative quality, locally informed career advice can be. Aspiration can be encouraged in students with support to see potential, followed by guidance on how to take their interests and identify relevant careers and pathways. As beneficial as career advice can be, it is not equally available to all Australian students.

To inform young people about the skilled work available within their own communities in a useful way, a career adviser needs to be aware of the local industries as well as those more broadly, understanding where the skill shortages exist and be informed of all educational pathways. Regarding tertiary study, where there are no options to study locally, knowing what supports are available to relocating students is imperative.

A 2022 study of RRR principals reported several challenges to fostering student aspiration, including a lack of industry knowledge, constraints of resources, and a mismatch between student and industrial partners' expectations.²⁴ Often career advice is another task added to a teacher's workload. Teachers often only have personal experience with a higher education pathway, and young teachers (who make up a large share of the RRR teaching workforce) have little other industry experience to share. This is a difficult situation to resolve, and feedback from stakeholders hints that often career advice is provided by a teacher who has developed an interest in the field, rather than received formal training.

(Issue for Consideration 14 refers)

Commissioner's Note

Where it is not possible to have a specialist career adviser on staff at a school, there is a role for more centralised entities like the National Careers Institute (NCI) to supplement what is available locally. The School Leavers Information Service in the NCI provides career advice that is clear, builds capacity and broadens perspectives on education and employment opportunities, and the links between both. Pleasingly, the service can effectively provide advice to a range of cohorts in a culturally appropriate and locally informed way. Expansion of the service and investing in resources for parents and teachers would extend the reach of this valuable initiative.

24 C Yuan Gao, M Dollinger, B D'Angelo, A Harvey, '[Leveraging Local Knowledge: Exploring how to support regional, rural and remote students career development](#)', *Australia and International Journal of Rural Education*, 2022, 32(1): 6.

Best practice example: School Leavers Information Service Northern Territory Pilot

The National Career Institute's School Leavers Information Service is currently delivering a pilot in the Northern Territory (NT), in collaboration with the NT Department of Education. Five secondary schools in Alice Springs, Darwin and Katherine have received a mix of online and face-to-face assistance to complement existing programs with career practitioner services. A team of career practitioners visited the NT to work closely with school staff to deliver interactive career development workshops, engage in career conversations and deliver face-to-face personalised career guidance sessions to students in Years 10-12 and engage with parents and guardians at a career pathways evening. Over 120 career guidance sessions, two presentations, four online group sessions, and eight face-to-face workshops were delivered as well as attendance at a school-based career expo with over 1,200 students.

Impact of COVID-19

Several years into the pandemic, everyone has been affected by COVID-19, but it was a true game changer for Australian students and schools. National and state based lockdowns forced schools to move to online learning for most students. This was highly detrimental for those with poor or no access to technology or stable internet. In an acknowledgment of how difficult it would be to achieve academic success in those circumstances, the 2020 NAPLAN testing was cancelled by Education Ministers. Aside from academic consequences, stakeholder feedback showed a significant effect on student and teacher mental health, adding to an already weary RRR community who have been through repeated natural disasters.²⁵

"More than two years since the outbreak of the pandemic, young people continue to feel the effects of COVID-19. School communities are telling headspace their students are reporting increased anxiety, and that young people are experiencing challenging emotions. We also know teachers are experiencing the impacts of increased workloads and staffing interruptions in the context of COVID-19.

Headspace is working hard to connect young people in regional, rural and remote areas with timely mental health care, and to provide telehealth services to those young people for whom in-person services are not always available."

Jason Trethowan, CEO, headspace

Boarding school students were an especially vulnerable cohort during the pandemic, with RRR students overrepresented in this group. Traveling away from home, many were affected by border closures before a National Code for Boarding School Students encouraged state governments to consider how to manage vulnerable young students. First Nations students were still especially affected due to concerns about students inadvertently bringing COVID-19 to remote communities. This meant many of these students did not return to school in the 2nd, 3rd or 4th terms of 2020.

²⁵ The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia 2020. 'Education in remote and complex environments', *House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment Education and Training*, 2020: 28.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING



VET courses are popular and successful in RRR Australia, with over 1,400 providers offering VET courses outside capital cities.²⁶ Their practical, targeted nature suits regional communities with students and local industry able to see a direct line from studying (or upskilling) to a specific career such as engineering, the caring economy or agriculture. They contribute to community development and growth, with research showing improved employment and earning potential for those with a qualification above Year 12.²⁷ Investing in regional VET education opportunities increases regional Australia's potential to contribute positively to the nation's productivity and the success and liveability of our regions.

Stakeholders this year have pointed out it would be unwise for policy makers, teachers and students to view VET as the 'poor cousin' to higher education. VET does not need to compete with higher education, in fact discussions have comfortably shown room within the system for both, and ample opportunities for collaboration. One such pathway is where VET graduates can use their qualifications as a basis for admission to higher education. Dual-sector providers also offer courses at both VET and higher education levels, demonstrating how the sectors already work together to deliver post-school study options to potential students. Work to improve connections between VET and higher education is underway, unified by the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and National Microcredentials Framework.

Access and participation to VET in RRR Australia

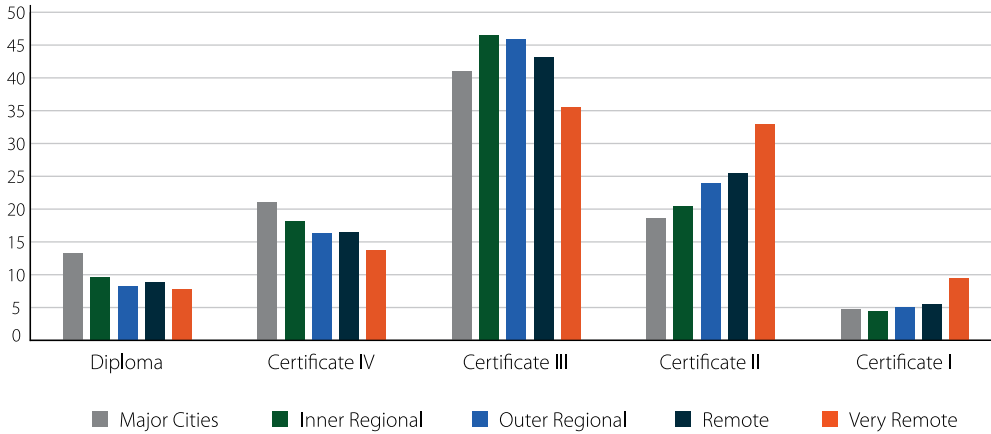
Access to VET is diverse and offers flexible options for students; it is available in schools, workplaces, some universities and via registered training organisations. In 2021, there were over one million RRR VET students, which is over a quarter (28.8 per cent) of all VET students. The numbers for RRR VET students who identify as First Nations is also double that of the cities (87,500 students or 7 per cent, compared to 3.4 per cent of VET students in major cities who identified as First Nations).²⁸

It is worth noting, as Figure 4 shows, this appears to be concentrated in lower level qualifications, with RRR students strongly represented in Certificate I to III. Higher level qualifications often lead to higher paid jobs, and more needs to be done to ensure RRR students can also access and succeed in higher levels of qualifications.

26 National Register of VET, 'Training.gov.au', 2022.

27 NCVET (National Centre for Vocational Education Research), '[VET student outcomes 2021](#)', NCVET, Adelaide, 2021.

28 NCVET, '[Total VET students and courses 2021: students DataBuilder, Total, Remoteness region, Indigenous status by Year](#)', NCVET, Adelaide, 2022.

Figure 4: Total VET program enrolments by level of education and remoteness category (2021)

Source: NCVET 2022, *Total VET students and courses 2021*

RRR VET graduates report strong employment outcomes, with 65.2 per cent of regional and 66.1 per cent of remote students reporting improved employment status after training, compared with 58.5 per cent of students from major cities.²⁹ Home growing workers is a powerful way to link the community and employers through a steady supply of skilled graduates for relevant regional jobs, including those future-facing careers.

Commissioner's Note

Supporting opportunities for industry to form close and productive links with schools and tertiary education providers benefits students and regional industries.

²⁹ NCVET, '[VET student outcomes 2021](#)', NCVET, Adelaide, 2021.

Workforce shortages

The National Skills Commission's 2022 Skills Priority List assesses VET trainers are in shortage in 2022.³⁰ As many stakeholders noted, when there is a shortage of trainers who understand teaching in the regions, training opportunities in areas of local and national need reduce. VET trainer shortages are already significant and felt more keenly in the regions where there is a smaller population pool.³¹ Importantly, the requirement for industry experience as well as a qualification in training and assessment has become a barrier to entry.³²

An emerging theme was the suggestion supporting access to a VET training qualification would assist existing industry professionals gain the necessary qualifications to fill trainer shortages. Programs like Fee-Free TAFE and JobTrainer go some way towards this by improving access to free or low-fee courses. However, this only really benefits a regional community where potential trainers are already locally available or willing to relocate, or where there are high-quality online training options.

“TAFEs operate in over 550 physical locations across Australia, many of them regional and remote. Therefore, it is important TAFE can provide flexible, local solutions for employers that will increase the skills capability in those communities. Students see their TAFE as a pivotal part of the local community. TAFEs support students to gain both skills for employment in critical local industries and to participate in a digitally changing world.”

Jenny Dodd, CEO, TAFE Directors Australia

Commissioner's Note

Improving pay or incentivising trainers to relocate to regional communities, or better yet, supporting industry professionals to train while completing their qualification should be considered as a way of increasing the options for regional providers to find and retain qualified staff.

³⁰ National Skills Commission, [‘Skills Priority List’](#), 2022.

³¹ NCVER, ‘Attracting industry experts to become VET practitioners: a journey, not a destination’, NCVER, Adelaide, 2021: 15.

³² NCVER, ‘Attracting industry experts to become VET practitioners: a journey, not a destination’, 2021: 16.

Support for regional providers and regional students

Providers

“Technology is what will enable all of this. Leveraging technology will be impactful.”

Jo Palmer, Pointer Remote

Updating infrastructure and buying specialised mechanical, IT or other equipment ensures providers are competitive and a ‘provider of choice’. Providers need access to current materials and technology to demonstrate they offer a high quality training environment, and to assure employers that graduates are familiar with contemporary equipment. Providers in the regions operate in communities with smaller populations without economies of scale and can face challenges in this regard. Stakeholders noted operating in smaller population centres makes securing funding for infrastructure or upgrades more difficult with less access to industry or philanthropic investors.

Many smaller regional towns only have one education provider (if at all) and these are not always a TAFE, tending to be a single or mix of private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and/or adult and community education (ACE) providers. In some regional communities, the employment service provider is the only RTO, offering a critical service and safety net for those requiring assistance with foundational skills, upskilling or support applying for jobs. Private RTOs and ACE providers are integral to that area’s education and training needs. It is worth considering that a ‘one size fits all’ approach does not necessarily work across metropolitan and RRR areas, requiring flexibility and a tailored method to meet the needs of RRR communities. **(Issue for Consideration 8 refers)**

“Independent RTOs support 85.4 per cent of remote, rural and regional students in skills training, particularly in critical areas such as resources and infrastructure – where more than nine-in-ten students study with independent RTOs.

These independent RTOs, which do the heavy lifting in delivering higher level and complex qualifications, must continue to be supported by governments so that they can deliver quality outcomes for remote, rural and regional students.”

Troy Williams, CEO, Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia

Commissioner’s Note

There is an opportunity to support all providers, recognising the social good offered by those servicing RRR areas, to ensure all providers can meet costs, provide equipment and continue to deliver courses particularly in areas of community need.

Students

Studying for a qualification does not mean a student's caring, financial or other responsibilities disappear. For mature students or mid-career changers, completing study for the first time or returning to study while balancing family and financial commitments is hard. As mentioned elsewhere in this report; flexible, affordable child care is a vital part of the story and a barrier to further study consistently raised by stakeholders.

Several themes emerged this year on the student experience in RRR VET studies. Providers noted it can be difficult for smaller education institutions to offer a broad range of student support services such as academic, wellbeing or financial support. Improving access to support through increased online options, or a framework for smaller providers within a region to collaboratively offer access to shared support services would be helpful. Stakeholders also pointed out there are few transport options for VET students in RRR areas. School students can use state or local government provided school buses and this access generally ends after high school. In regional communities with limited or no public transport, without a car or a license your options for participating in further education reduce considerably. Exploring opportunities to increase transport options would support RRR VET students to enrol, participate in, and succeed in their studies **(Issue for Consideration 10 refers)**.

A useful component of VET is hands-on workplace learning. This can be challenging in regional communities, where access to work placements can be limited with fewer employers taking on trainees. Alternative options like virtual or remote placements or intensive placements (maybe in cities or larger regional centres) over shorter periods of time could be considered to fill this gap.

The decision to enrol in a VET qualification is an important one for any future student and is easier to navigate with clear information on pathways from education and training to employment. Feedback from stakeholders showed this is not always the case, particularly between government and non-government training organisations, fee and loan arrangements and enrolment requirements. Up to date, accurate and tailored careers information would support this, unfortunately this can be difficult to access for people in RRR communities.³³

For those in school, decisions on training and education pathways are expected to be made while they are busy completing their senior studies. Demands on students' time can be considerable between assignments, exams and study requirements, and future-focused decisions can be required in short timeframes, with little time for consideration in an already overwhelming period. Add to this the many influences on student decision-making, such as parents, caregivers and teachers, many of whom may not themselves have the first-hand experience or knowledge on navigating options. Making this decision-making period easier with clear, straightforward information would be welcomed by students and their parents. **(Issue for Consideration 14 refers)**

³³ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, '[Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System](#)', *The Joyce Review*, Canberra, 2019: 1-177.

Commissioner's Note

Improving the tools for parents, teachers and prospective students to access information on potential VET pathways would support how young people are informed on the full breadth of education and training opportunities available.

The opportunity to complete a VET qualification at school can provide young people with a head start in their career. VET Delivered to Secondary Students (VETDSS) links school students with accessible employment opportunities, a qualification, and a visible pathway to further education and training.

The Commissioner led a project in 2021-22 investigating the delivery of VET to secondary students in RRR areas; the project identified opportunities to improve the success of programs in regional communities. Consultation with over 80 stakeholders in the project found VETDSS programs in RRR communities can be a beneficial addition to secondary schooling, and are highly regarded by regional schools, employers and participants, often more so than in metropolitan areas.

The project report echoes the feedback from regional VET stakeholders, including the challenges faced by RRR students and providers. It found consideration should be given to funding arrangements supporting RRR providers to build on the success of VETDSS. This includes providing incentives for VET trainers to work in regional communities and supporting flexible ways for students to complete work experience placements.

Skilling the future

According to the National Skills Commission, most new jobs are likely to require post-school qualifications. The Commission also found VET qualifications are an essential ingredient in meeting this demand.³⁴ Those living in RRR Australia are an incredible resource and should be supported to obtain a broad range of skills, knowledge and training to ensure they can participate in the jobs of the future.

Homegrown, VET qualified students are valuable to local and emerging industries. Opportunities for VET graduates to participate in transforming and growing industries, such as green energy and technological advancement in agriculture, supply chain logistics, manufacturing and digital industries should be embraced.³⁵ This requires forward thinking and ensuring RRR communities are considered and included in planning for the industries of the future, specifically, through locally-available education and training **(Issue for Consideration 9 refers)**. The world of work is fast changing, requiring transferrable skills and knowledge. Local business councils and education providers could improve availability of emerging industry and training opportunities in RRR Australia. Opportunities such as microcredentials will support the capacity of communities to train in, and benefit from, emerging technologies and industries.

VET graduates have an important role to play in Australia's current workforce needs, particularly industries under workforce pressure. Jobs in sectors including health care and social assistance, community work, IT, education and hospitality are anticipated to grow.³⁶ An agile RRR VET sector that can respond to the changing needs of a regional workforce will contribute to Australia's success now and into the future. Jobs and Skills Australia (established in October 2022) provides an opportunity to consider the unique labour market and skills supply issues outside of Australia's capital cities **(Issue for Consideration 15 refers)**.

Commissioner's Note

Supporting RRR VET providers to align course offerings with emerging industries would increase the regional skilled workforce, meaning RRR communities share in the benefits of local growth industries.

34 National Skills Commission, 'Employment outlook (five years to November 2026)', *Australian Government*, 2022.

35 Department of the Treasury, 'Jobs and Skills Summit Issues Paper', *Australian Government*, 2022: 10-11.

36 National Skills Commission, 'Employment outlook (five years to November 2026)', 2022.

CASE STUDY: South Australia Remote Community Pilot

The South Australia Remote Community Pilot (Pilot) is providing important English language, literacy, numeracy, and digital skills (LLND) training to the far west coast communities of Ceduna, Koonibba, Scotdesco, Yalata and Oak Valley. The Pilot is delivered locally by EyrePlus, a First Nations led organisation with Australian Employment and Training Solutions. The Pilot has been designed to meet local community needs, with EyrePlus involving each of their community Boards and community members in the co-design of the program.

“While it takes time to get the right people locally, the success of the Pilot is because the trainers are the right fit for the region.”

EyrePlus

Learners work with EyrePlus to establish individual learning plans, which include the goals and interests that improving their LLND skills will help them to pursue.

To date learners who participated in the Pilot and improved their skills have:

- Gained employment
- Completed accredited VET units (Certificate II Resources and Infrastructure and Certificate II Conservation and Eco-system Management)
- Completed accredited surf rescue training units with Surf Life Saving SA which supported the provision of beach activities for the Koonibba Youth Hub and After School Care Programs
- Obtained Learner Driver Permits, overcoming a significant barrier to people being able to enter and maintain employment and training.

“I am grateful for what this program has done for me. It helped me at the right time! I have gained skills, qualifications, and my licence - things I never would have dreamed of achieving. I am about to start my first ever job and a career in mining. I have never felt this good about myself before!”

Participating learner

Feedback from the communities is that this approach has the capacity to change the lives of the learners and their immediate and extended families, within and around the Region. It will also grow community capacity which ultimately leads to personal growth and sustainable employment for learners.

HIGHER EDUCATION



Going to university is a life-changing decision. It opens the door to a wide range of career options and evidence shows a university education can lead to better-paid employment and improved social wellbeing for the individual and their community.³⁷ For many students living in our regions, they are the first in their family to go to university. This opportunity must be within everyone's reach, no matter where they come from. Unfortunately, the Napthine Review highlighted a clear country-city divide in participation and attainment rates for tertiary education, with those living in RRR areas less than half as likely as their city counterparts to obtain a university degree by the time they are 35 years old. The stubborn persistence of this divide has been a recurring theme in discussions with stakeholders this year.

Just as Australia's RRR communities are an exceptional place to grow up, they are an exceptional place to study. Equally important are the economic, social and productivity benefits university educated, skilled graduates bring to regional communities, and the nation more broadly. An investment in regional higher education, and its institutions, is an investment in the competitiveness and productivity of our regional communities.

It is pleasing to see considerable investment already underway in our regional institutions. For example, many universities are headquartering in regional towns or establishing satellite campuses in RRR Australia. These institutions are significant economic and social contributors to Australia's regions. Innovative programs, like the RUCs, are also expanding local learning landscapes. This all means RRR students have more options to study, without needing to move; especially as we know the costs of relocating to attend university can be substantial.³⁸ We know from Regional University Network (RUN) data, a student educated in the region often stays in the region to pursue their career and raise their family (69 per cent of RUN bachelor-level graduates work in regional Australia).³⁹ This is great news for country Australia.

"Rural health professionals in a community can help that community to thrive, both by keeping the community healthy, and by contributing economically as employers and as a magnet for other industry to a region. When rural and remote students are given the opportunity to continue their education in a rural community, they are far more likely to return to work in such communities after they graduate; thus, providing education for health professionals in a rural community contributes to the current wellbeing and to the future strength of that and similar or more remote communities."

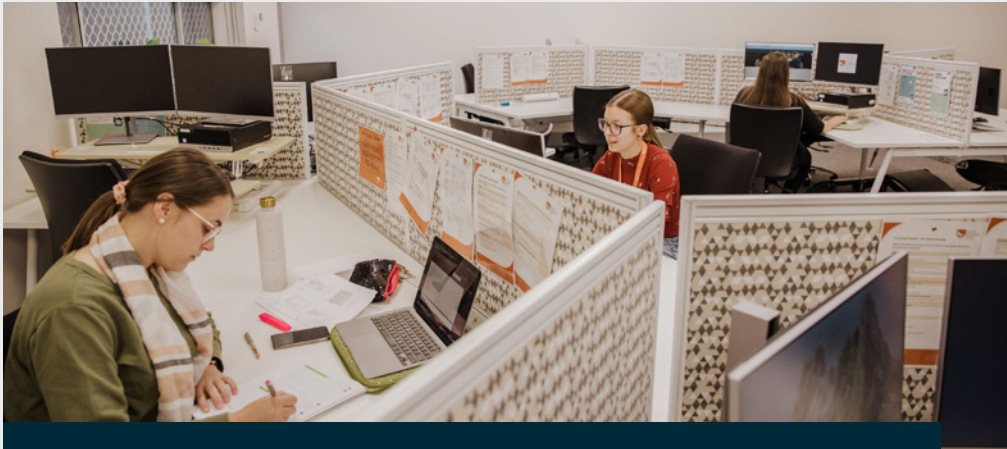
Adjunct Professor Ruth Stewart, National Rural Health Commissioner

37 Department of Education, '[Benefits of Educational Attainment](#)', Canberra, 2019: 1.

38 Commonwealth of Australia, '[National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy](#)', 2019: 24.

39 Regional Universities Network (RUN), '[Economic Impact of the Regional Universities Network](#)', *Nous Group*, 2020: 11.

An ongoing theme raised by stakeholders and in the Napthine Review, is the importance of aspiration. This is the starting point for making the decision to start higher education. Thoughtful policy settings, like improving access to careers advice and student mentoring programs can grow aspiration; aspiration does not need to be inherent in all would-be university students from a young age. For aspiration to flourish, regional students need to see a clear path from school towards a degree with more university-educated role models visibly studying and working in their communities. Put simply, 'you cannot be what you cannot see'. Aspiration is only the first step. Creating the settings for students to not only aspire, but to develop the self-belief they can go further in their studies and be successful in higher education and employment is the main objective.



CASE STUDY – Regional University Centres (RUC) Program

The [RUC program](#) is a great example of innovation and how to avoid a 'one size fits all' approach for studying in RRR communities. The centres improve access to higher education and build aspiration in the regions. They put local community at the centre and connect stakeholders like education providers (schools, VET and higher education), local industry/employers and community groups.

The centres provide facilities (study spaces, IT) and support (administrative and learning support) for RRR students studying via distance at any Australian tertiary education provider, meaning students stay local while benefitting from all aspects provided by the RUCs, including the 'human element' often missing from online study.

There are currently 26 RUCs in operation, in every state and the Northern Territory (with a further 8 to be established in 2023). As each centre reflects its unique local context, no two Centres are the same. They span from larger regional centres like Albany, WA and Goulburn, NSW, to very remote communities in Arnhem Land, NT.

Uni Hub Spencer Gulf (Uni Hub), South Australia: works closely with the community, schools, tertiary providers, and industry to support local students and provide tertiary courses addressing specific skills needs and shortages in the Upper Spencer Gulf region.

In 2021, Uni Hub celebrated its first 7 Bachelor of Nursing 'supported course' graduates resulting from Uni Hub's partnership with CQUniversity. All graduates continue to live and work in RRR communities, in much needed nursing jobs. Recently, Uni Hub partnered with CQUniversity to deliver Australia's first university-level traineeship, the Associate Degree in Engineering, following extensive consultation with local industry on the skills needed for their workforce.

Continued on next page...

Country Universities Centre (CUC) Balonne, Queensland: located nearly 500km from the nearest university campus with a small population, this centre has exceeded expectations currently supporting 71 students from approximately 30 different institutions. The centre's satellite site (a pilot for the RUC program) in Dirranbandi provides access to higher education for a community of just over 600 residents.

"The CUC ... provides locals with the professional hub, on par with all the major universities in metropolitan areas, but in our home community. This allows students to pursue their studies in a community they are already immersed in. Furthermore, it allows working aged professionals to upskill without having to make any major changes in their lives."

CUC Balonne student.

Wuyagiba Regional Study Hub, Northern Territory: in south-east Arnhem Land, this Hub provides a university pathway program through Macquarie University focused on an exchange of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal knowledge. It employs cultural and academic experts to teach on-country, and has a curriculum focused on cultural content taught by Elders with academic skills woven in. The Centre provides accommodation and facilities for students to live and study on country during the 10-week microcredential course, which runs twice per year. Since 2019, 23 students have gone on to university-level studies at Macquarie University after completing the pathway program. The first Wuyagiba alumni is expected to graduate with a full Bachelor degree in Semester 1 2023.

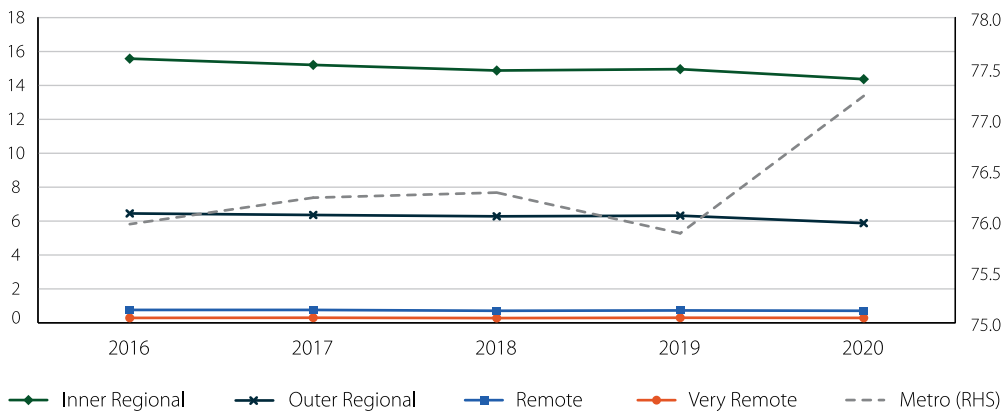
"My dream is to be the first Aboriginal teacher from my community. I think it will really happen."

Wuyagiba student.

Accessing higher education in RRR Australia

The fact remains there are proportionally less students from the regions in higher education compared to those from the cities. This has not improved to any great extent over recent years, with the access rate in 2020 for RRR students no better than it was in 2016 (Figure 5 refers).

Figure 5: Student access rate by regionality (2016-2020)



Source: Department of Education, Higher Education Statistics, 2020

At the time of writing, measuring the current access for RRR is complicated. The substantial investment following the response to the Napthine Review, intended to shift the dial on regional access and attainment, did not (in the main) commence until 2021.

No doubt the COVID-19 lockdowns and border closures also influenced low 2020 access rates. The access rate for metropolitan students, however, increased in 2020, suggesting pandemic effects were experienced differently depending on where you live. Labour market upheavals and changes in income support during the pandemic may have been more beneficial for metropolitan students to enter university, while border closures may have influenced RRR students to delay starting university.

“Lower participation rates in rural and regional areas means that universities have to be inventive when it comes to enabling and credit-bearing pathways from TAFE to university. While there have been some significant success stories, there remain some blockages in the system that revised policy and funding settings could help to overcome.”

Professor John Dewar, Vice-Chancellor La Trobe University

Supporting the regions and regional students

Students

One of the leading issues raised by stakeholders is the substantial financial cost on RRR students to go to university. When you consider regional students relocate from their family home for university at a rate around 3 times higher compared to those from the cities this creates a significant barrier.⁴⁰ The Naphthine Review found RRR parents consistently cited a figure of \$20,000 to \$30,000 per year as reflective of the accommodation and living costs associated with a student relocating for university. Students from major cities, where there are often several universities nearby, do not bear this cost to anywhere near the same extent. The project investigating student support services found through their consultation with current RRR students that many of these students identified financial issues as the most concerning barrier for them.⁴¹

Stakeholders like the Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA) have welcomed increased financial support, like the Tertiary Access Payment, to tackle this financial burden. However, payments are not universally available and navigating eligibility criteria and application processes can be challenging **(Issue for Consideration 12 refers)**.

Commissioner's Note

More effective promotion of available financial assistance and streamlining the application process would mean RRR students are better informed on what is available, before and during studies.

As noted in the Early Childhood Education and Care Chapter, access to flexible child care is critical for those wanting to work and study, and stakeholders reflected this barrier persists in RRR areas when accessing higher education. This is keenly felt by mid-career changers and mature students, often women, and is more prevalent in RRR areas. This is shown in the 2022 RUC data that identified 75 percent of students were female and 56 per cent were over 25 years old.⁴² This cohort is regularly overlooked in policy designs that tend to focus on school leavers.

Stakeholders also raised the importance of reliable internet connectivity. A project investigating internet connectivity for RRR tertiary students is scheduled to commence in late 2022. This will report on the extent that internet access affects participation and success in tertiary studies for RRR students. The project will investigate the technological solutions currently available and highlight local approaches supporting internet access for tertiary RRR students.

40 Productivity Commission, [The demand driven university system: a mixed report card](#), Canberra, 2019.

41 Department of Education, 'Final Report, Research into support services for tertiary students in RRR areas', *Outpost Consulting*, 2021: 23.

42 Department of Education, 'Regional University Centre program Data 2022', Canberra, 2022.

Institutions

Regional universities are important drivers of regional economic and population growth, providing employment opportunities and attracting students to and retaining them in the region. The Regional University Network (RUN) has consistently highlighted regional universities face additional costs not experienced to the same extent by metropolitan-based universities that can access philanthropic or other investment and operate in higher-density population centres.

“Regional universities are anchor institutions with our communities at the heart of all that we do. We are not just nice to have for our communities, we are essential enablers of regional human capital and resources and contribute to the educational opportunities, economic prospects, and community capabilities for the third of Australians who live in non-metropolitan Australia. Regional universities are crucial in ensuring Australia’s continued national economic growth and prosperity through our world-leading teaching, our impactful research and our contributions to the social and cultural wellbeing of regional Australia.”

Alec Webb, Executive Director, Regional Universities Network (RUN)

A measure implemented by the Government in response to the findings of the Napthine Review to grow regional campuses (3.5 per cent increase in funding for commencing non-medical bachelor places at regional campuses) has meant regional university campuses receive additional funding through the Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS). While this is welcome support, stakeholders are concerned over ‘capping’ funding allocated to universities under the 2021 Job-ready Graduates Reform. While universities can enrol students above the funding allocated in the CGS, they will not receive additional CGS funding for ‘over-enrolments’. Some regional university providers note this prevents them from enrolling additional students, particularly in areas of local need, like healthcare or teaching.

Commissioner’s Note

The Accord is well placed to examine policy settings such as CGS and the Regional Loading Program. Increasing the capacity of regional universities to enrol students in priority areas would contribute to a regional workforce that meets Australia’s future needs.

In the meantime, the additional 20,000 Commonwealth supported places (CSPs) available in 2023 and 2024 is a positive step; members of RUN received more than 2,500 additional CSPs over the next two years, resulting in more than an additional \$69 million in funding.⁴³ This positions regional universities at the centre of training the future RRR workforce, addresses skill shortages and supports students from under-represented groups obtain a university education.

43 RUN, [‘RUN welcomes announcement of additional student places’](#), 24 October 2022.

As noted by Professor Ruth Stewart, training health professionals in RRR areas has multiple benefits for students and their communities, with graduates more likely to practice in RRR towns after completing their training. RRR communities need a greater number of health professionals, and locally trained graduates offer a great resource.

Universities with regional medical schools noted the strong demand for places and highlighted this is not met currently through allocations of Commonwealth supported places. For example, La Trobe University reports applications to its Rural Medical Training Pathway operating in partnership with the University of Melbourne tripled to over 600 between 2019 and 2022 for its allocation of 15 CSPs. Charles Sturt University reported over 750 applications in 2022 for 37 CSPs. Recognising the contribution of regional institutions such as the Murray-Darling Medical Schools Network in training doctors regionally and considering whether current allocations meet the needs of regional medical schools to train a future RRR workforce, could be considered through the Accord (**Issue for Consideration 11 refers**).

Submissions to the Napthine Review and stakeholder discussions also suggest a need to improve existing and build new infrastructure at regional universities.⁴⁴ The Napthine Review noted this would allow regional universities to provide world-class teaching and learning facilities, clinical and research facilities, and student accommodation, in turn supporting growth in Australia's regions. Regional universities report they struggle securing co-funding for infrastructure projects, compared to metropolitan universities.



Left to right – Vice-Chancellor and President of La Trobe University, Professor John Dewar AO; the Regional Education Commissioner, the Hon Fiona Nash; Associate Professor Ing Kong, Assoc Prof, Manufacturing Engineering La Trobe; Dr Akesh Kakarla, Research Fellow Engineering and Dr Siti Norasmah Surip, Research Fellow Engineering.

Commissioner's Note

Further discussion on opening opportunities for regional universities to access support for infrastructure projects is needed. This would benefit students and the region through facilitating investment, attracting skilled professionals and increasing industry partnerships.

⁴⁴ RUN, '[Submission from the Regional Universities Network on the National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy](#)', 2019: 9.

Outcomes for regional graduates and communities

Interestingly, RRR graduates have comparatively strong employment outcomes (74 per cent in full time employment compared to 68 per cent of metropolitan graduates) and make a significant contribution to regional and national economies.⁴⁵ Yet their completion rate still falls short of their city counterparts (a rate over nine years of 61.5 per cent for remote students, 67.7 per cent for regional compared to 72.9 per cent in cities).⁴⁶

The regions need more skilled workers and recruiting skilled staff has been difficult in regional areas over the past three years.⁴⁷ While the regions have seen considerable internal migration during the pandemic, regional education providers and representative groups are concerned about the migration of skilled young people from the regions to the cities. They point out once a student relocates to a metropolitan area, they often do not return. This 'brain drain' is a significant loss for regional communities.

Encouraging regional education institutions and industry to remain connected with university students during their studies and highlighting employment pathways will support and encourage graduates to live and work in our regions. Better connection between industry, regional universities, communities and employers means graduates can see more opportunities to live and work in our diverse and thriving regional communities. **(Issue for Consideration 13 refers)**

Commissioner's Note

Many students from the regions move to the cities to study and often never return or return later in life. Considering options for a 'pathway home' may keep students connected to the regional community they left and make it easy for them to return.

45 Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching, '[2021 Graduate Outcomes Survey](#)', Canberra, 2021: 8.

46 Department of Education, 'Higher Education Statistics', Canberra, 2020.

47 National Skills Commission, '[Recruitment Insights Report September 2022](#)', *Experiences and Outlook Survey*, Canberra, September 2022: 5.

A note on the Australian Universities Accord

The Accord process will review the higher education system and consider how higher education can meet the needs of Australians into the future. The process itself will take 12 months to consider and report on the future of higher education in Australia, including a wide-ranging review consulting with universities, unions, students and their families. This process, backed by broad and aspirational Terms of Reference, is a strong statement on the importance of the sector.

On 16 November 2022, the Government announced a panel of eminent Australians to undertake the review. This panel includes the Commissioner to ensure the voice of regional students, communities, industry and institutions are heard.

As the Accord will be the primary mechanism for review and reform in the higher education sector, issues for consideration from this report should be considered within this context. Practically, several evaluations scheduled for 2023 will take place in the context of the Accord, including an evaluation of the measures implemented in response to the Napthine Review, an evaluation of the Tertiary Access Payment, an evaluation of the RUCs, and a review of the Job-ready Graduates measures.

(Issue for Consideration 11 refers)

The Naphthine Review and related measures

In response to the findings of the Naphthine Review, the former Government implemented a range of measures to support RRR tertiary attainment, and the capacity of regional institutions:

- \$177.8 million for a new \$5,000 Tertiary Access Payment to encourage and assist regional and remote students to access tertiary study immediately following Year 12
- \$146 million to increase Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding for regional university campuses by 3.5 per cent a year, compared to 2.5 per cent for high-growth metropolitan campuses and 1 per cent for low-growth metropolitan campuses
- \$17.1 million for demand driven Commonwealth supported places for First Nations students from regional and remote areas
- \$48.8 million to enhance the research collaboration capacity of regional universities
- \$21 million to establish up to eight additional RUCs; and to strengthen the existing Centres program
- \$7.1 million for the Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program to enable universities and Centres to deliver higher education outreach initiatives to enable the aspiration of students in RRR Australia
- \$0.7 million for improvements to Fares Allowance, administered through Services Australia
- \$6 million to establish and support a Commissioner.

Evaluation of the Naphthine measures

In 2023, there will be a formal evaluation of the implementation of the Naphthine measures looking at the success and effectiveness of individual measures and identify what adjustments are needed. This would include the lower-than-expected uptake of the Tertiary Access Payment, and whether demand driven places for RRR First Nations students has resulted in an increase in RRR First Nations students in higher education. It will also consider the relative influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the resulting effects on the higher education sector, the labour market and student choices as well as changes to learning environments since 2020.

It is likely this evaluation will be aligned with the Accord process.

Assessment of Naphthine measures

All measures commenced in 2021. As a detailed assessment of the success of the measures will be managed through the formal evaluation, this initial Report to Government does not examine the effectiveness of the measures, rather it provides a status update of implementation. Reviewing the measures implemented in response to the Naphthine Review must consider that policy responses require time to take effect. Statistical analysis of outcomes from the measures is difficult to determine at present, as data to support analysis of the impact of measures such as student enrolments is released following reporting by universities and a process of verification. At time of writing, verified student data for 2021 is not yet available. Available data on measures is included at Appendix E.

FUTURE WORK

The Commissioner will undertake a range of work over 2023-2024 across early childhood, schools, vocational education and training, and higher education. She will have particular regard to access and outcomes for First Nations students, families and communities.

Early Childhood Education and Care

Priority	Detail	Timing
Support the Productivity Commission's review into the early childhood education and care sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where requested, the Commissioner will provide advice and support on RRR matters to the Productivity Commission's review into the early childhood education and care sector. The review will examine ways to improve affordability and access for families, including considering a universal 90 per cent Child Care Subsidy rate. 	Review is due to commence in the first half of 2023 and report in 2024
Research the availability of developmental assessments and early intervention support services for RRR children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further research on developmental assessments for RRR children to determine availability and identify barriers to access. 	2023-2024

Schools

Priority	Detail	Timing
Support the need for an increased RRR teacher workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where appropriate, the Commissioner will support the joint Commonwealth and state and territory priority to increase the teaching workforce in the regions. 	2023
Increase support services in RRR schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further research on the need for additional support services in RRR schools through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> determining the services RRR schools require additional access to examining the effect of insufficient access to services on students' health and wellbeing exploring the financial effect on schools to self-fund required services 	2023-2024

Investigate the current models for delivering senior school subjects in RRR areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognising the inequity of access to required subjects in senior school between RRR and metropolitan students, further research on access issues and explore: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – partnerships between schools – expanding delivery models 	2023
Research project on retention of RRR students to Year 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Commissioner will lead a research project investigating best-practice methods of retaining RRR students to Year 12 will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – identify effective interventions and approaches supporting Yr 12 attainment – provide examples of approaches to be shared with schools 	Anticipated to report mid 2023
Supporting the development of a Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Commissioner will support the department to design and implement the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program to ensure the program supports families in RRR communities in need of financial support to attend boarding schools. 	2023-2024

Vocational Education and Training

Priority	Detail	Timing
Reduce barriers for RRR VET delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop targeted policy to reduce barriers for RRR VET delivery especially where they affect occupations in skill shortage, including, but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – minimum class size requirements – suitability of funding for RRR providers – insufficient placement opportunities 	Proposed for 2024
Research project mapping tertiary access programs and career advice in RRR areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – explore the availability of tertiary access programs and careers advice in RRR areas – consider the level of awareness of tertiary access programs and careers advice 	2023-2024

Higher Education		
Priority	Detail	Timing
The Accord	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Australian Government is delivering a review of Australia's higher education system, led by an independent expert panel. In 2023, the Commissioner will work closely with her fellow panellists, the department and the sector on the creation of an Australian Universities Accord. 	2023
Evaluation of the measures responding to the Napthine Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There will be a formal evaluation of the implementation of the Napthine measures looking at the success and effectiveness of individual measures and identifying what, if any, adjustments may be needed. It is likely this evaluation will be aligned with the Accord process. 	Due to report mid 2023
Research project on Internet access for RRR students research project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project will investigate internet requirements of RRR students and will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – explore the internet requirements of RRR tertiary students and approaches of providers and organisations to support internet access – build on existing work such as the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review – suggest ways to support tertiary students access internet to meet their educational needs 	Due to report mid 2023
Research RRR graduate and employment outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Further research on the benefit of education on RRR employment outcomes, considering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – income, job security, full- and part-time hours and casual employment, as well as hours worked – the effect of further study on employment outcomes 	2023-2024
Research project on geographic classification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project will explore geographic classifications and regional definitions as they relate to education and education services. 	2023-2024
Availability and effectiveness of financial support for RRR students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Further research on current RRR tertiary student financial supports, considering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – level of awareness – ease of accessibility – effect on students' decisions relating to course/location choices – level of effectiveness in supporting access and participation – supporting equitable access 	2023

Cross-Sector		
Priority	Detail	Timing
National approach to regional education strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">As part of a larger piece of work, the Commissioner will consider a national approach to improve access to education and educational attainment in the regions. For this, the Commissioner will examine existing states and territories' regional education strategies with a view to developing a national regional education strategy.	Ongoing

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Cross-sector research projects

Evaluating support services for RRR students in tertiary education		
Napthine Review	Status	Description
Recommendation 3, Action 13	<p>Completed December 2021</p> <p>The report will be provided to the Government</p>	<p>The Napthine Review highlighted students from RRR areas face additional challenges in successfully transitioning to tertiary education and completing their studies, as reflected in higher attrition rates for students from inner RRR areas compared to their metropolitan peers.</p> <p>The project developed a current understanding of the support services provided to RRR students at tertiary providers (both VET and university) to inform future policy development. The project included development of a Good Practice Framework to support knowledge sharing within and between providers with examples of practice and resources to support provider practice.</p> <p>The final report draws on desktop research as well as consultation with 10 peak bodies, 73 education providers (universities, non-university higher education and VET providers) and focus groups and interviews with 70 students.</p>

Mapping the current provision of tertiary access programs, including careers advice in RRR areas

First phase: VET Delivered to Secondary Students

Napthine Review	Status	Description
Recommendation 4, Action 20	<p>First phase completed July 2022</p> <p>The report will be provided to the Government</p>	<p>This project investigated the provision of VET to secondary students in RRR areas. It identified cases of good practice and how programs can support students to successfully transition to post-school education or employment. Consultations built on the desktop research to gather stakeholder insights into VET Delivered to Secondary Students (VETDSS) in RRR areas. Consultations were conducted through a survey and targeted one-on-one consultations and focus groups with a total of 680 survey responses received and over 80 stakeholders consulted.</p> <p>The final report highlighted important challenges for VETDSS in RRR areas including access to qualified trainers and assessors, lack of funding, geographic access to VET programs, insufficient student numbers to form classes, and limited equipment and resources. A range of suggestions were made to improve access to VET programs in RRR areas, including reviewing minimum class number requirements and funding per student, incentivising VET trainers and assessors to work in RRR areas and implementing virtual work placements to allow these students to obtain work experience.</p>

Second phase: Mapping availability of career information and tertiary access programs

Napthine Review	Status	Description
Recommendation 4, Action 20	2023-2024	<p>This phase will investigate the way RRR schools can prepare students for success by identifying and mapping existing careers advice and the availability of tertiary access programs delivered within schools and communities in RRR areas.</p> <p>The Napthine Review highlighted improving career advice is critical to improving the participation and attainment of RRR students in tertiary education as career advice is often cited as a major factor in RRR students' decisions about future education, training and job prospects. Students in RRR areas often experience increased challenges around access to career advice and information as there may be fewer opportunities for these students to gain exposure to a wide range of industries, employers and career options in comparison to their metropolitan peers.</p>

Investigating best-practice methods of retaining RRR students to Year 12

Napthine Review	Status	Description
Recommendation 4, Action 21	Due to report mid 2023	<p>The Napthine and Halsey Reviews found students from RRR areas experience higher attrition rates due to ongoing inequities throughout their study, leading to less students completing Year 12. This project will examine the extent to which interventions and approaches influence the engagement and retention of RRR students to Year 12, including identifying and analysing common characteristics.</p> <p>The project will be undertaken in consultation with the department and stakeholders, including state and territory education authorities, schools, peak body groups including parent peak bodies and students and other organisations that may work with this cohort to support students complete their schooling. This project aims to identify effective interventions and approaches for RRR schools to engage and retain students to Year 12.</p>

Investigating the internet requirements of RRR tertiary students and how to best meet their needs

Napthine Review	Status	Description
Recommendation 1, Action 4	Due to report mid 2023	<p>The Napthine Review found access to modern internet is crucial to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for students, particularly in RRR locations where issues with affordable access and reliability are frequently reported.</p> <p>This project will identify current internet access and capacity needs of RRR tertiary students, possible technological solutions for barriers that currently exist, and how tertiary education providers are currently supporting students facing internet accessibility challenges to successfully participate in their education. This project will complement reviews like the Regional Telecommunications Review investigating issues with internet accessibility and coverage in regional communities. The project will be undertaken in consultation with the department and stakeholders, including state and territory education authorities, schools, peak body groups including industry and other organisations.</p>

Developing an education specific RRR geographical classification tool

Naphine Review	Status	Description
Recommendation 7, Action 33	2023-2024	The Naphine Review found the current geographical classification system used by the ABS is not designed specifically for use in relation to education and, as a result, there are shortcomings that make it insufficient for the purpose of targeting effort to under-served regions and monitoring the Naphine Review. This project will explore geographic classifications and regional definitions as they relate to education and education services.

Appendix B: Terms of Reference

Overview

The Australian Government recognises students in regional, rural and remote areas face challenges and barriers to accessing high quality education and successfully transitioning to employment.

The *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* (Halsey Review) found the key challenge for regional, rural and remote education is ensuring every young person has access to high quality schooling and opportunities, regardless of location or circumstances.

The *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy* (Naphthine Review) found individuals living in regional, rural and remote areas are less than half as likely as their city counterparts to obtain a university degree by the time they are 35. This has a significant effect on the ability of people living in regional areas to pursue their choice in career and limits their lifetime earnings.

The Government accepted all recommendations of the Halsey and Naphthine Reviews.

Recommendation 7, Action 32 of the Naphthine Review recommended establishing a Regional Education Commissioner (the Commissioner) to support effective implementation of the Naphthine Review through partnerships and coordinate efforts across governments, local communities, education providers and employers. The Commissioner will bring together the efforts of Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments to provide an ongoing national focus on regional, rural and remote education outcomes.

The Commissioner will have a broad remit across a student's educational lifespan, from early childhood education and care to higher education, and will provide a national focus for regional, rural and remote education.

The primary goal of the Commissioner is to at least halve the disparity in tertiary education outcomes between regional and metropolitan students by 2030.

Key duties and responsibilities

- Be a champion for regional, rural and remote education, keeping issues at the forefront for government and the community and articulating their relevance to broader policy agendas.
- Work with regional, rural and remote communities, education providers, employers and across all tiers of government and stakeholders to improve education access, participation and outcomes.
- Provide advice to the Australian Government to ensure it is achieving maximum impact and value for money from investments and initiatives in regional, rural and remote education.
- Provide advice to the Australian Government on effective and efficient strategies to improve access, participation and attainment in regional, rural and remote education in Australia.
- Advocate for the improvement of education policies spanning early childhood education and care, schools, and tertiary education to better support regional, rural and remote students.
- Engage with all tiers of government and stakeholders to improve education outcomes of students from equity backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students with disability from regional, rural and remote areas.
- Oversee projects in response to the recommendations of the Napthine Review, using their findings to inform new policy suggestions to governments.
- Coordinate effort and oversee the implementation and monitoring of the Napthine and Halsey Reviews, providing a national focus for regional, rural and remote education, training and research.

Key deliverables

- An annual report to the Minister for Education, detailed below.
- An annual workplan provided to and agreed by the Minister for Education.
- Oversee a formal evaluation of all measures taken in response to the Napthine Review in 2022–23.
- Provide advice on regional, rural and remote education policy issues spanning early childhood education through to tertiary education, including barriers to access, participation and attainment.
- Engage with regional, rural and remote stakeholders including peak bodies representing parents, students and community bodies and education providers.
- Grow opportunities for vocational education and training (VET) in regional, rural and remote areas by working with Commonwealth, state and territory governments as well as the National Skills Commissioner.
- Build partnerships to enhance the social and economic contribution of higher education, including research, to regional, rural and remote communities.
- Attend conferences, forums, roundtables and other opportunities for engagement with regional, rural and remote communities and stakeholders, as required.

Annual Report

The Commissioner will report annually to the Minister for Education, and the Assistant Minister for Education, as required, on the state of education in the regions. The annual report will include:

- an update on the Australian Government's progress implementing the recommendations of the Napthine and Halsey Reviews
- examples of successful existing initiatives, highlighting cases of best practice
- an analysis of the current, emerging and future education needs of regional, rural and remote areas
- an examination of trends in regional, rural and remote student outcomes
- advice on improving tertiary student achievement, access and attainment using relevant indicators across all education sectors
- a summary of outcomes of projects undertaken in response to the Napthine Review, including any policy recommendations
- a summary of stakeholder engagement and consultations undertaken
- responses to other issues, as required.

Support and Secretariat

The Commissioner is supported by an Executive Assistant as well as a policy secretariat based within the Department of Education.

Appendix C: Consultations

Stakeholders

Early Childhood Education and Care

1. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
 2. Family Day Care Australia
 3. Royal Far West
 4. Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC – National Voice for our Children)
 5. The Front Project
 6. The Smith Family
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Schools

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| 1. Association of Independent Schools of NSW | 14. Future Schools |
| 2. Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience | 15. Gulf Academy |
| 3. Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership | 16. Independent Schools Australia |
| 4. Australian Primary Principals Association | 17. Indigenous Education and Boarding Australia |
| 5. Bendigo Senior Secondary College | 18. Lisa Paul AO PSM, Quality Initial Teacher Education Review |
| 6. Berrigan Rural Schools | 19. National Catholic Education Commission |
| 7. Boarding Schools Expo Australia | 20. Online Formative Assessment Initiative |
| 8. Catholic Education Diocese of Wagga Wagga | 21. Queensland Teachers' Union |
| 9. Central West Leadership Academy | 22. RAISEducation |
| 10. Cleve Area School and Sims Farm, South Australia | 23. State School Teachers' Union of W.A. (Inc.) |
| 11. Coalition of Regional Independent Schools Australia | 24. Teacher Education Expert Panel |
| 12. Edmund Rice Education Australia | 25. Teach for Australia |
| 13. Family Focus Consultancy | 26. The Rockhampton Grammar School |
| | 27. Whitsunday Anglican School |

VET and Tertiary Education

1. TAFE Directors Australia
 2. GOTAFE
 3. Australian Skills Quality Authority
 4. Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia
 5. Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
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Higher Education

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Alphacrucis University College 2. Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities 3. Australian Technology Network 4. Australia's Academic & Research Network 5. Charles Sturt University 6. Council of Australian Postgraduates Associations 7. Country Universities Centre 8. CQUniversity 9. Deakin University 10. Edith Cowan University 11. Endeavour College of Natural Health 12. Geraldton University Centre | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Group of Eight 14. La Trobe University 15. Regional Universities Network 16. Southern Cross University 17. The University of Melbourne 18. Universities Australia 19. University of Canberra 20. University of New England 21. University of New South Wales 22. University of Newcastle 23. University of South Australia 24. University of Tasmania 25. University of the Sunshine Coast |
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Industry and employment

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. AgriFutures 2. Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry 3. Australian Industry Group 4. Australian Pork Limited 5. Business Council of Australia 6. Career Industry Council of Australia 7. Council of Small Business Organisations Australia 8. Hughes <i>et al</i>, uWorkin 9. Human Services Skills Organisation | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Indigenous Business Australia 11. Minerals Council of Australia 12. National Broadband Network Australia 13. National Careers Institute 14. National Centre for Vocational Education Research 15. National Farmers' Federation 16. Pointer Remote 17. Regional Arts Australia 18. Rural Doctors Association of Australia |
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Ministers and MPs

1. Minister for Education, the Hon Jason Clare MP
 2. Assistant Minister for Education and Assistant Minister for Regional Development, Senator the Hon Anthony Chisholm
 3. Former Minister for Regionalisation, Regional Communications and Regional Education, Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie
 4. Former Shadow Minister for Education and Shadow Minister for Women, the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
 5. Former Minister for Employment, Workforce, Skills, Small and Family Business of Australia, the Hon Stuart Robert MP
 6. Former Assistant Minister for Regional Development and Territories, the Hon Nola Marino MP
 7. Minister for Education, Training and Skills South Australia, the Hon Blair Boyer MP
 8. Minister for Education and Training Western Australia, the Hon Sue Ellery MLC
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Department of Education and Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

1. Secretary, Department of Education, Dr Michele Bruniges AM
2. Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood and Child Care Group, Brenton Philp
3. Deputy Secretary, Schools and Youth, Ros Baxter
4. Deputy Secretary, Higher Education Research and International, Tony Cook
5. Deputy Secretary, Skills and Training, Nadine Williams
6. Deputy Secretary, Employment and National Workforce, Nathan Smyth
7. First Assistant Secretary, National System and Performance, Julie Birmingham
8. First Assistant Secretary, Funding and Data Collection Division, Fabian Harding
9. First Assistant Secretary, Improving Student Outcomes Division, Pablo Carpay
10. First Assistant Secretary, Program Payments and Early Learning Division, Anne Twyman
11. First Assistant Secretary, Provider Analytics and Integrity Division, Tristan Reed
12. First Assistant Secretary, Research Division, Dom English
13. First Assistant Secretary, Higher Education Division, Kelly Pearce
14. First Assistant Secretary, Workforce Australia for Business Division, Miranda Lauman

Cross-sector

1. Brotherhood of St Laurence
2. Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
3. Department of Regional NSW
4. Director General, Western Australia Department of Education, Lisa Rodgers
5. Education Services Australia
6. Emeritus Professor John Halsey, author of the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*
7. Emeritus Professor Peter Lee, former member of the Regional Education Expert Advisory Group
8. Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia
9. Fogarty Foundation
10. Ms Caroline Graham, former member of the Regional Education Expert Advisory Group
11. Ms Meredith Wills, former member of the Regional Education Expert Advisory Group
12. National Indigenous Australians Agency
13. National Youth Science Forum
14. New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.
15. North Central Local Learning and Employment Network
16. NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
17. Productivity Commission
18. Regional Australia Institute
19. Regional Development Australia
20. Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia
21. The Hon Dr Denis Napthine, former Chair of the Regional Education Expert Advisory Group
22. Year13

Student, parents and community

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| 1. Alliance of Western Councils, New South Wales | 10. Mayor of Gunnedah Shire Council |
| 2. Australian Rural Leadership Foundation | 11. Mayor of Narromine Shire Council |
| 3. Centre of Resource Excellence (CoRE) Learning Foundation | 12. Isolated Children's Parents' Association |
| 4. Community Colleges Australia | 13. Munarra Limited (Munarra Centre for Regional Excellence) |
| 5. Country Education Partnership | 14. Regional Capitals Australia |
| 6. Country Mayors' Association of New South Wales | 15. Regional Education Support Network |
| 7. Country Women's Association of New South Wales | 16. Regional Queensland Council of Mayors |
| 8. Eleanor McCormack, Locals (Winner of the 2022 ABC Trailblazers Program) | 17. Philippine Ambassador to Australia, Ma. Hellen B. De La Vega |
| 9. Mayor of Forbes Shire Council | 18. Shire of Moora |

Health

1. Australian Rural Medical Academy
2. Indigenous Allied Health Australia
3. Headspace
4. National Rural Health Commissioner, Adjunct Professor Ruth Stewart
5. Royal Flying Doctor Service
6. Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health

Engagements

Visits

1. Bendigo Senior Secondary College (VIC)
 2. Central Queensland University (Rockhampton, QLD)
 3. Charles Sturt University with the Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education (Bathurst, NSW)
 4. La Trobe University, Bendigo Campus (VIC)
 5. Rockhampton Flexible Learning Centre, Edmund Rice Education Australia Flexible Schools Network (Rockhampton, QLD)
 6. University of New England (Armidale, NSW)
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Advisory

1. Regional University Centre 2022 Assessment Panel
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Roundtables

1. **8 March 2022:** Rockhampton Community Roundtable (attended)
2. **24 March 2022:** Mount Gambier Community Roundtable (attended)
3. **25 March 2022:** Mildura with Community Roundtable (attended)
4. **10 May 2022:** Industry Roundtable (hosted)
5. **26 May 2022:** Regional Australia Institute, Regionalisation Roundtable (attended)
6. **3 June 2022:** AgriFutures, Rural Women's Roundtable (attended)

Events

1. **1 March 2022:** Country Education Partnership, Rural Youth Ambassadors Forum (Albury, NSW)
 2. **4 March 2022:** Charles Sturt University, Medical School Opening (Orange, NSW)
 3. **10 March 2022:** Narromine Shire Women's Day (Narromine, NSW)
 4. **31 March 2022:** North Central Local Learning and Employment Network, School to Work Summit (Melbourne, VIC)
 5. **5 April 2022:** Community Colleges Australia, 2022 National Adult and Community Education (ACE) Summit (virtual)
 6. **7 April 2022:** Charles Sturt University, Launch of Smart Regions Report (Dubbo, NSW)
 7. **4 August 2022:** Country Mayors Association of NSW Skills Forum (virtual)
 8. **8 September 2022:** Australian Boarding Schools Summit (Dubbo, NSW)
 9. **29 September 2022:** Charles Sturt University, Collaborative Teachers' Aide Pathway Official Launch (Dubbo, NSW)
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Conferences attended and spoken at

1. **22 February 2022:** Regional Australia Institute, Regions Rising Webinar Series 'Meeting the Demand - Creative Solutions to Regional Workforce Challenges' (virtual)
2. **3 August 2022:** Isolated Children's Parents' Association, 2022 Federal Conference (virtual)
3. **13 October 2022:** National Conference for Regional, Rural and Remote Education 2022 (hosted by the Society for the Provision of Education in Australia) (Barossa Valley, SA)
4. **11 November 2022:** University of Tasmania, Celebrating the Impact of Regional Research and Education (Burnie, TAS)

Appendix D: Progress responding to the Halsey Review

Priority 1: Establishing a national focus for RRR education.		
Recommendations	Implementation	Status
Recommendation 11: Establish a national focus for RRR education, training and research to enhance access, outcomes and opportunities in RRR Australia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Australian Government continues to work with state and territory education departments and other educational authorities to ensure all students can access a high-quality education regardless of where they live. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing – see further detail in Recommendation 6.
Recommendation 11: Establish a national focus for RRR education, training and research to enhance access, outcomes and opportunities in RRR Australia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National Careers Institute (NCI) developed a Regional, Rural and Remote School Leavers information booklet to help young people aged 15 to 24 years with information on education, training and work. It was developed in consultation with a representative sample of RRR students to ensure its relevance and usefulness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During 2023 the NCI will expand the information booklet into a Regional, Rural and Remote School Leavers Information Kit. The RRR kit will be available to download on the NCI's Your Career website and physical copies will be distributed as required.
Recommendation 11: Establish a national focus for RRR education, training and research to enhance access, outcomes and opportunities in RRR Australia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Australian Government departments continue to report annually through the Regional Ministerial Budget Statement on progress in delivering improved access, outcomes and opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing - reporting released with the annual Budget cycle.
Priority 2: Enhancing leadership, teaching, curriculum and assessment.		
Recommendations	Implementation	Status
Recommendation 1: Establish and/or refine processes for ensuring the relevance of the Australian Curriculum and state/territory assessment processes for RRR students and communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Version 9.0 of the Australian Curriculum was endorsed by all Education Ministers on 1 April 2022. State and territory curriculum authorities and school authorities are responsible for the implementation of the Australian Curriculum in their schools in line with system and jurisdictional policies and requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing - the Government will continue to work through the Education Ministers Meeting to implement curriculum and assessment initiatives, and support programs and incentives to place quality teachers and leaders into RRR schools. Jurisdictions can implement the revised curriculum from 2023.

<p>Recommendation 2: Ensure RRR challenges and opportunities are explicitly included in the selection and pre-service education of teachers, initial appointment processes and their on-going professional support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On 15 April 2021, the Government launched the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review. The Expert Panel, chaired by Lisa Paul AO PSM, consulted widely with stakeholders and undertook a number of engagement activities including webinars, focus groups, surveys and workshops. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed – the Final Report of the Review was released in February 2022. The Government allocated funding to respond to the Review in the October 2022-23 Budget. Education Ministers will consider the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan in December 2022.
<p>Recommendation 2: Ensure RRR challenges and opportunities are explicitly included in the selection and pre-service education of teachers, initial appointment processes and their on-going professional support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From 2024, the Australian Government will provide undergraduate and post graduate bursaries of up to \$40,000 (\$10,000 a year over four years for undergraduate students and \$10,000 a year over two years for postgraduate students) to attract high achieving students into teaching, including students from RRR areas. A top up payment of \$2,000 will be available for bursary recipients who undertake their final year professional experience placement in a remote area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government provided funding for the bursaries program in the October 2022-23 Budget. The department is working with the Community Grants Hub to deliver the program. Bursaries will be available from 2024.
<p>Recommendation 2: Ensure RRR challenges and opportunities are explicitly included in the selection and pre-service education of teachers, initial appointment processes and their on-going professional support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government committed \$28.7 million from 2018-2022 to deliver the High Achieving Teachers (HAT) Program. This program is delivered by Teach for Australia (TFA) and La Trobe University. Funding to deliver an additional 760 places from 2023 is being provided to TFA and La Trobe University. In addition, the Government has committed to expand the HAT program to support an additional up to 1500 mid-career professionals to retrain as teachers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The department manages current contracts for the HAT Program through funding agreements with TFA and La Trobe University. The expanded HAT program will be developed in the first half of 2023.
<p>Recommendation 2: Ensure RRR challenges and opportunities are explicitly included in the selection and pre-service education of teachers, initial appointment processes and their on-going professional support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) is delivering initiatives relevant to RRR education, including developing cultural competency resources to support classroom teachers. 	

<p>Recommendation 2: Ensure RRR challenges and opportunities are explicitly included in the selection and pre-service education of teachers, initial appointment processes and their on-going professional support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Australian Teacher Workforce Data collection (ATWD) will support future national collaborative work. ▪ In the 2021-22 Budget, the Government provided \$5.8m to continue the ATWD, providing nationally consistent data on the teacher workforce including in RRR areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ongoing – nationally consistent data will assist in identifying opportunities and challenges to attracting, developing, supporting and retaining high quality teachers.
<p>Recommendation 3: Ensure RRR contexts, challenges and opportunities are explicitly included in the selection, preparation, appointment and ongoing professional support of educational leaders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ AITSL developed a spotlight publication detailing the challenges and opportunities for teachers in accessing high quality professional learning in RRR contexts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ AITSL has published the document Professional learning for RRR teachers on its website.
<p>Recommendation 3: Ensure RRR contexts, challenges and opportunities are explicitly included in the selection, preparation, appointment and ongoing professional support of educational leaders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In 2019, the Government committed \$7.5 million for Teach for Australia (TFA) to develop and pilot a new Future Leaders Program (FLP). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The FLP pilot is operating over three years (2021–2023) with 140 participants anticipated. ▪ In 2022, schools in WA, NT, NSW and QLD are participating in the program.
<p>Recommendation 8: Improve opportunities for RRR schools to implement entrepreneurship in education through curriculum, teaching, system and cultural changes and building on good practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Government committed \$2 million to expand the Country Education Partnership’s Rural Inspire (RI) program to encourage young people in rural communities to set their sights high, develop their motivation and increase their ability to choose and achieve positive career, life and learning goals. ▪ In 2020 RI expanded into New South Wales and South Australia, in 2021 to QLD and NT (with a focus on First Nations participants) and to WA and Tasmania during 2022. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The national expansion has been achieved, with the program having established links to the relevant education authorities in all participating jurisdictions.

Priority 3: Improving information and communications technology (ICT).

Recommendations	Implementation	Status
Recommendation 9: Improve ICT for schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government has committed to providing up to 30,000 families with no internet at home with free broadband for a year to boost education opportunities. Schools, education authorities and partnering community organisations will nominate families, as they are best-placed to identify students who are in-need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the October Budget 2022-23 the Government is providing NBN Co a \$4.5 million grant to support delivery. Subject to consultations it is anticipated to commence from Term 1 of the 2023 school year.
Recommendation 10: Support RRR communities to implement innovative approaches to education delivery designed to improve education access and outcomes for students living in remote communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over time, NBN Co has been developing satellite products to meet the needs of a wider range of users, including Sky Muster Plus. The Government is investing \$2.4 billion so NBN Co can upgrade an additional 1.5 million premises from fibre to the node (FTTN) to enable access to full-fibre services. The Government has also provided \$480 million to NBN Co to support an upgrade to the entire NBN Fixed Wireless and Satellite networks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once this upgrade is complete around 90 per cent of fixed-line premises will be able to access speeds of up to 1 Gigabit per second. The First Nations Digital Advisory Group, will provide advice to the Minister for Communications on ways to support First Nations digital inclusion, including in remote communities.

Priority 4: Enhancing transitions into and out of school.

Recommendations	Implementation	Status
Recommendation 4: Ensure RRR children start school with a strong foundation for learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Preschool Reform Agreement is an Australian Government commitment to make \$2 billion available to support state and territory governments to deliver universal access to 15 hours of preschool a week to children in the year before full time school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From 2022 to 2025, the Government is providing funding through the Preschool Reform Agreement. The Government and States and Territories are working to deliver a reform agenda to ensure all children benefit from Commonwealth funding, lift preschool enrolment and attendance, and help understand the impact of preschool.

<p>Recommendation 4: Ensure RRR children start school with a strong foundation for learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Australian Government's Child Care Safety Net includes funding for the Connected Beginnings program, which is expanding to 50 sites nationally by 2025. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Connected Beginnings program currently supports 32 First Nations communities. The expansion is being implemented in a staged approach, with an additional seven to eight sites being established in 2022-23.
<p>Recommendation 5: Expand the availability, affordability and accessibility of high-quality work experience placements, VET, dual VET/university options and two-year associate degree programs for RRR students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Australian Government partnered with states and territories to establish a \$1 billion 12-month Skills Agreement. ▪ The Agreement commences on 1 January 2023 and delivers 180,000 Fee Free TAFE and vocational education places throughout 2023. ▪ Further information can be found in the Skills and Training fact sheet on the 2022-23 Budget website. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delivery plans are being finalised.
<p>Recommendation 6: Support RRR students to make successful transitions from school to university, training, employment and combinations of them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The School Leavers Information Service is currently delivering a pilot in the Northern Territory (NT), in collaboration with the NT department providing career guidance services to students at NT secondary schools. ▪ In addition to the NT pilot program, the Service is available to young people aged 15 to 24 years in RRR areas through career guidance sessions in a career practitioner, and workshops and presentations delivered in schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As of 31 October 2022, the NT Pilot has run in Darwin, Humpty Doo, Palmerston, Katherine and Alice Springs. ▪ 129 personalised career guidance sessions have been delivered to RRR students. ▪ As of November 2022, over 3,500 career guidance sessions have been booked with young people across Australia.
<p>Recommendation 7: Encourage the philanthropic sector to play a greater role in raising achievements and improving opportunities for RRR students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The department undertakes regular discussions with philanthropic organisations such as Australian Schools Plus about their Smart Giving program and other work with schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ongoing

Appendix E: Measures responding to the Napthine Review

Funded 2020-21 to 2023-24

Tertiary Access Payment		
Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$177.8 million for a new \$5,000 payment to encourage and assist regional and remote students to access tertiary study immediately following Year 12	1 January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2021, a total of 2,123 payments were made to tertiary students. Of the 376 TAP recipients surveyed in the 2021 TAP program evaluation, the majority reported the TAP greatly assisted their relocation, with some indicating without it, the relocation would not have been possible. In 2022, 3,461 payments have been made (as of 9 September 2022). A second stage evaluation of the TAP is scheduled for 2023-24 and will consider the longer-term affects of the program including its impacts on access, participation and attainment.

Increased Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding for regional university campuses		
Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$146 million to increase Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding for regional university campuses by 3.5 per cent a year	1 January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding growth is provided for additional Commonwealth supported students based on the distribution of non-medical bachelor level enrolments across campuses and regionality: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.5 per cent at regional campuses 2.5 per cent at campuses in high-growth metropolitan areas 1 per cent at campuses in low-growth metropolitan areas. Transitional arrangements apply over 2021 to 2023, with full growth rates applying from 2024.

Demand-driven places for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students from regional and remote areas

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$17.1 million for demand driven Commonwealth-supported places for First Nations students from regional and remote areas	1 January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial payments to universities commenced on 7 January 2021 and payments are revised based on the latest Commonwealth supported enrolment estimates of their regional and remote First Nations student load. The latest payments are made up to 34 Table A universities based on April 2022 estimates. This measure is yet to be reviewed, however university estimates indicate demand may have been affected by COVID-19 travel restrictions and shutdowns, as it has for all other students.

Enhance and strengthen the Regional University Centres (RUC) program

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$21 million to establish up to eight additional RUCs; and to strengthen the existing Centres program	From 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of up to 8 new RUCs - following a competitive process in early 2022, 8 successful applicants have been agreed. Note: these RUCs will not commence operations until 2023 to consider the effect of their support for students. RUC Network established in April 2021 as a centralised support network for all RUCs. A first stage evaluation of the RUC program was completed in mid-2021, with a second stage planned for 2023-24. In 2022, RUCs support approximately 2700 students.

Regional Research Collaboration (RRC) program

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$48.8 million to enhance the research collaboration capacity of regional universities	From 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six projects were funded under round 1 of RRC from September 2021, totalling \$19.9 million. Five projects were funded under round 2 of RRC from April 2022, totalling \$19.5 million.

Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program (RPPPP)

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
<p>\$7.1 million for the Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program to enable universities and Centres to deliver higher education outreach initiatives to enable the aspiration of students in RRR Australia</p>	<p>From 2022</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Program is using a two-phase process to co-design (Phase 1) and deliver (Phase 2) targeted outreach initiatives in regional and remote Australia. ▪ Six Phase 1 projects commenced in August 2022, with total funding of \$704,628 awarded. The 6 project teams comprise 21 RUCs and 33 universities working with local communities across Australia. ▪ A further \$6.4 million is available under Phase 2. The Phase 2 application process is underway, with projects anticipated to commence early 2023.

Expansion of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP)

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
<p>No additional funding.</p> <p>Existing funding of \$140.1 million available in 2022 and \$140.1 million indexed each year ongoing.</p>	<p>1 January 2021</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ From 1 January 2021, the HEPPP was expanded to support students from regional and remote areas and Indigenous students alongside those from low SES backgrounds. Universities are allocated HEPPP funds based on their proportion share of students from each of the three equity cohorts.

Regional Education Commissioner		
Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$6 million to establish and support a Regional Education Commissioner to oversee implementation of the Napthine Review response, and report to the Government on regional education.	13 December 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Following a merit-based national search in 2021, the Hon Fiona Nash was appointed by Government for an initial three-year term commencing 13 December 2021. ▪ A dedicated webpage on the department website houses information on her appointment, role and remit, including Terms of Reference. ▪ Annual workplan for 2022 provided to Government in February 2022. ▪ Several cross-sector research projects have been completed and/or commenced:3.5 per cent at regional campuses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluating support services for RRR students in tertiary education (completed December 2021). – Mapping current provision of tertiary access programs, including careers advice in RRR areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First phase VET in Schools project (completed July 2022) • Second phase career mapping project (scoping commenced). – Investigating best-practice methods of retaining RRR students to Year 12 (procurement underway, due to report mid 2023) – Investigating internet requirements of RRR students and how to meet their needs (procurement underway, due to report mid 2023) – Developing an education specific RRR geographical classification tool (scoping commenced). ▪ Leading an evaluation of measures implemented in response to the Napthine Review in 2022-23. ▪ First annual report to Government, due November 2022.

Improvements to Fares Allowance		
Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$0.7 million for improvements to Fares Allowance, administered through Services Australia	1 January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ From 1 January 2021, the initial waiting period to claim Fares Allowance was reduced from 6 months to 3 months. This means eligible students can access Fares Allowance for the mid-year break in their first year of study. ▪ As of August 2022, the total amount paid to students is approximately \$9.44 million. As of August 2021, the total paid to students was \$7.98 million. Data is not available on the number of students who have received payments. ▪ Administered by Services Australia, with policy owned by the Department of Social Services.

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