



Australian Government



Regional
Education
Commissioner

Annual Report

2025



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The document must be attributed as the Regional Education Commissioner Annual Report 2025.

Cover photo taken by Federation Council Mobile Preschool showing the Regional Education Commissioner visiting preschoolers at the 'Bush Preschool', Daysdale NSW.

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Regional
Education
Commissioner

The Hon Fiona Nash
Regional Education Commissioner
Department of Education
GPO Box 9880
CANBERRA ACT 2601
E: RECsecretariat@education.gov.au

28 November 2025

The Hon Jason Clare MP
Minister for Education
Member for Blaxland
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email: minister.clare@education.gov.au

Dear Minister

In accordance with the Terms of Reference of my appointment as Australia's Regional Education Commissioner, I present my 2025 Annual Report. This report covers activities and findings from November 2024 to November 2025.

Yours sincerely

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

The Hon Fiona Nash
Regional Education Commissioner

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY



The Regional Education Commissioner and her Secretariat 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 to rivers, lands and seas.

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

REGIONAL EDUCATION COMMISSIONER'S FOREWORD



It has been another inspiring year engaging with people across our regions, working together to improve education outcomes in regional, rural and remote Australia.

Regional people continue to share with me their love of living, learning and working in regional Australia. The positive aspects of life in regional, rural and remote communities are not easy to define, and even harder to measure, but the common themes I have heard and experienced is the connectedness, the sense of community, and the ability of regional people to roll their sleeves up and work together to get the job done and find their own solutions.

The people I have met this year continue to demonstrate how innovative regional, rural and remote people can be finding ways to access and deliver education for their communities. As we continue to grapple with critical workforce shortages in all education sectors and look at ways to attract and retain educators in the regions, we need to think more broadly than financial incentives, we must showcase and share these distinct lifestyle and community benefits. There is no better place to live than regional Australia.

Throughout 2025 there has been a significant focus on productivity, with government, industry and other relevant stakeholders coming together to share ideas on how to boost productivity and create a more resilient economy. Regional Australia makes a substantial contribution to Australia's economy and is an important source of Australia's economic growth. Unlocking the full potential of our regions is critical for future national prosperity.

Education and training have a direct impact on productivity as a skilled workforce operates more efficiently and drives innovation and economic growth. In this context, it is not just tertiary education that matters, but building foundation skills and enabling lifelong learning are just as important.

You can't lift the productivity of the nation without unlocking the potential of regional Australia and that starts with high quality early childhood education and care. The first five years of a child's life are the most critical, forming the foundation for a lifetime of learning. Unfortunately access to early childhood education and care, and the sustainability of many childcare services remains a challenge in regional, rural and remote communities.

In the face of higher delivery costs and workforce shortages in the regions, I have seen firsthand the creative solutions that communities are implementing to fill gaps where they can. Community groups and local government continue to make significant contributions.

Regional, rural and remote communities simply do not have the number of people or economies of scale to make metropolitan childcare models financially viable in the regions. I'm yet to hear a government say they want everyone to move from rural Australia to the coast or the cities, so until they do, they have an obligation to deliver services where the market doesn't.

In these thin markets where childcare providers may find it challenging to sustain their operations, I firmly believe that government has an obligation to step in and ensure that these children have access to the same opportunities as children in the cities.

The government's 3-day guarantee is a strong start to delivering on its commitment to universal early childhood education and care. However, to truly deliver universal early childhood education and care, the issue of supply in the regions needs to be addressed, with particular attention given to local solutions and flexible models designed by regional communities for regional communities.

One size fits all policy does not work in regional Australia.

As a member of the Australian Universities Accord panel, I was pleased to see the government adopt a target of 80% of the working age population having a tertiary qualification by 2050. This target won't be achieved without inspiring a new generation of students, people of all ages from regional, rural and remote Australia that never thought tertiary education was for them, to enrol and succeed in tertiary education.

Thin markets and lack of economies of scale described above for childcare in the regions equally apply to regionally headquartered universities that have the same funding-per-head model as metropolitan universities, but their markets and costs are significantly different.

As the Australian Tertiary Education Commission begins its work as a steward of the tertiary education sector it is critical that the full cost of delivering high quality tertiary education in the regions is accounted for, and that the unique mission and contribution of regionally headquartered universities and regional university campuses to their communities is valued and rewarded.

A highlight of the year was meeting with young Australians from regional, rural and remote communities about their educational experiences and future career plans. This year, timely and relevant careers advice in the regions was described to me as 'luck of the draw'. That is not good enough.

As I often hear, 'you can't be what you can't see'. Our young people in regional, rural and remote communities deserve high quality careers advice that showcases the full range of education pathways, including locally tailored information about opportunities to study and work in their communities should they wish to stay there and follow a career path.

Whether that be a vocational education and training pathway or a university degree, we need to ensure that the aspirations of all regional, rural and remote students are nurtured, for their own benefit and as key to Australia's prosperity.

Improving outcomes in regional, rural and remote education requires connection across all levels of government, education departments and stakeholders, whilst respecting the uniqueness of every community. My role, spanning early childhood education and care, schools, tertiary education and workforce skills and training across regional Australia, brings a national, cross-sector focus to regional education and ensures that relevant decision-makers remain informed of the education needs of regional, rural and remote people.

At the end of 2024, I was reappointed as Regional Education Commissioner for a further 2-year period. It is an honour and a privilege to continue in this role as a champion for regional, rural and remote people, ensuring that regional-specific challenges and solutions across all education sectors remain front of mind for government and policy makers.

I have been strongly encouraged by the Minister for Education's focus on improving education access and outcomes for all, but especially for those who might not otherwise have had the same educational opportunities. I look forward to continuing to work with government through this period of significant reform across all education sectors.

I would like to acknowledge the support I have received from the department this year, in particular from the Department of Education Secretary Tony Cook PSM, and the former Deputy Secretary of Higher Education, Research and International Group Ben Rimmer.

My Secretariat team is outstanding. They continue to provide a work level that is exemplary, and it is as a team that we do our very best to improve outcomes for regional, rural and remote people. I convey to them my sincere thanks and appreciation.

This report remains first and foremost for the people of regional Australia. I am deeply appreciative of the time they continue to give me and the knowledge that they share. I will continue to do all I can, working with people across regional Australia, to ensure that regional, rural and remote people, regardless of where they live, can access the educational opportunities they need to reach their full potential.



The Hon Fiona Nash

Regional Education Commissioner



Image Caption: The Regional Education Commissioner and her Secretariat team

Top row L-R: Max Cleversley, David Solomon, William Healy

Bottom row L-R: Lucy Webster, the Hon Fiona Nash, Karen Roscoe, Jacqueline Ramsay

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION



Early Childhood Education and Care

Issue for Consideration 1 (p 13): To further efforts to build a truly universal early childhood education and care system, the Australian Government should adopt an early childhood education and care universal service obligation. Under this obligation, the Australian Government would be responsible for ensuring that early childhood education and care services are accessible to all children in regional, rural and remote Australia.

Issue for Consideration 2 (p 14): To improve access to early childhood education and care for people in regional, rural and remote communities, increase support for a greater number of flexible delivery models, including consideration of which models would be best placed for different levels of remoteness, and how secure ongoing funding can be delivered. This may include:

- Working with states and territories to support greater use of in-venue Family Day Care in the regions
- Increasing the current legislative in-venue Family Day Care educator limits to allow two approved Family Day Care educators to care for no more than 14 children
- Allowing for an In Home Care educator to care for children from more than one family at the same time in remote areas
- Providing greater support for the delivery of online preschool education combined with in person care for remote and geographically isolated children
- Improving recognition of and expanding access to mobile childcare services, including mobile preschools.

Issue for Consideration 3 (p 20): Design and implement a system to provide funding for operational costs to ensure the sustainability of early childhood education and care services in thin markets in regional, rural or remote areas, where demand is not always sufficient to support a service.

Issue for Consideration 4 (p 21): Extend the Assistance for Isolated Children – Distance Education allowance to 3–4 year-olds undertaking an approved pre-compulsory distance education program to reduce the financial burden for remote families who have no option other than to deliver the preschool program themselves.

Issue for Consideration 5 (p 26): Acknowledging the important role Family Day Care plays in early childhood education and care delivery in regional, rural and remote areas and the need to increase the early childhood education and care workforce, the Australian Government should develop and implement a Family Day Care traineeship program.

School Education

Issue for Consideration 6 (p 29): States and territories to consider, through the Education Ministers Meeting, the transport needs of regional, rural and remote students to ensure access to appropriate and timely school bus services.

Issue for Consideration 7 (p 30): Increase the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Basic Boarding Allowance to ease financial pressures for geographically isolated families caused by boarding fees.

Issue for Consideration 8 (p 30): In recognition of the significant cost burden of boarding for regional, rural and remote families who often have no choice but to send their children to boarding school, expand the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship program to support a greater number of eligible regional, rural and remote students attending boarding school.

Issue for Consideration 9 (p 30): Demand-driven funding should be implemented for boarding school scholarships for First Nations students from regional, rural and remote areas, to ensure that all those students living in First Nations communities, where there is either no secondary school or the local school cannot meet their educational needs, can access secondary education.

Issue for Consideration 10 (p 32): In recognition of the critical role of geographically isolated classroom supervisors, fund a program to support these supervisors educating geographically isolated students via distance education where there are no alternatives.

Issue for Consideration 11 (p 37): To alleviate the workload of regional, rural and remote principals, teachers and other school staff, and to improve access to allied health services for students, pilot and evaluate a program for a School and Allied Health Services Regional Coordinator role to coordinate student access to these services.

Issue for Consideration 12 (p 42): Improve secondary education outcomes, and tertiary pathways, for regional, rural and remote secondary students by implementing more structured access to Regional University Study Hubs for secondary students where appropriate and supported by community needs.

Issue for Consideration 13 (p 43): Acknowledging the importance of timely and relevant careers advice to students across all life stages, and its pivotal role in nurturing aspiration and building confidence and improving tertiary education attainment, improve careers advice through measures including, but not limited to:

- undertaking a national comprehensive assessment to investigate the accessibility, effectiveness and quality of current careers advice delivery, including identifying good practices
- developing a consistent national framework for careers advice across all life stages.

Issue for Consideration 14 (p 44): Re-establish an online careers advice service, that builds on the School Leavers Information Service which was in place during the COVID pandemic, to enhance access to high quality careers advice for regional, rural and remote students and career changers.

Issue for Consideration 15 (p 49): Establish a national Rural Youth Ambassadors program to enhance education outcomes in the regions by nurturing the aspirations and strengthening the leadership skills of regional, rural and remote young people.

Tertiary Education

Issue for Consideration 16 (p 61): Expand access to, and boost attainment of, tertiary education qualifications for people from regional, rural and remote areas by undertaking a review of the regional, rural and remote Independent Youth Allowance eligibility criteria and making necessary adjustments to ensure that regional, rural and remote students who have no choice but to relocate for tertiary study are appropriately financially supported to do so.

Issue for Consideration 17 (p 62): Improve uptake of the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) by providing students with the financial support, or at least confirmation that the payment will be made upon verification of their tertiary study enrolment after the census date, prior to relocation rather than after they commence their studies.

Issue for Consideration 18 (p 62): Extend the eligibility for the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) to include regional, rural and remote Australian Apprentices who must relocate from their place of residence to undertake their apprenticeship.

Issue for Consideration 19 (p 63): Expand access to, and boost attainment of, higher education by providing Government funding for first year on-campus accommodation costs for regional, rural and remote students who relocate and reside on a regional university campus.

Issue for Consideration 20 (p 68): To reward and recognise regional universities and regional university campuses for their unique role in delivering strong education outcomes for regional students, engagement with and support for regional communities, and contribution to regional economic development, the Australian Tertiary Education Commission should implement regional university and regional campus impact measures as part of the mission-based compacts process.

Issue for Consideration 21 (p 69): To enable higher education access for regional students, sustainable growth for regional universities, and to deliver the regional workforce needed, remove 'hard caps' on enrolments from all regionally headquartered universities.

Issue for Consideration 22 (p 70): To enable regional communities to continue to have access to high quality university education, the Australian Tertiary Education Commission and Government should ensure the regional loading component of the Needs-based funding system accounts for the true cost of delivering higher education in the regions and supporting regional students to succeed.

Issue for Consideration 23 (p 70): Establish a dedicated Regional Higher Education Infrastructure Fund to address the critical shortfall in funding available for current and future infrastructure requirements at regional universities, and to ensure regional universities have the facilities to provide a quality student experience, to support tertiary education access and attainment, and to contribute socially and economically to their regional communities.

First Nations Education

Issue for Consideration 24 (p 71): Establish a First Nations Education Commissioner to improve education outcomes for First Nations people by working with First Nations education sector stakeholders and providing advice to the Australian Government on First Nations education.

Issue for Consideration 25 (p 77): Elevate First Nations assistant teachers to 'partner' teachers to value the importance of their cultural knowledge and expertise, and to support a sustainable workforce in First Nations communities.

Issue for Consideration 26 (p 78): Create a new program in First Nations communities to establish Distance Assistance Study Hubs (DASHs) to support On Country distance education learning for First Nations students, potentially commencing through a pilot, based on the principles on the Regional University Study Hubs program.

Issue for Consideration 27 (p 79): In collaboration with a remote First Nations community, design and pilot a program to support First Nations students to complete their nursing education On Country.

Cross-sector

Issue for Consideration 28 (p 85): Develop and implement a cross-portfolio National Rural Veterinary Workforce Strategy to address the critical veterinary workforce shortage in regional, rural and remote Australia.

The National Rural Veterinary Workforce Strategy may include, but not be limited to, education measures including:

- providing HELP fee relief to encourage early career veterinarians to work in rural areas
- extending the eligibility of the Commonwealth Prac Payment to include veterinary science students
- supplementing university admissions processes to ensure places for students with a commitment to regional, rural and remote practice
- increasing Commonwealth funding to universities delivering veterinary degrees focussed on large animal and rural practice and/or end to end training in regional, rural and remote areas
- developing a network of rural veterinary practices and/or clinical training facilities that can provide teaching in collaboration with veterinary schools and the development of a rural-specific veterinary training pathway.

Issue for Consideration 29 (p 91): Ensure all Australian, state and territory government departments consider, and where relevant adopt, Jobs and Skills Australia's final '10 Design Principles for the Jobs and Skills System in Regional Australia' to inform decision-making on regional, rural and remote policies and programs.

PROPOSAL FOR CONSIDERATION



Proposal for Consideration (p 89): Establish a 'Regional Education Collaborate and Connect' program to facilitate strong and sustainable connections between regional, rural and remote education providers, industry and community to:

- nurture the aspiration and build the confidence of regional, rural and remote students
- ensure regional, rural and remote people are better informed about, and supported to pursue, post-secondary education and career pathways
- increase tertiary participation and attainment for people in regional, rural and remote communities
- facilitate a strong and sustainable 'homegrown' workforce that can address region-specific skills and workforce needs
- work towards shared community goals, and ultimately seek to deliver stronger regional, rural and remote communities.

COMMISSIONER'S NOTES

Early Childhood Education and Care

Commissioner's Note 1 (p 18): The Commissioner supports greater public recognition of the quality of care provided by mobile childcare services, including by publishing the results of assessment and rating processes that services take part in. Additionally, the Commissioner supports the establishment of a peak body to advocate for mobile childcare services.

Commissioner's Note 2 (p 20): In many regional, rural and remote areas, the market will not deliver early childhood education and care for families and communities. In recognition of the challenges of delivering sustainable early childhood education and care services in regional, rural and remote thin markets, early childhood education and care services in these areas require ongoing support, including operational funding, to ensure their sustainability.

School Education

Commissioner's Note 3 (p 33): In order to ensure that the planned review of the Schooling Resource Standard in 2027-2029 can be effectively carried out, the Commissioner encourages the Education Ministers to work together as early as possible to identify what regional, rural and remote school data is required for the review, ensure that it being collected, and plan for how any gaps can be addressed.

Commissioner's Note 4 (p 39): States and territories should examine whether there is any impact of increased distance single subject enrolments on regional, rural and remote students undertaking their entire schooling through distance education and if quality is impacted, explore strategies to address the impacts.

Commissioner's Note 5 (p 40): The Commissioner proposes that regional, rural and remote teachers be offered subsidised courses to undertake upskilling in specialist subject areas.

Commissioner's Note 6 (p 41): Where there is a need to support secondary students in the community studying via distance education, consideration should be given to enabling local schools to provide these students with a classroom and teacher aide support.

Commissioner's Note 7 (p 51): The Commissioner encourages higher education providers to establish or expand programs that allow pre-service teachers to visit regional, rural and remote schools and communities for a short excursion prior to undertaking their placement.

Commissioner's Note 8 (p 59): The Commissioner supports the Isolated Children's Parents' Association's motion that the experience of supervisors educating distance education students be recognised as prior work experience if they undertake formal study in education.

Tertiary Education

Commissioner's Note 9 (p 61): The Commissioner strongly supports expansion of the Commonwealth Prac Payment program to identified additional disciplines with regional workforce shortages and extended placement periods in regional, rural and remote Australia.

Commissioner's Note 10 (p 64): The Commissioner encourages all universities to have programs in place to ensure regional, rural and remote students, who have no choice but to relocate to undertake tertiary study, have priority access to on-campus university accommodation.

Commissioner's Note 11 (p 64): Further consideration needs to be given to the accommodation needs of regional, rural and remote students relocating to undertake their apprenticeship or intensive on-campus learning blocks.

Commissioner's Note 12 (p 82): The Commissioner supports a requirement for policy makers to ensure that when updates are made to geographic classification systems, in line with population or other changes, that individuals already engaged in regional, rural and remote education programs retain their initial eligibility regardless of subsequent boundary or classification changes.


Commissioner's Note 13 (p 82): The Commissioner supports a proposal from the Isolated Children's Parents' Association that pre-service teachers working under a Permission to Teach authorisation in Very Remote schools should have this time included in the service period for the HELP debt reduction program.

Commissioner's Note 14 (p 85): Appropriate scrutiny needs to be given to the allocation of the 100 additional Medical Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) to ensure that the current medical workforce maldistribution issues are addressed, and that places are specifically allocated to medical schools which enrol students committed to living and working in regional, rural and remote areas.

Cross-Sector

Commissioner's Note 15 (p 94): The Commissioner has seen many examples that showcase how collaboration and partnerships within and across regions can enable programs in small regional, rural and remote communities to achieve scale, whilst still maintaining their local, ground-up focus. The Commissioner encourages all levels of government and policy makers to consider ways to enable this type of approach through their programs and initiatives.

EQUITY IN EDUCATION IN REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE AUSTRALIA



Education is lifechanging. The opportunities that it provides to individuals, their families and the broader community cannot be taken for granted. A quality education from early childhood, through schooling and into tertiary studies, provides the foundation of a young person's life – giving them the confidence, skills and ideas they will use throughout the rest of their lives. When more people have access to this kind of quality, well-rounded education, their communities thrive, and the nation prospers.

To build this more prosperous nation, Australia needs to develop a productive and efficient economy, underpinned by a skilled and flexible workforce, that can bring benefits to all communities. This is a goal that must have education at its heart. The transformative power of education is one of the most important drivers of change in the economy and wider society.

Education shapes what our future looks like: it skills the workforce, inspires young people, and forges the next generation of leaders across every field. This is why access to education is so critical. Every person, regardless of where they live, should be able to access the benefits of a quality education at all stages of life.

If we want to increase Australia's productivity through improved education outcomes there is arguably nowhere this is more important than in regional, rural and remote areas. Australia's regions currently host more than one-third of Australia's population and are experiencing strong population growth, with more Australians currently relocating from capital cities to the regions than vice versa.¹ These regional communities provide an outsized contribution to the Australian economy, accounting for over one-third of national economic output and approximately two-thirds of sovereign export wealth.²

When the regions thrive, Australia thrives – however there remains a persistent gap between the educational outcomes of regional students and their metropolitan counterparts, with regional Australians almost half as likely to obtain a university degree by age 35 than metropolitan Australians.³ Whilst supporting people in the regions to access tertiary education is undeniably important, truly addressing these gaps will involve real change at each stage of the education lifespan: starting with access to early childhood education and care and early interventions, through to high quality and accessible schooling and careers advice to support regional students into tertiary education and the workforce.

Each stage of someone's education serves as the foundation for the next, building up the skills and confidence they will use throughout their education and life beyond. A robust regional education system that provides support and addresses barriers at every stage would unlock the significant untapped productivity potential within regional, rural and remote communities – bringing benefits for both the regions and the nation as a whole.

Increasing access to education is vital, however a universal, one-size-fits-all approach to education delivery is unlikely to meet the diverse needs of regional, rural and remote communities.

1 Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, [Movement to regional Australia is a long term trend – and it's not the people you thought who are moving](#), 6 March 2025.

2 Regional Australia Institute, [Rebalancing the Nation, Regionalisation Consultation Paper](#), March 2022, p 28.

3 Napthine D, [National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy: Final Report](#), Department of Education, 19 August 2019, p 5.



Image caption: Regional Education Commissioner visit to the University of Tasmania

L-R: Scott Davies, Founder and Principal of Reign Maker Advisory, Professor Nicholas Farrelly, Pro-Vice Chancellor (South), University of Tasmania, the Hon Fiona Nash, Regional Education Commissioner, Professor Julianne O'Reilly-Wapstra, Dean of School, Natural Sciences, University of Tasmania

Any approach to equitable education in the regions must account for the reality of geographic isolation. Increased distance, decreased density, and the associated costs means that access to education is more difficult in the regions than in metropolitan areas. Young people in the regions face additional barriers to accessing their education that their metropolitan equivalents do not: long and costly commutes, or the need to relocate altogether; limited availability of specialised subjects or courses; inconsistent exposure to career education opportunities; and a shortage of experienced educators.

Such issues are complex and multi-faceted, however what has repeatedly come through in the Commissioner's conversations with people across regional, rural and remote communities is that so often people in those communities already have solutions to these challenges. People living in regional, rural and remote communities know what is needed and what works in their specific contexts, and how to draw on and utilise the many unique benefits of life in the regions.

Improving education outcomes in the regions

Over the last year, the education sector has been characterised by the Australian Government's implementation of policy changes responding to significant sector-level reviews seeking to reform Australian education. With the announcement of a \$1 billion Building Early Education Fund, the finalisation of school funding agreements across all states and territories and establishment of an interim Australian Tertiary Education Commission, all education sectors in Australia are set for significant change. It is vital that regional, rural and remote communities are, and continue to be, meaningfully on the radar for decision-makers during this process.

Through her role as a champion for people in regional, rural and remote communities, the Commissioner has continued to play a part in this period of reform. In her conversations with decision-makers, input to key reviews, and advocacy in roundtables and panels, the Commissioner endeavours to represent the ideas and concerns of the many people she meets from across the regions. Meaningful change to persistent barriers often happens slowly, but there are positive signs that appear to indicate a shifting of the dial on key issues raised in previous iterations of this report.

The growth and success of the Regional University Study Hubs program has been a positive development over the last several years. Ongoing stakeholder and community feedback has confirmed the significant impact of this program as a community-centred measure to increase access and support for tertiary students in the regions, and the opening of 11 new hubs to students in regional communities over the last year continues to grow its impact. The Commissioner continues to play an active role in this program, meeting with stakeholders and working with the Department of Education to provide advice on the further enhancements.

The recently legislated changes to the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) also represent encouraging progress when it comes to supporting regional and remote students to access tertiary education. In the last several iterations of this Annual Report the Commissioner raised concerns with the 'no-gap year' requirement of the TAP eligibility criteria, explaining how it has acted as a deterrent to regional students weighing up the decision of relocating to attend university or VET study with the need to work and save money during a gap year. These issues were picked up in the final report of the Australian Universities Accord, and the removal of the TAP 'no-gap year' requirement occurred this year.

The Commissioner has been very encouraged by the work of Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA), particularly on the Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia released in July 2025. The Roadmap lays out an overarching strategic framework for the regional jobs and skills system with the aim of delivering an efficient and skilled workforce to meet the needs of regional Australia into the future. The Commissioner has been closely involved in the development of this Roadmap and looks forward to continuing to work with the Jobs and Skills Commissioner and the broader JSA team as the second phase of the project looks to develop targeted roadmaps specific to the needs and contexts of individual regions.

Over the last year, just as every year in the role, the Commissioner has met with numerous inspiring and hardworking individuals and organisations across regional, rural and remote Australia. She has also regularly attended roundtables, participated in panels, travelled to events and been directly consulted by decision-makers as she has championed the people of Australia's regions in education. Appendix A of this report sets out the extensive list of stakeholders that the Commissioner has consulted with between November 2024 and November 2025.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE



Image Caption: Regional Education Commissioner visit to Yass Early Childhood Centre

L-R Samantha Page, CEO of Early Childhood Australia; Julie Hearne, Director of Yass Early Childhood Centre Association, Early Childhood Australia; the Hon Fiona Nash, Regional Education Commissioner

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is the foundation of a child's education. The early years of a child's life are a critical time in which the experiences and support they are given can have a significant impact on their development and future. ECEC is a vital avenue to provide children with these kinds of opportunities that can set them up for the rest of their lives. Beyond this, ECEC can also bring significant benefits to families and the community more broadly by giving parents the choice to participate in the workforce.

The Australian Government has signalled an intention to develop a universal childcare system that provides at least three days of ECEC to every child across the country. This would bring great benefits to Australian children, their families and communities. However, a truly universal childcare system will require meaningful consideration of the realities of ECEC delivery in regional, rural and remote Australia. Smaller populations and greater distances between them can mean that ECEC in the regions is often less accessible and more expensive than in metropolitan areas. These barriers have resulted in lengthy waiting lists and 'childcare deserts'⁴ across the country that must be addressed. What is needed in these regional, rural and remote communities is different than what is needed in the city, and any 'universal' system must allow for the kinds of flexible, local solutions that are already making a difference across the regions.

All children and families deserve to be able to access these benefits that quality ECEC can bring, regardless of where they live. This chapter will provide an overview of the current state of ECEC in the regions and explore regional-specific proposals/models to remove barriers, improve access, and build towards a universal ECEC system that delivers for regional, rural and remote people.

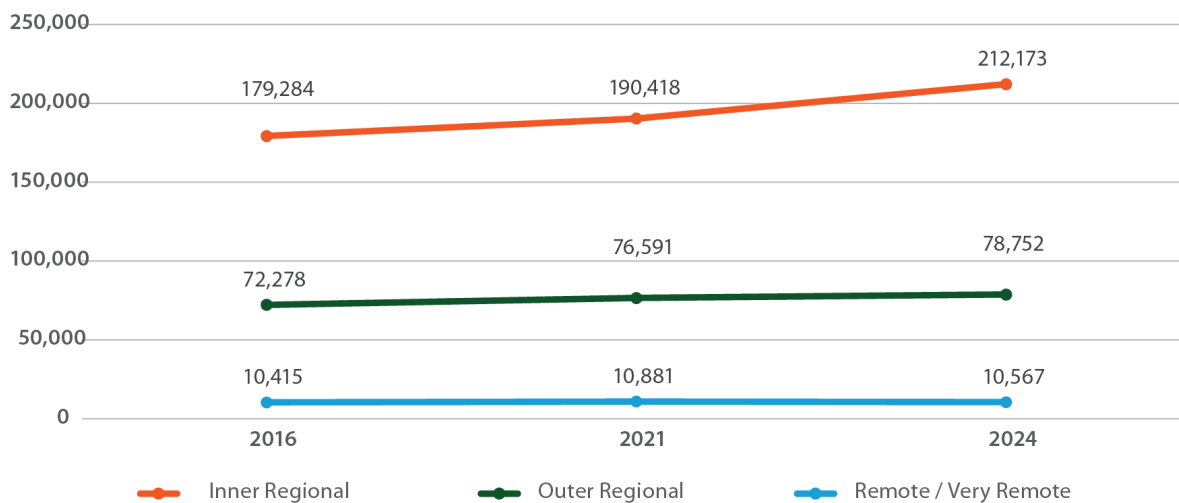
4 Hurley P, Tham M and Nguyen H, [International childcare report: Mapping the deserts](#), Mitchell Institute, Victoria University, 20 August 2024.

Access to early childhood education and care in the regions

All children deserve access to ECEC, but supply and distance continue to be barriers in regional, rural and remote communities. In 2024, 27.3% of Australian children lived in Regional or Remote areas.⁵ In the same year, there were 301,492 children accessing ECEC services across Regional and Remote Australia, just 20.2% of all children accessing ECEC.⁶

Inner Regional Australia, however, has seen significant increases in the number of children accessing care since 2021, with more than 21,000 additional children accessing care (Figure 1).⁷ This is promising news, but more needs to be done. Outer Regional areas have seen a more modest increase of just over 2,000 additional children in care, and Remote/Very Remote Australia saw a decrease of 314 fewer children in care.⁸ From 2021 to 2024, the number of children in care in Major Cities increased by 18.6%, more than double the growth rate that Regional and Remote areas experienced.

Figure 1: Total number of Regional and Remote children attending Child Care Subsidy services during National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census reference week, by remoteness, 2016-2024



Source: Department of Education, 2024 National Workforce Census Interactive Dashboard [data set], accessed 28 August 2025.

5 Department of Education, [Australian Early Development Census National Report 2024](#), July 2025, p 23.

6 Department of Education, [2024 National Workforce Census Interactive Dashboard](#) [data set], accessed 28 August 2025.

7 Department of Education, [2024 National Workforce Census Interactive Dashboard](#) [data set], accessed 28 August 2025.

8 Department of Education, [2024 National Workforce Census Interactive Dashboard](#) [data set], accessed 28 August 2025.

Early childhood education and care universal service obligation

The Australian Government's plans to build a universal system will be supported by the introduction of the 3-day guarantee, a commitment by the Australian Government that all children will be eligible for three days a week of subsidised ECEC.⁹ This commitment is significant in removing financial barriers to ECEC for families, but substantial improvements in access will be needed if this amount of care is to be accessible for regional, rural and remote Australians. The 3-day guarantee does not address real supply constraints, and many families in regional, rural and remote areas will not be able to access their entitlements under the guarantee because of a lack of ECEC supply in their communities.

Consideration should be given to the 3-day guarantee being backed up by a federal 'ECEC universal service obligation', where the Australian Government takes on the responsibility of ensuring all families who wish to access the 3-day guarantee can do so. This would be a significant commitment to delivering increased supply of ECEC across Australia.

Issue for Consideration 1

To further efforts to build a truly universal early childhood education and care system, the Australian Government should adopt an early childhood education and care universal service obligation. Under this obligation, the Australian Government would be responsible for ensuring that early childhood education and care services are accessible to all children in regional, rural and remote Australia.

To be fulfilled, this obligation would require significant changes to how the Australian Government supports ECEC delivery. This includes better utilisation of models of ECEC that work for regional, rural and remote communities, and reconsidering approaches to funding to ensure services in thin markets can operate sustainably.

Flexible delivery models

Currently, Australia's ECEC system relies heavily on the Centre Based Day Care model, with 43.9% of all services being Centre Based Day Care, and 62.5% of all ECEC educators working in Centre Based Day Care.¹⁰ Centre Based Day Care works well for many regional communities where demand is sufficient to support a larger service. However, to support a universal childcare system and ensure all children in regional, rural and remote areas can receive the hours of care needed, a range of flexible approaches to delivery that cater to the needs of individual communities will be required. This is particularly true for smaller and more remote communities.

Early this year, the Australian Education Research Organisation released research into ECEC delivery approaches in regional and remote thin markets. The report reviewed the evidence for different approaches to improving access to ECEC services in thin markets. The report affirms much of what the Commissioner has consistently heard from stakeholders – there is no single solution to addressing barriers to ECEC access in regional, rural and remote areas. Approaches need to be tailored to each community to ensure they are both meeting the needs of communities and are sustainable over the long term. This will require effective communication between federal or state government funders and local communities.¹¹

⁹ Department of Education, [3 Day Guarantee](#), accessed 4 November 2025.

¹⁰ Department of Education, [2024 National Workforce Census Interactive Dashboard](#) [data set], accessed 28 August 2025.

¹¹ Hinz B, Nugroho D, Razak A, Tang L, Shirtcliff R and Mancenido Z, [Delivery approaches in regional and remote thin markets: A review of the evidence for improving access to quality children's education and care services](#), Australian Education Research Organisation, February 2025, p 33.

Issue for Consideration 2

To improve access to early childhood education and care for people in regional, rural and remote communities, increase support for a greater number of flexible delivery models, including consideration of which models would be best placed for different levels of remoteness, and how secure ongoing funding can be delivered. This may include:

- Working with states and territories to support greater use of in-venue Family Day Care in the regions
- Increasing the current legislative in-venue Family Day Care educator limits to allow two approved Family Day Care educators to care for no more than 14 children
- Allowing for an In Home Care educator to care for children from more than one family at the same time in remote areas
- Providing greater support for the delivery of online preschool education combined with in person care for remote and geographically isolated children
- Improving recognition of and expanding access to mobile childcare services, including mobile preschools.

Home-based early childhood education and care delivery

The most prevalent models of home-based delivery in Australia are Family Day Care and In Home Care. These models are particularly useful for supporting ECEC delivery in thin markets as they are designed for smaller numbers of children than Centre Based Day Care. These models have been found to be effective in providing childcare access in regional and remote areas.¹²

While it is typically a home-based model, in-venue Family Day Care is also an existing model that can provide significant benefits for regional, rural and remote communities. It retains the model's focus on small groups and more personalised care, but is delivered in an approved venue rather than the educator's home. The Commissioner continues to advocate for two Family Day Care educators to be able to care for up to 14 children when the service is an in-venue Family Day Care. This would benefit small communities where demand is too low to sustainably operate a Centre Based Day Care venue. Stakeholders continue to advocate for this reform, as it would bring significant benefits for regional, rural and remote communities.

'This reform would make it worthwhile for councils in smaller communities to invest in purpose-built facilities, meaning educators would not have to run their business from their home. For councils, this may be as cost effective as fitting out a community or church hall, a simple action councils could take to help make the service viable.'

Jo-Anne Quigley, Mayor, Lower Eyre Council and spokesperson for the Regional Childcare Desert Advocacy Project

¹² Hinz B, Nugroho D, Razak A, Tang L, Shirtcliff R and Mancenido Z, *Delivery approaches in regional and remote thin markets: A review of the evidence for improving access to quality children's education and care services*, Australian Education Research Organisation, February 2025, pp 22-23.

This year, the Commissioner has heard from stakeholders that while in-venue Family Day Care is an existing option, its use is applied inconsistently across different states and territories. Better utilising in-venue Family Day Care would be of particular benefit for small communities where there may only be several children requiring care at a time.

Local communities, either through council or other local groups, would be able to invest in the facility to ensure the community has ongoing access to an appropriate venue. In the event the educator moves away or stops providing Family Day Care in their home, a community-owned Family Day Care venue would prevent the community from losing access to the venue as well as the educator, as the venue would not be dependent on the educator. This provides a greater level of certainty for the community, as the venue is an ongoing asset they can use to attract a Family Day Care educator.

The Commissioner also continues to advocate for allowing In Home Care educators to care for children from more than one family in remote locations. This would allow the educator to provide care to multiple families living in remote locations, such as on pastoral stations.

Early childhood education and care delivery through schools

Schools are a key piece of local infrastructure that regional, rural and remote communities can utilise to increase local access to ECEC. Many regional, rural and remote communities already have schools that are delivering preschool programs, and this approach can lead to rapid increases in access, and ECEC enrolments tend to increase in communities when this option becomes available.¹³

Governments are embracing this approach to increasing access to ECEC. The Australian Government's Building Early Education Fund will fund services 'on or near' school sites.¹⁴ The New South Wales Government is building 100 new public preschools on public school sites across the state by 2027.¹⁵

The School Education chapter of this report discusses the concept of education hubs, which would combine the delivery of various levels of education, such as ECEC and primary school, into the same location. This model could build on existing delivery through school approaches, with an ECEC service co-located with the school (or on the school grounds), where the ECEC service staff are employed by the school but responsible for ECEC only. In particularly thin markets where demand may sometimes decrease below the number of ECEC educators employed, staff could be moved to other duties within the school, keeping them in a job and with the ability to return to delivering ECEC when demand increases.

Online preschool delivery

Online preschool delivery combines online education delivered by a qualified educator with in-person care. This model allows children to access the benefits of ECEC even if there are no services in their local area. Where no other options exist, accessing online preschool provides better educational outcomes for children than not attending preschool at all.¹⁶

13 Hinz B, Nugroho D, Razak A, Tang L, Shirtcliff R and Mancenido Z, [Delivery approaches in regional and remote thin markets: A review of the evidence for improving access to quality children's education and care services](#), Australian Education Research Organisation, February 2025, pp 24-25.

14 Department of Education, [Building Early Education Fund](#), accessed 19 November 2025.

15 NSW Department of Education, [100 new public preschools](#), accessed 29 September 2025.

16 Hinz B, Nugroho D, Razak A, Tang L, Shirtcliff R and Mancenido Z, [Delivery approaches in regional and remote thin markets: A review of the evidence for improving access to quality children's education and care services](#), Australian Education Research Organisation, February 2025, pp 25-26.

By allowing the education component to be delivered remotely by a qualified educator, children would still be able to access the benefits of ECEC even if there is a limited ECEC workforce in the area. Several current programs providing distance ECEC for remote children and families, including Katherine School of the Air's 'KSA Cubs' and Brisbane School of Distance Education's 'eKindy', demonstrate how online delivery combined with supports like resource packs, learning guides and occasional face-to-face playgroups can provide a quality early education for isolated children.

CASE STUDY: Online Preschool Delivery

Katherine School of the Air (KSA)

KSA in the Northern Territory provides distance education for both school-aged and preschool-aged children. The KSA Cubs program focuses on intentional teaching combined with play-based interactions to provide a strong foundation for children.¹⁷

Three-year-old children may access the KSA Cubs program, with four-year-old children able to start preschool at the beginning of the school year when they turn four between 1 January and 30 June.

Remote & Isolated Children's Exercise (RICE)

RICE's mission is to ensure children and families in outback South Australia have access to quality early years services, including education and childcare, that are not readily available due to geographical location. Their services include a preschool program with weekly online sessions, a craft and resource box and the opportunity for face-to-face Kindy Experience Weeks once a term. A preschool teacher is also available to complete one home visit a term.¹⁸

Mobile early childhood education and care services

Where families are unable to access an ECEC service, or a service is located a considerable distance from their home, mobile ECEC services present an alternative for children to attend care. These services allow families to access care close to home on some days of the week, providing flexibility in delivery for thin markets.

Mobile services provide ECEC activities, using a vehicle or vehicles to transport staff and equipment to locations across several communities. In many cases, transport is also provided for children to attend the service, if required.

In July this year, the Commissioner visited the Federation Council Mobile Preschool to see firsthand the important work mobile ECEC services do for their communities.

17 Katherine School of the Air, [KSA Cubs](#), accessed 29 September 2025.

18 Remote & Isolated Children's Exercise, [Pre-school program](#), accessed 29 September 2025.

CASE STUDY: Federation Council Mobile Preschool

Federation Council Mobile Preschool has been operating in various forms since the 1970s and services the communities of Urana, Boree Creek, Rand, Oaklands and Daysdale. The service includes transport if required for children from three years old to receive 15 hours (two days) of preschool. The preschool has two vehicles that can transport up to 15 children in total. Educators working for the preschool can travel up to 506kms per week transporting children.

Over the years, the preschool has offered high school students the opportunity to undertake work experience with the preschool.

In Daysdale, the service runs a 'Bush Preschool'. The children are responsible and involved members in setting up the site, assisting educators with placing boundary cones to establish the play area and setting up a hand washing station. The goal is to give every child a role and help them build skills to become resilient and involved members of the community.

Educators also go to significant efforts to support children's transitions into school, meeting with primary school teachers and supporting parents to find the best school for their child.¹⁹



Image Caption: Regional Education Commissioner visit to the 'Bush Preschool', Daysdale

L-R Heidi Odewahn, Federation Council Mobile Preschool; the Hon Fiona Nash, Regional Education Commissioner; Jessica Parascos, Team Leader, Federation Council Mobile Preschool; Sharon Brown, Educator, Federation Council Mobile Preschool

Adequate, sustained funding and regular, consistent delivery are important factors in delivering effective mobile preschool services.²⁰ However, the Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA) have raised concerns that the availability of mobile ECEC services has 'dwindled due to inadequate and uncertain funding'. Additionally, the ICPA note that, as a result of short-term funding models 'these early childhood services find it very difficult to retain staff', making these services unsustainable.²¹

In 2020, the Commonwealth House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training recommended that the Commonwealth modify funding arrangements for mobile ECEC services to provide flexibility and surety of funding for these services.²²

19 Federation Council, [Mobile Preschool Service](#), accessed 29 September 2025.

20 Hinz B, Nugroho D, Razak A, Tang L, Shirtcliff R and Mancenido Z, [Delivery approaches in regional and remote thin markets: A review of the evidence for improving access to quality children's education and care services](#), Australian Education Research Organisation, February 2025, p 28.

21 Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, [Submission to the Productivity Commission Review of Early Childhood Education and Care](#), May 2023.

22 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, Parliament of Australia, [Education in remote and complex environments](#), November 2020, p 62.

Mobile ECEC services are out of scope of the National Quality Framework.²³ Mobile ECEC services report that because of this, they are not listed on the ACECQA website, even when they hold a state or territory approval to operate. As a result, families cannot easily confirm the accreditation status of a mobile childcare service.

'Despite successfully undergoing a comprehensive Assessment and Rating (A&R) process spanning five days, our service is not listed on the ACECQA website. Other Community Preschools typically undergo only a two-day assessment and are publicly acknowledged. This lack of visibility does not reflect the high quality, inclusive, and professional education we deliver to families across diverse communities. It is essential that Mobile Preschool services receive the recognition and support they deserve within the broader early childhood education landscape.'

Jessica Parascos, Federation Council Mobile Preschool

The absence of a peak body for mobile ECEC services to advocate for their unique place within the sector makes it particularly challenging for mobile ECEC services to advocate on issues that affect them.

Commissioner's Note 1

The Commissioner supports greater public recognition of the quality of care provided by mobile childcare services, including by publishing the results of assessment and rating processes that services take part in. Additionally, the Commissioner supports the establishment of a peak body to advocate for mobile childcare services.

Transport

For many families, access to school bus services can support their day-to-day life, as they do not need to drive their children to school. However, services providing transport to preschool aged children is not commonplace.

At their 2025 State Conference, the Queensland ICPA agreed to lobby the Queensland Government to allocate seats for preschool aged children on bus services that service State Delivered Kindergarten as well as in rural communities which have standalone Kindergartens.

23 Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority, [Guide to the National Quality Framework](#), September 2025, pp 36-37.

CASE STUDY: Early Years Bus Service – Central Great Southern, Western Australia

The Early Years Bus Service in the Central Great Southern region of Western Australia is an example of the positive outcomes that can be achieved when solutions to challenges in ECEC access are tailored to regional, rural and remote communities' unique needs.

Families in the region with children up to four years old can access an Early Years Bus Service which provides access to early education services, health services, and cultural events across Katanning, Kojoonup, Gnowangerup, and Broomehill-Tambellup.

The initiative is a result of the Central Great Southern Community Plan, which was designed through a collaboration between local families, educators and service providers. In the plan, a lack of public transport was identified as a major obstacle to accessing ECEC and health services in the region. The Early Years Bus Service is expected to significantly improve school readiness and health outcomes for children in the region.²⁴

The service is funded through the Early Years Partnership – a collaboration between four Western Australian communities, the Western Australian Government, the Minderoo Foundation and The Kids Research Institute, with support from the Australian Government through Connected Beginnings.

Early childhood education and care funding

In late 2024, the Australian Government announced the Building Early Education Fund, a \$1 billion fund aimed at increasing the supply of childcare. The fund includes \$500 million for targeted capital grants to establish new services and to increase the capacity of existing services, and \$500 million for future Australian Government investment in owning and leasing a portfolio of ECEC centres.²⁵

Providing funding to build new and expanded services is an important part of increasing access to ECEC in regional, rural and remote communities. However, many existing services also require sustainability funding, especially in rural and remote communities where the number of children attending ECEC services can be low and demand can fluctuate significantly. The Commissioner has heard from some regional councils that they are contributing significant local government funding to sustain ECEC services in their communities.

Stakeholders have noted that a lack of sustainability funding creates several challenges, as during periods of greater demand, centres may wish to put on additional staff, which is subsequently unaffordable in years of lower demand. In some cases, a service itself may not be financially viable at all, but if it closes, the children in the area who do require care lose access to ECEC completely.

Variable demand also has flow on effects on the attraction and retention of staff, as services are often only able to provide shorter term contracts, which are understandably less attractive, particularly if a potential educator would need to relocate for the position. This may result in the service being unable to supply enough places to meet future increase in demand.

24 Western Australia Government, [Driving Change for Childhood Development](#), 23 May 2025.

25 Department of Education, [Fact Sheet – Building Early Education Fund](#), accessed 28 August 2025.

Recommendation 5.2 in the Productivity Commission inquiry into ECEC described an ‘ECEC Development Fund’, that included block grants to cover capital and operating costs in communities where the level of demand is too low to support all the costs of operating a service.²⁶

The Australian Government provides support for services’ sustainability through the Community Child Care Fund disadvantaged and vulnerable communities grant. However, this is a competitive grant which is only open at specific times and not always provided to all services that may need support. To date, there have been four grant rounds held between 2018 and 2024. Services experiencing difficulties with financial viability due to operating in a thin market should be able to access support whenever it is needed, not just at specific times.

Under the ECEC universal service obligation proposed by the Commissioner, the Australian Government would guarantee that any service that needs financial support to provide ECEC in an identified thin market receives it. Appropriate eligibility requirements for this funding would need to be developed, but services in need of support should not have to undergo a competitive grant process to receive sustainability funding to deliver childcare. Instead, funding should be guaranteed to all services that meet the eligibility requirements.

Commissioner’s Note 2

In many regional, rural and remote areas, the market will not deliver early childhood education and care for families and communities. In recognition of the challenges of delivering sustainable early childhood education and care services in regional, rural and remote thin markets, early childhood education and care services in these areas require ongoing support, including operational funding, to ensure their sustainability.

Issue for Consideration 3

Design and implement a system to provide funding for operational costs to ensure the sustainability of early childhood education and care services in thin markets in regional, rural or remote areas, where demand is not always sufficient to support a service.

Assistance for Isolated Children – Distance Education allowance

The Preschool Reform Agreement supports the delivery of 15 hours a week, or 600 hours a year, of quality preschool programs in the year before school.²⁷ However, barriers such as the distance from remote locations to physical preschool programs prevent some children from accessing this entitlement unless families provide the learning resources themselves and bear the cost of this.

The Assistance for Isolated Children – Distance Education (AIC-DE) allowance, delivered through Services Australia, currently provides financial assistance towards incidental costs incurred by geographically isolated families whose children are undertaking an approved course via distance education; however, the allowances are only available for the primary, secondary or tertiary levels, not for pre-compulsory education programs.

²⁶ Productivity Commission, [A path to universal early childhood education and care, Inquiry report no. 106, Vol. 1](#), 2024, p 76.

²⁷ Australian Government, [Preschool Reform Agreement, Federation Funding Agreement – Education and Skills](#), December 2021.

Making the AIC-DE allowance available to geographically isolated families providing preschool education to their children would appropriately value the role families play in delivering ECEC in the regions by reducing the financial burden on these families, who often have no option other than to deliver the preschool program themselves.²⁸

The Productivity Commission inquiry into ECEC recommended an extension of the AIC-DE allowance be trialled. To date there have been no announcements relating to this recommendation. The Commissioner urges the Australian Government to consider implementing the allowance, and to implement it fully rather than through a trial. This would recognise the important role that parents play in supporting their children's education in their early years.

Issue for Consideration 4

Extend the Assistance for Isolated Children – Distance Education allowance to 3–4 year-olds undertaking an approved pre-compulsory distance education program to reduce the financial burden for remote families who have no option other than to deliver the preschool program themselves.

School readiness

The first years of a child's life are a critical, but short, time to make the biggest impact on a child's development. Ensuring that children have the right support in their early years can have a significant impact on their future learning and development.²⁹ Services must be delivered equitably across the country to support children with possible developmental delays, including the provision of timely supports to address concerns early.³⁰

This year the results of the 2024 Australian Early Development Census were released. The results indicate a concerning drop in the percentage of Australian children that are developmentally on track. In 2024, 50.5% of children in Inner/Outer Regional areas, and 43.1% of children in Remote/Very remote areas were developmentally on track on all five domains measured by the AEDC.³¹

Additionally, there continues to be a gap in the number of children developmentally on track between the cities, regional areas, and especially Very Remote areas (Figure 2).

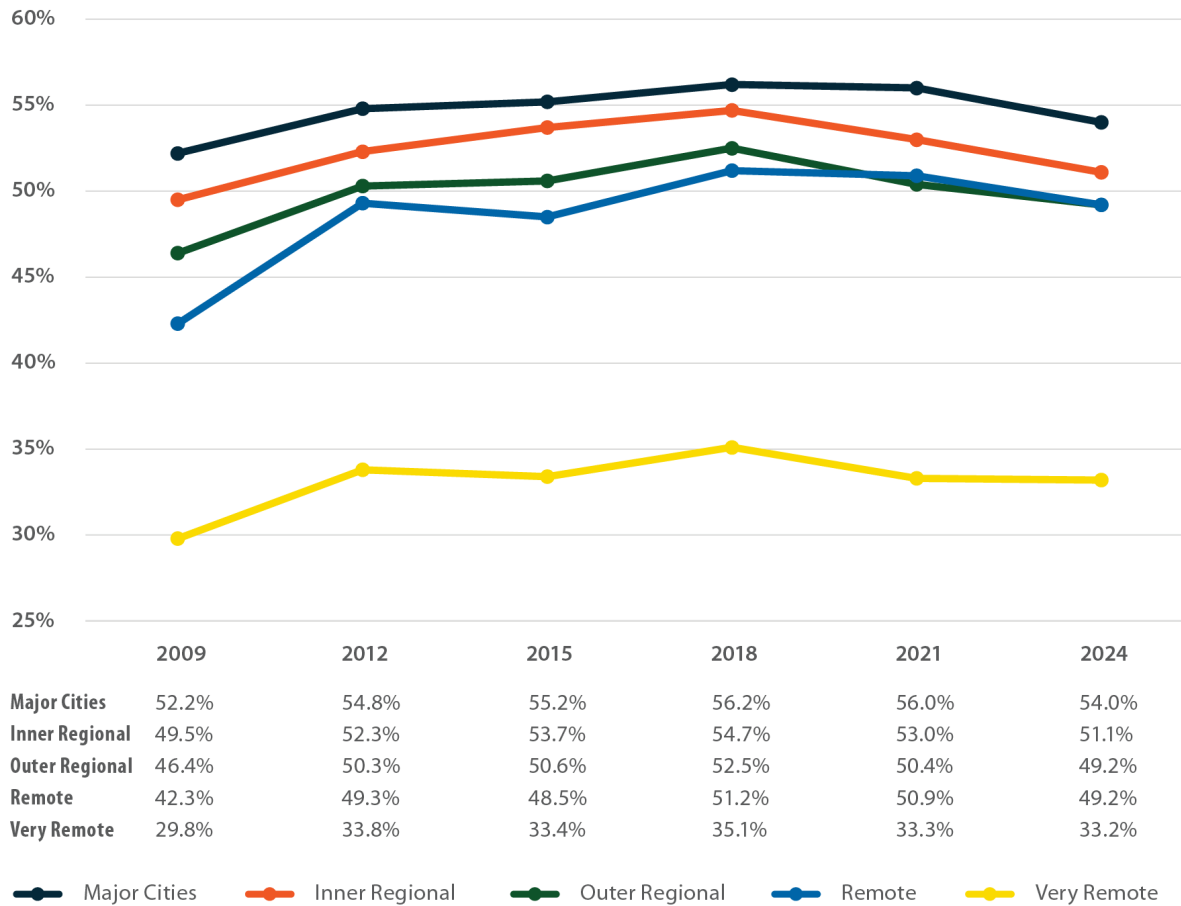
28 Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, [Motion A39: North West Branch \(SA\)](#), July 2025.

29 Department of Education, [Australian Early Development Census National Report 2024](#), July 2025, p 2.

30 Department of Social Services, [Early Years Strategy 2024–2034](#), 2024, p 13.

31 Department of Education, [Australian Early Development Census National Report 2024](#), July 2025, p 23.

Figure 2: Percentage of children developmentally on track on five domains over time, 2009-2024



Source: Department of Education, 2024 AEDC Results - Summary Indicators and Domains by Demographics and Priority Groups (2009-2024) [data set], accessed 10 October 2025.

Providing children with the right support in their early years can have a major positive effect on their future. However, the Productivity Commission ECEC inquiry found that children who would benefit most from ECEC are less likely to attend.³² This includes children from regional and remote areas.³³

Increasing access to ECEC is vital, as it is often where developmental delays can be identified early. However, ensuring that these children are provided with the supports they need, and can access all the benefits that ECEC can bring, is in many cases a matter of resourcing. The Productivity Commission ECEC inquiry found that while many services are adept at supporting children with disability or developmental delay, in some instances they exclude children as they are unable to meet their needs.³⁴ Services must be resourced to ensure they can provide education and care to any family that wishes to enrol their children.

32 Productivity Commission, *A path to universal early childhood education and care, Inquiry report no. 106, Vol.1*, 2024, p 58.

33 Productivity Commission, *A path to universal early childhood education and care, Inquiry report no. 106, Vol. 2, Supporting papers*, 2024, p 50.

34 Productivity Commission, *A path to universal early childhood education and care, Inquiry report no. 106, Vol. 2, Supporting papers*, 2024, p 59.

Educator workforce in the regions

A strong regional, rural and remote ECEC sector needs to attract and retain a qualified workforce. An essential component for delivering on an ECEC universal service obligation, as proposed by the Commissioner, will be providing the workforce to support it. This process will require attracting, training and retaining substantial numbers of educators in regional, rural and remote Australia.

In its 2024 ECEC Workforce Capacity study, Jobs and Skills Australia indicated that there was a shortfall of around 21,000 ECEC workers needed to meet existing demand at that time. They estimated that an additional 36,000 workers would be needed to meet unmet demand in future services, and to meet demand from various Child Care Subsidy and expanded preschool policies.³⁵

Retention is a significant issue in the regional, rural and remote ECEC workforce. For all ECEC educators, matters such as pay, job security and flexibility, and career progression opportunities may influence a decision to remain in the profession.³⁶ These factors, combined with additional challenges in regional, rural and remote Australia, can lead to difficulties for ECEC providers in the regions attracting and retaining a suitably skilled and qualified workforce.

Where there are no locally qualified workers, it can be exceedingly difficult to attract workers to a region. Practicalities such as housing, employment for spouses and partners, and schooling options all weigh into a person's willingness to move to a regional, rural or remote location and can be difficult to resolve.

Regional, rural and remote communities need to be able to draw on their existing population by providing people with the education and training they need to work as ECEC educators. However, many stakeholders have reflected on the unfortunate consequences that a lack of local training options can have. Not only are there barriers to relocating to obtain required training, but when people do relocate away from the regions to study they do not always return to the regions and bring their newly acquired skills back with them.

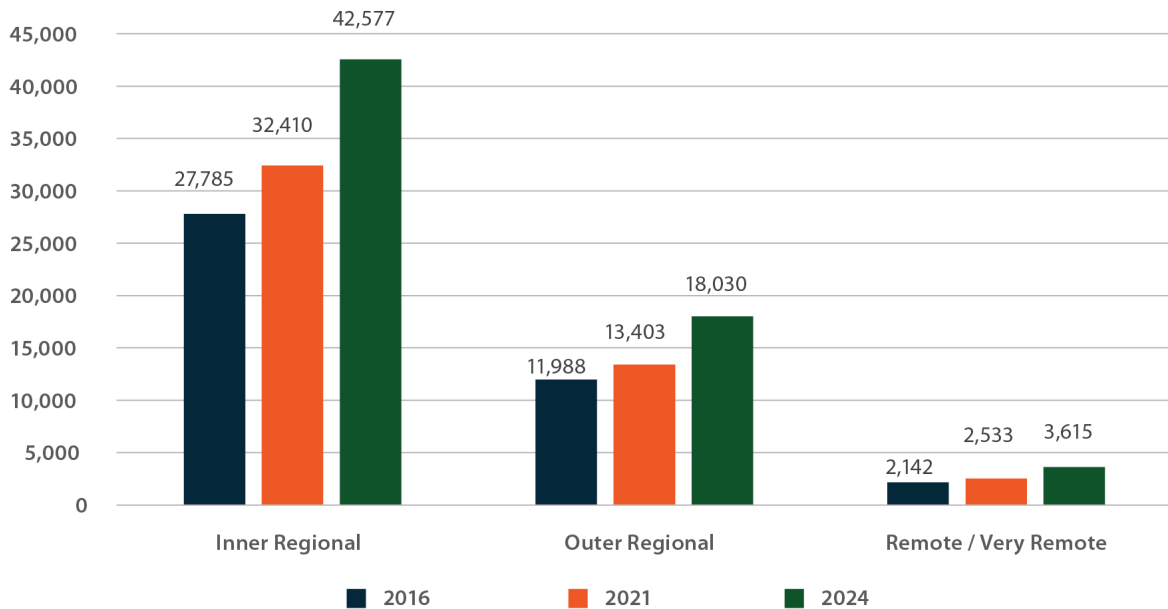
National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census

The 2024 National ECEC Workforce Census showed that there were 64,222 ECEC educators working across Regional and Remote Australia, and that this number has been growing since 2016 (Figure 3).³⁷

35 Jobs and Skills Australia, [The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession – Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Capacity Study](#), 2024, p 7.

36 Jobs and Skills Australia, [The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession – Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Capacity Study](#), 2024, pp 154-165.

37 Department of Education, [2024 National Workforce Census Interactive Dashboard](#) [data set], accessed 28 August 2025.

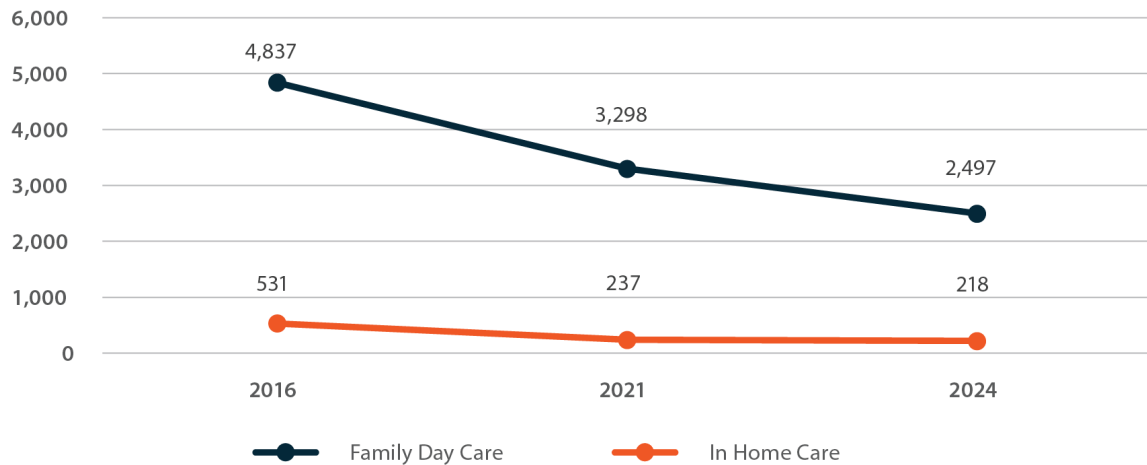
Figure 3: Size of the Regional and Remote ECEC workforce, 2016-2024

Source: Department of Education, 2024 National Workforce Census Interactive Dashboard [data set], accessed 28 August 2025.

There were 37,909 educators working in Centre Based Day Care, 2,497 Family Day Care educators and 218 In Home Care educators across Regional and Remote Australia in 2024.

Concerningly, Family Day Care and In Home Care are the only two service types covered by the census that have seen decreases in workforce size since 2016 (Figure 4). Across Regional and Remote areas in 2024, there were fewer than half the In Home Care educators and almost half the Family Day Care educators compared to 2016. This is despite evidence that these forms of care are particularly important for regional, rural and remote communities. For example, the Productivity Commission's inquiry into ECEC noted that Family Day Care is relatively more important in regional and remote areas than it is in major cities, and that 21% of families that used In Home Care were geographically isolated.³⁸

38 Productivity Commission, *A path to universal early childhood education and care, Inquiry report no. 106, Vol. 2, Supporting papers*, 2024, p 328.

Figure 4: Family Day Care and In Home Care workforce in Regional and Remote areas, 2016-2024

Source: Department of Education, 2024 National Workforce Census Interactive Dashboard [data set], accessed 28 August 2025.

Family Day Care workforce

As Family Day Care is delivered by a single educator, usually in their own home, there can be additional barriers to a worker entering the Family Day Care sector than there is for other types of ECEC.

The current reliance on an educator's home being the location where Family Day Care services are delivered may create barriers to entry for potential Family Day Care educators whose homes may not be a suitable location to operate a Family Day Care service. Better utilisation of in-venue Family Day Care, delivered from a venue other than an educator's home, as discussed earlier in this chapter, may have an additional benefit of allowing more workers to enter Family Day Care.

A second barrier is the lack of a combined training and employment pathway in Family Day Care. Under the National Quality Framework, an educator needs a minimum of a relevant Certificate III qualification before working as an ECEC educator. These qualifications typically take a minimum of a year to complete. In centre-based ECEC a person 'actively working towards' a relevant certificate III qualification can be employed, giving a student the ability to work in ECEC while completing their course. However, a person must hold an approved certificate III level (or higher) qualification prior to commencing as a Family Day Care educator.³⁹

The Productivity Commission inquiry into ECEC notes that use of traineeships in the ECEC sector has increased in recent years, and that this model can have advantages such as giving trainees more practical experience and may help with retention of trainees in the sector. The Productivity Commission also highlighted Family Day Care Australia's 'student educator' model for traineeships in Family Day Care and recommended the development of bespoke traineeship pathways for Family Day Care settings.⁴⁰

39 Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority, [Actively working towards a qualification](#), accessed 22 September 2025

40 Productivity Commission, [A path to universal early childhood education and care, Inquiry report no. 106, Vol. 2, Supporting papers](#), 2024, pp 174-176.

Family Day Care Australia's Proposed Family Day Care Traineeship Model

Under the model proposed by Family Day Care Australia (FDCA),⁴¹ a trainee Family Day Care educator would be supervised by a fully qualified Family Day Care educator while they completed their qualification. The service could be delivered from either the trainee or the supervisor's home, or from an approved Family Day Care venue.

Under this model, the service could also care for more children. Currently, a Family Day Care service is capped at an educator to under school aged child ratio of 1:4. FDCA proposes a ratio of 1:3 for under school aged children, for a total of six children under school age supervised by the two educators.

Family Day Care Australia notes several positive impacts this proposal could have on the Family Day Care workforce, including:

- Allowing for a rapid increase to Family Day Care supply in areas of high need.
- Providing for an immediate increase in capacity for participating services (while also achieving a lower educator to child ratio).
- Creating a pipeline of experienced and qualified educators.
- Mitigating current barriers to entry caused by the requirement for Family Day Care educators to hold a relevant qualification before they can work in the sector.
- Providing an option where former Family Day Care educators could return to work as supervisors rather than fulltime educators.
- Addressing ECEC shortages in thin markets that cannot support Centre Based Day Care.
- Several secondary benefits such as increasing educator wellbeing, bolstering service viability and providing diversified entry pathways into the ECEC sector.

Issue for Consideration 5

Acknowledging the important role Family Day Care plays in early childhood education and care delivery in regional, rural and remote areas and the need to increase the early childhood education and care workforce, the Australian Government should develop and implement a Family Day Care traineeship program.

41 Family Day Care Australia, [Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Early Childhood Education and Care "A path to universal early childhood education and care: Draft report"](#), 14 February 2024.



Image Caption: The Hon Fiona Nash, Regional Education Commissioner, speaking at the Early Childhood Australia Regional, Rural and Remote Early Childhood Forum

SCHOOL EDUCATION

Regional, rural and remote schools are at the heart of their communities and their students represent the future of Australia's regions. They serve as a place for community events, an employer of local workforce, and of course play the critical role of educating and inspiring the next generation of young people. Regional, rural and remote schools are a vital piece in the development of the workforce and economy of the future. In order to grow and support the skilled and flexible workforce that Australia will require, we must develop an education pipeline that nurtures students and supports them through to tertiary education and beyond.

For the quarter of Australian school students who attend a regional, rural or remote school,⁴² there are benefits such as smaller and more tailored classes, a tight-knit community, and leadership opportunities. However, students attending these schools often face barriers that their metropolitan counterparts do not. Students in regional, rural and remote Australia have consistently lower rates of educational attendance, participation and attainment than their metropolitan peers, and often have lower learning outcomes.⁴³

These students living in regional, rural and remote communities deserve equitable access to high quality options for accessing their education. By providing these students with equitable access to a quality school education, in whatever form best meets their needs, and supporting them on their journey through and out of schooling with quality careers advice and developmental supports, we can give them the best chance for future success – increasing the likelihood of future prosperity for themselves, their communities and the economy more broadly.

Access to school education in the regions

The choices and experiences of regional, rural and remote students are anything but uniform. For this reason, one-size-fits all approaches to school settings won't work in the regions, and national policies designed with metropolitan schools in mind cannot be expected to work in regional, rural and remote contexts.

Students in the regions experience schooling across a variety of different settings. These can include partial or complete distance education, small local schools with combined classes, On Country schools, or a boarding school that requires relocation. For those children attending school locally, transport options can significantly affect their ability to attend school.

Transport

Students in regional, rural and remote communities may spend hours each day commuting to school. For people who do not have access to private transport, public and school buses play key roles in supporting people's mobility – often serving as the only way for them to access key services like education. A lack of access to bus services can compound existing challenges in regional communities for school attendance.

42 1,094,349 students live in regional and remote areas, Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Table 46a Students \(FTE\) by ASGS Remoteness Indicator and Affiliation, State and Territories, 2024](#) [data set], 2024.

43 Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), Student Attendance, [Student Attendance](#) rate by school sector and state/territory and geolocation for Years 1–10 [data set] 2024, accessed 9 September 2025; ACARA, [Year 12 certification rates](#), Year 12 certification rates by sex and state/territory and geolocation [data set], 2022, accessed 9 September 2025; ACARA, [NAPLAN National Results](#), 2025, NAPLAN achievement for Year 3 in ready by student background [data set] 2025, accessed 9 September 2025

In May 2025, the Commissioner met with Mount Isa City Council to discuss issues their community has experienced due to the lack of transport options and heard that transport was often the primary difference in students attending school or staying at home. The Commissioner is supporting the community to find a solution to this pressing issue.

Young people have a right to an education and should not have their ability to access school hampered by the lack of publicly funded transport. Access to school bus services must be prioritised in regional communities where students require public transport to access their school.

Issue for Consideration 6

States and territories to consider, through the Education Ministers Meeting, the transport needs of regional, rural and remote students to ensure access to appropriate and timely school bus services.

Boarding schools

For students living in regional, rural and remote communities who do not have access to a local school to complete their studies or have access to distance education that meets their needs, attending a boarding school is often their only option to access secondary education. Approximately three-quarters of boarding students across Australia come from regional and remote communities.⁴⁴ However, with no federal or state funding for boarding, those schools who cannot subsidise the high costs of running boarding facilities must often pass the fees on to the families of boarders. This can place a significant financial burden on regional, rural and remote families or remove boarding as an option for low-income families.⁴⁵

Assistance for Isolated Children Basic Boarding Allowance

The Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Basic Boarding Allowance provides some financial assistance to eligible families through an annual basic payment of \$10,338, with an additional payment of \$2,965 for low-income families who earn below \$65,189.⁴⁶ However, as the Commissioner noted in her 2024 Annual Report, those families that live less than 56 kilometres away from their nearest government school are not eligible for the payment, even when boarding is the only option for their children.⁴⁷

With costs for boarding and tuition ranging from \$25,000 to more than \$75,000 a year, the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance has not kept pace with inflation and rising school fees.⁴⁸ To assist regional, rural and remote families, the Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA) has again this year advocated for an increase to the basic allowance to more accurately reflects the real and rising cost of boarding school for geographically isolated students. This issue has also been raised in the Commissioner's 2022, 2023 and 2024 Annual Report Issues for Consideration and it remains an issue in 2025 that requires urgent consideration.

44 Stokes R, [Census 2025](#), Australian Boarding Schools Association, June 2025, p 8.

45 Kelsey-Sugg A, and Werden C, [Australian boarding schools offer an education lifeline for regional and remote families, but some still hold criticisms](#), ABC News, 3 September 2024.

46 Services Australia, [Payment rates](#), 2025, accessed 9 September 2025.

47 Department of Social Services, [Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme Guidelines](#), 1 January 2024, p 29.

48 Ellis V, [Boarding school costs 'frightening' for remote NT families, ICPA calls for more support](#), ABC News 13 March 2024; Boarding Schools, Boarding School Fees Australia - Boarding Schools Costs, 2025, accessed 11 September 2025.

Issue for Consideration 7

Increase the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Basic Boarding Allowance to ease financial pressures for geographically isolated families caused by boarding fees.

Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program

Other financial support available for regional, rural and remote families whose children need to attend a boarding school includes the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program. This pilot program is providing 50 scholarships worth \$20,000, and 50 scholarships worth \$10,000, to eligible regional, rural and remote students for every year of their secondary schooling.⁴⁹ The Commissioner has been closely involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of this program and is pleased to see that it has been successful in providing this much-needed assistance to regional, rural and remote families. Given the demonstrated need for these scholarships (with over three times as many applications as scholarships available in 2024),⁵⁰ and depending on positive findings from the evaluation, the Commissioner supports an expansion of this program.

Issue for Consideration 8

In recognition of the significant cost burden of boarding for regional, rural and remote families who often have no choice but to send their children to boarding school, expand the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship program to support a greater number of eligible regional, rural and remote students attending boarding school.

Scholarships for regional, rural and remote First Nations Students

Access to secondary education in some First Nations communities can be limited. For those First Nations students wanting to attend boarding school to complete their secondary education, high financial costs can be a barrier for their families.

In 2025, the Australian Government committed \$44.2 million to more than 50 boarding providers across Australia to support 2,500 First Nations students to attend boarding schools.⁵¹ Although this funding supports many First Nations students from remote communities to access secondary education, with over 4,000 First Nations students attending boarding school⁵², as noted in her 2024 Annual Report, the Commissioner believes that instead, scholarships should be introduced that are demand-driven and not capped to ensure that any First Nations student who wants to attend boarding school is able to have that opportunity.

Issue for Consideration 9

Demand-driven funding should be implemented for boarding school scholarships for First Nations students from regional, rural and remote areas, to ensure that all those students living in First Nations communities, where there is either no secondary school or the local school cannot meet their educational needs, can access secondary education.

49 Chisholm A, [Commonwealth Regional Scholarship pilot program attracts strong interest](#), Ministers of the Education Portfolio Media Centre, 30 January 2024.

50 Chisholm A, [Commonwealth Regional Scholarship pilot program attracts strong interest](#), Ministers of the Education Portfolio Media Centre, 30 January 2024.

51 Clare J, and McCarthy M, [Support for First Nations boarding students to finish their schooling, Ministers' Media Centre, Australian Government Department of Education Media Centre](#), 27 February 2025.

52 Stokes R, [Census 2025](#), Australian Boarding Schools Association, June 2025, p 46.



Image Caption: The Hon Fiona Nash, Regional Education Commissioner, speaking at the Isolated Children's Parents' Association Federal Conference 2025

work who supervise their child's learning must forgo income and career opportunities, while self-employed parents must hire someone to backfill their role in the family business. Alternatively, parents must pay for a suitable person to carry out the supervisor role.

'A solution needs to be found that brings respect for the model of education that's being delivered and for the important role of the supervisor in delivering distance education. Australia needs not only agriculture but the resources in rural, regional and remote areas and to have a workforce and a robust industry, you need families to have access to education. If we can't recognise and actually give value to the distance education as a delivery model and assist the families to be able to deliver that model effectively, then we're not actually supporting our industries or our regions throughout Australia.'

Wendy Henning, Queensland President, Early Childhood Portfolio Leader, Isolated Children's Parents' Association.

The Commissioner supports the ICPA and their longstanding advocacy for a form of subsidy to support supervisors educating geographically isolated students enrolled in a distance education school.⁵³

Accessing education from home

For students in remote locations without a local school, or a school that meets their needs, distance education can address a number of barriers for students in the regions – whether it is the primary way to access school for a student living in a very remote area, or the avenue for a student at a regional school to undertake a specialist subject otherwise unavailable at their school in-person. Supporting students to study through distance education providers can ensure that they can study from home with the support of their family and friends.

Financial support for geographically isolated students

Students in geographically isolated communities face distinct challenges, particularly those who have no choice but to study via distance education.

Supporting a child to participate in distance education, particularly full-time, requires a considerable level of support from their families. The Commissioner has identified in previous Annual Reports that the requirement for children studying through a distance education school to be fully supervised places a large financial burden on regional families. Parents in paid

53 Isolated Children's Parents Association of Australia, [2025 Federal Conference: Agenda Motions](#), Motion F02.

At the ICPA's 2025 Federal Conference, a motion was carried to advocate for the remuneration of supervisors under the title 'Remuneration for the Isolated Classroom Supervisor (RICS)'. This updates previous terms used, including the 'Geographically Isolated Education Supervisor's Subsidy' and the 'Distance Education Teaching Allowance'.

In October 2025, in recognition of a motion carried at the ICPA's 2024 Federal Conference,⁵⁴ the Commissioner convened a roundtable with ICPA, state, territory and federal education departmental representatives and other key remote education stakeholders to discuss a potential payment for supervisors educating geographically isolated students. The roundtable discussed the need for a flexible solution that recognises the unique needs of geographically isolated families and options for designing and implementing a program to support these students and families.

The Commissioner will continue to work with the roundtable and other remote education stakeholders to progress the introduction of this important support for remote families with children studying distance education.

Issue for Consideration 10

In recognition of the critical role of geographically isolated classroom supervisors, fund a program to support these supervisors educating geographically isolated students via distance education where there are no alternatives.

School Funding

Regional, rural and remote schools need to be properly funded to deliver high quality education to all students to create a pipeline of future skilled workers. Regional, rural and remote, and small-sized schools are provided with additional loadings under the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) in recognition that they require additional funding due to the size and location of the school.⁵⁵

Under the new national school funding agreement, the *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025–34*, and the *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement – Full and Fair Funding 2025–34* (collectively known as the BFSA), the Australian Government has agreed to review the SRS base and loadings calculation methodology in 2027 – 2029 (SRS Review).⁵⁶ The SRS Review should explore whether the current loadings for regional, rural and remote, and small-sized schools are adequate.

This review could also include a consideration of the proposal put forward by the ICPA that a fifth additional loading category for geographically isolated students be added to the SRS, in addition to the current four loadings for students with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, socio-economic disadvantage and low-English proficiency.⁵⁷ This would enable a school to cover the higher costs of supporting geographically isolated students undertaking distance education, including supervisor allowances, costs of travel to the distance education school or access to appropriate technologies.⁵⁸

54 Isolated Children's Parents Association of Australia, [2024 Federal Conference: Agenda Motions](#), Motion F01.

55 Department of Education, [Schooling Resource Standard](#), accessed 3 October 2025.

56 Commonwealth of Australia, [Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025-2034](#), 23 January 2025, cl 88(a).

57 Isolated Children's Parents Association of Australia, [2024 Federal Conference: Agenda Motions](#), Motion A15.

58 Isolated Children's Parents Association of Australia, [2024 Federal Conference: Agenda Motions](#), Motion A15.

In its 2023 review of the SRS, the National School Resourcing Board (NSRB) noted they were unable to access the necessary regional, rural and remote school data to analyse the sufficiency of the loadings, or in some circumstances, the data was unavailable or incomplete.⁵⁹ In addition to coordinating with states and territories to provide access to their data, the NSRB recommended that a survey be commissioned of a representative sample of schools from across Australia to enable a detailed assessment of the additional costs of operating schools with different characteristics, such as regional, rural or remote location or size.⁶⁰

The Commissioner acknowledges that the states and territories, from 2025, are now required to work with the Government and provide any required data and information for the SRS Review under the BFSA.⁶¹ However, it is unclear whether all the data, necessary to evaluate the adequacy of the additional loadings, currently exists.

Commissioner's Note 3

In order to ensure that the planned review of the Schooling Resource Standard in 2027-2029 can be effectively carried out, the Commissioner encourages the Education Ministers to work together as early as possible to identify what regional, rural and remote school data is required for the review, ensure that it being collected, and plan for how any gaps can be addressed.

Improving timing of school funding processes

Enrolment numbers at smaller schools in outer regional, remote and very remote areas can often fluctuate significantly year to year. This can be due to a variety of factors, including how many students decide to relocate for boarding school or take up alternative pathways such as apprenticeships or vocational pathways, or changes in family circumstances such as seasonal workers relocating or families moving away from the area.

While timing differs between the states and territories, student numbers are generally assessed in the first few weeks of Term 1, with funding allocations made towards the end of the term. Changes in student numbers can result in reduced funding for the school and potential loss of staff with very little notice. Particularly in small schools, one family moving away may result in the loss of a staff member, which can have a significant impact on the school and community.

In light of the unique challenges faced by schools in the regions, the Commissioner encourages state and territory governments to ensure that there are flexible options available for regional, rural and remote schools to access additional funding where a decrease in funding allocation for the year would detrimentally affect the school.

In her 2024 Annual Report, the Commissioner explored the impact of the Direct Measure of Income (DMI) calculation timing on non-government schools in regional, rural and remote areas. Stakeholders have raised how slight changes in a school's Capacity to Contribute (CTC) score can impact the amount of funding the school receives, in turn potentially affecting the amount that students' families are expected to pay. With changes to CTC scores only being released two months prior to the start of the new school year, there is often little time for schools to make budgetary adjustments or for families to consider alternative options if they cannot afford the fees.

59 National School Resourcing Board, [Review of Regional Schooling Resource Standards Loadings](#), February 2023, p 6.

60 National School Resourcing Board, [Review of Regional Schooling Resource Standards Loadings](#), February 2023, Recommendations 8 and 9, p xix.

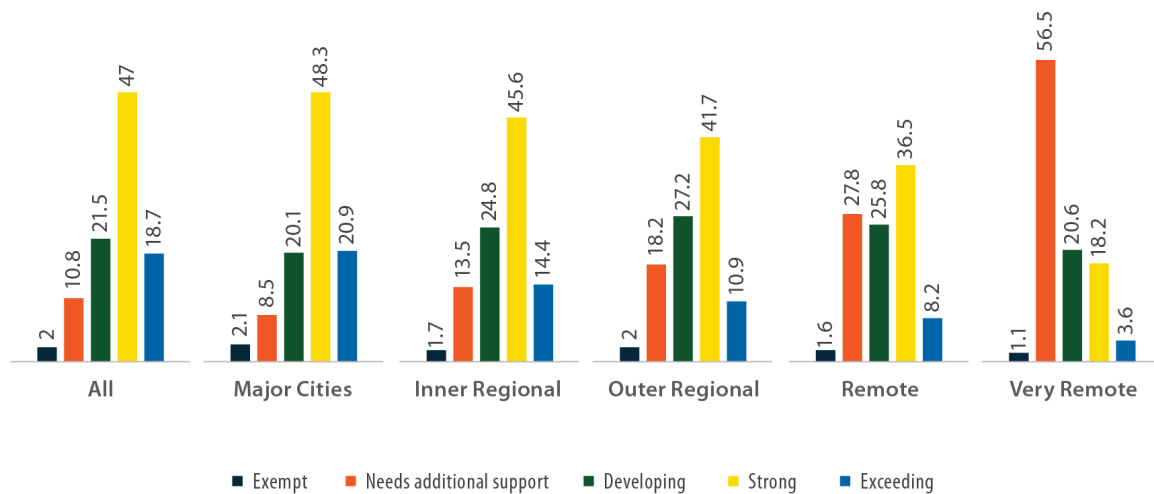
61 Commonwealth of Australia, [Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025-2034](#), 23 January 2025, cl 49.

In response to these concerns from the sector, the Commissioner welcomed the changes being implemented for the DMI process to bring forward the publication of these scores by 6-8 weeks, as well as the temporary 12-month rollover of CTC scores to allow time for the Department of Education and sector to work through solutions to further bring forward the timing of releasing the scores.⁶² These changes will ensure that non-government schools have ample time to prepare their budget for the following year.

Supporting regional, rural and remote school students to succeed

Improving opportunities for regional, rural and remote students to learn and to succeed in their schooling education is vital for the future of the regions. However, there continues to be significant gaps between the educational outcomes for students living in the cities and those in the regions. In the 2025 NAPLAN results, only 21.8% of year 3 students from very remote schools were rated as 'strong' or 'exceeding' in Reading, compared to 69.2% of year 3 students from major city schools (Figure 5).⁶³ Of particular concern, over 55% of students in very remote areas were found to 'need additional support' in order to meet expected learning outcomes compared to just 8.5% of students in major cities.⁶⁴

Figure 5: NAPLAN achievement for year 3 in Reading by student background, Australia 2025



Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, NAPLAN National Results, NAPLAN achievement for year 3 in Reading by student background [data set] 2025, accessed 9 September 2025.

Challenges accessing early childhood and care in the regions mean that many regional, rural and remote children often begin school behind their metropolitan peers, both developmentally and socially. As seen in the Early Childhood Education and Care chapter, a child in regional, rural and remote Australia is more likely to be developmentally vulnerable than a child living in a major city, with only around 50% of children in regional areas, and 43% of children in remote and very remote areas, developmentally on track on all five domains measured by the Australian Early Development Census.⁶⁵

62 Clare J, *Response Letter, Independent Schools Australia's policy priorities for education*, Australian Labor Party, Sydney, 2025.

63 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *NAPLAN National Results*, NAPLAN achievement for Year 3 in reading by student background [data set] 2025, accessed 9 September 2025.

64 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *NAPLAN National Results*, NAPLAN achievement for Year 3 in reading by student background [data set] 2025.

65 Department of Education, *Australian Early Development Census National Report 2024*, July 2025, p 18.

Without early intervention, these issues compound over time, widening the gap as regional, rural and remote children progress through their schooling.

'Developmental complexity is increasing, particularly for children in regional and remote communities. Without access to early intervention and wraparound support, many will struggle to keep pace with their peers. The key to reversing these trends is early intervention screening, assessment, and therapy for developmental vulnerabilities.'

Jacqueline Emery, CEO, Royal Far West

Accessing allied health services

Allied health services, including but not limited to speech pathology, psychology, audiology, occupational therapy and physiotherapy, are often required to improve developmental outcomes for children.⁶⁶ However, it can be difficult for families to access support as there are fewer allied health services in the regions.⁶⁷ This means families are often forced to travel long distances or may miss out altogether on accessing services due to long waiting lists and high fees.⁶⁸

Some community organisations, such as Royal Far West, assist regional, rural and remote communities by providing allied health services through telehealth and outreach. Royal Far West utilises improved technology to virtually deliver services and online learning programs into over 260 schools and early learning environments across rural and remote New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia, while also providing in person clinics as part of its outreach.⁶⁹

Another initiative is the Allied Health in Outback Schools program, where allied health and nursing students provide services to local primary school students under the supervision of a clinician.⁷⁰ This program was developed in 2009 by the Broken Hill Department of Rural Health in response to concerns raised by primary school principals in Broken Hill regarding inadequate access to allied health services. It now runs in 10 primary schools in Broken Hill, Menindee and Wilcannia in New South Wales, and has inspired similar programs in Katherine in the Northern Territory and Geraldton in Western Australia.⁷¹

66 Gosse G, Kumar S, Banwell H and Moran A, [Child Development Allied Health Services in Rural and Remote Areas: A Systematic Scoping Review of Drivers, Barriers and Enabling Strategies to Delivery of Services](#), Australian Journal of Rural Health, 2025, 33(1).

67 Gosse G, Kumar S, Banwell H and Moran A, [Child Development Allied Health Services in Rural and Remote Areas: A Systematic Scoping Review of Drivers, Barriers and Enabling Strategies to Delivery of Services](#), Australian Journal of Rural Health, 2025, 33(1).

68 Gosse G, Kumar S, Banwell H and Moran A, [Child Development Allied Health Services in Rural and Remote Areas: A Systematic Scoping Review of Drivers, Barriers and Enabling Strategies to Delivery of Services](#), Australian Journal of Rural Health, 2025, 33(1).

69 Royal Far West, [Schools & Early Years Services](#), accessed 11 September 2025.

70 Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health, [Allied Health in Outback Schools](#), accessed 11 September 2025.

71 Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health, [Allied Health in Outback Schools](#), accessed 11 September 2025.

Schools as community hubs

Successful initiatives have focused on providing place-based and flexible solutions for local communities to access allied health services. This has included using existing infrastructure, in particular local schools, to provide a hub for allied health service delivery to families in the regions.

CASE STUDY: Narromine Wellbeing Hub

Once a run-down principal's residence at Narromine High School, the school has renovated and transformed the house into a student wellbeing hub. Students can access a GP, speech and occupational therapists, a psychologist and get hearing and dental check-ups. The hub's work was highlighted at a national rural health conference in Perth, held up as an example of collaborative healthcare working to close the gap with more than 300 GP appointments in 2023.⁷² The hub was also recognised at the 2025 NSW Public Education Awards, with the school winning the Secretary's award for Outstanding School Achievement.⁷³

In the absence of universal early childhood education and care, schools are often the first place that developmental vulnerabilities are identified.⁷⁴ With their central role in a regional community, schools are well-placed to provide vulnerable students and families access to allied health services, minimising the barriers preventing families from accessing this support.

Delivering allied health services in schools requires extensive coordination between different agencies and sectors. The Commissioner has heard from stakeholders that schools are taking on a large administrative burden in coordinating students' access to allied health services, in particular scheduling appointments for students at school. Principals, teachers and other school staff take on this expanded role in regional schools, adding to an already large workload, even though providing access to allied health services is not part of a school's responsibilities.

Funding for a community allied health services coordinator based in a school could relieve some of this burden on principals, teachers and other school staff. The coordinator could work within a single school or across a cluster of schools, depending on size and need, and provide the vital linkage between students and allied health services while allowing principals, teachers and other school staff to concentrate on teaching and providing support in the classroom. This role would also provide a consistent communication channel between parents and the school.

'Children spend so much time at school, and it is often where they experience their biggest challenges. Allied health staff need clear and easy processes, with an accessible space, to be able to provide support to students at their school. A dedicated person responsible for coordination between schools and allied health services would provide students, parents, teachers and allied health professionals with a consistent point of contact, streamline processes and reduce the current burden on all those involved in providing this critical service.'

Georgia Gosse, Paediatric physiotherapist, PhD Candidate, University of South Australia

72 Gibbs-Muir J, *Narromine High School's social wellbeing hub gets a big tick from NSW students, families*, ABC News, 30 November 2024.

73 Bastow C, *How this high school is 'transforming' student wellbeing and academic results*, Daily Liberal, 7 August 2025.

74 Hurley P, Matthews H and Pennicuik S, *Deserts and oases: How accessible is childcare in Australia?*, Mitchell Institute, Victoria University, 2022, pp 5-7.

The Commissioner's submission to the Inquiry into the Thriving Kids initiative put forward the concept of this program funding an allied health coordinator role within a school, or across a cluster of schools, to provide the vital linkage between students and allied health services.

Issue for Consideration 11

To alleviate the workload of regional, rural and remote principals, teachers and other school staff, and to improve access to allied health services for students, pilot and evaluate a program for a School and Allied Health Services Regional Coordinator role to coordinate student access to these services.

Full service schools

Under a full service school model, schools deliver a holistic range of services across health, education and family services. Full service schools would utilise collaborative partnerships with service providers to increase access to vital supports by connecting students with a hub of community, social and health services.⁷⁵

There are several full service school pilots underway through federal and state programs. Under the BFSA, governments have committed to building initiatives that support connections between schools and other non-school services to support students to come to school ready to learn, including through full-service school models where appropriate.⁷⁶

CASE STUDY: Roebourne District High School, Western Australia

Roebourne District High School, located in the Pilbara Region of Western Australia, is a K-12 school with approximately 120 pupils and 98% of its cohort identifying as First Nations. In August 2025, the school was selected as one of four Connected Communities Schools across Western Australia. Funded under the BFSA, four schools will be participating in a four year trial that will connect students and families with support for health and wellbeing and well as links to community and social networks.

Across 2025, participating schools will consult with their community and stakeholders to work towards addressing specific local needs with a range of initiatives, such as making services available on site to remove barriers to access.⁷⁷

75 Australian Government, [Improving Outcomes for All, Australian Government Summary Report of the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System](#), December 2023.

76 Clare J, [Better and fairer schools agreement](#), Ministers of the Education Portfolio Media Centre, 31 July 2024.

77 Western Australia Government, [New Connected Community School trial to commence in 2026- Western Australian Government](#), 21 August 2025.

Supporting students to complete year 12

There are many different pathways to a successful career that a regional, rural and remote student may take. Some students may leave school prior to year 12 to start an apprenticeship, traineeship or get a job and go on to have very successful post-school pathways. However, it is important that all regional, rural and remote students are aware of potential tertiary pathways and that the schooling and tertiary systems are sufficiently flexible to accommodate the different pathways that students may wish to take.

Year 12 certification rates differ significantly depending on where a student lives. In 2022, nearly 80% of students in major cities obtained a year 12 certification, progressively decreasing as remoteness increases. In remote and very remote areas, only 55% of students attained a year 12 certification.⁷⁸ It will be difficult to achieve the Australian Government's target for 80% of the working age population to have a university degree or VET qualification by 2050⁷⁹ whilst there is still a clearly pronounced gap between the school completion rates for regional, rural and remote and metropolitan students.

Having good attendance at school is a key factor for students to attain their year 12 certificate. Encouraging students to attend school makes them more likely to continue on with their education, whether this is at university, a VET provider or an apprenticeship, and sets them on a pathway for future success. However, as geographic isolation increases, school attendance continues to decrease. In 2024 the average attendance rate for students in major cities was almost 90%, compared to only around 65% in very remote areas.⁸⁰ This is equivalent to around 14 weeks, or more than one quarter, of school time missed each year.⁸¹ There are a number of reasons why this could be the case, including long distances to travel, weather events or cultural obligations for First Nations students.

Access to secondary subjects

In addition to lack of access to quality careers advice, explored later in this chapter, the Commissioner has also repeatedly heard from stakeholders that access to secondary subjects can significantly impact the motivation, school attendance and future careers of students in the regions.

The range of subjects studied in secondary school can nurture a student's interest and enable students to think about and pursue a future career pathway. Access to STEM subjects such as Advanced Mathematics, Physics or Chemistry are often prerequisites or assumed knowledge for students to study medicine, nursing, veterinary science or engineering. However, due to a lack of specialist teachers in the regions, as well as small cohort sizes, regional, rural and remote schools generally offer their students a smaller range of secondary subjects than metropolitan schools.⁸²

In previous Annual Reports, the Commissioner has highlighted the different models that regional, rural and remote communities adopt to improve access to a broader range of secondary subjects for their students, including through distance education or schools forming 'clusters' to share specialist teaching resources across a greater range of students in a region.

78 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, [Year 12 certification rates](#), 2025, accessed 11 September 2025. Major cities (79.4%) Inner regional areas (67.6%) Outer regional areas (69.2%) Remote/very remote areas (55.5%).

79 Australian Government, [Australian Universities Accord – Budget Summary](#), 15 May 2024, p 5.

80 Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority, [Student attendance](#), Student Attendance rate by school sector and state/territory and geolocation for Years 1–10 [data set] 2024, accessed 11 September 2025. Attendance rate is defined as the number of actual full-time equivalent student-days attended by full-time students in Years 1-10 in Semester 1 as a percentage of the total number of possible student-days attended in Semester 1.

81 Assuming 200 days of school per year.

82 Dean J, Downes N, and Roberts P, [Access to and equity in the curriculum in the Australian government secondary school system](#), SN Social Sciences, 2023, volume 3, article 64, p 12. In New South Wales, a student studying at a remote or very remote government school will have on average nine subjects to choose from compared to a student in a major city government school, which offers on average 26 subjects.

Distance education

As access to internet improves for people living in regional, rural and remote communities, there are increased opportunities for students to access secondary subjects virtually. There are a number of distance education schools across Australia that provide regional, rural and remote students with access to secondary subjects. These include Aurora College, a virtual selective school for regional students in New South Wales from years 5-12 and state distance education schools, such as the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) in Western Australia and the Open Access College in South Australia. In Queensland, there has also been innovative progress in supporting access to key STEM subjects and supporting future STEM-based career pathways through the establishment of the Queensland Virtual Academy as well as the Queensland Academies of Health Science.

CASE STUDY: Queensland Virtual Academy

In May 2025, the Queensland Government announced the launch of the Queensland Virtual Academy which would aim to livestream specialist subjects to more than 4,000 students in 365 state schools across 2025. This pilot offers Specialist Mathematics, Senior Physics, Japanese and Senior Psychology. By enabling students with the opportunity to pursue these subjects, it can also allow them to meet pre-requisites for university degrees such as medicine and psychology. Increasing access to these secondary subjects supports students to pursue their chosen careers.⁸³

The number of geographically isolated children in New South Wales studying distance education full-time has remained broadly consistent over the past decade, with 281 students enrolled in 2024.⁸⁴ However, there has been significant growth in students accessing a single subject through distance education providers, as more students who cannot attend a local school for reasons other than geographic isolation turn to this form of education. The NSW Department of Education reported that over 5,500 students in New South Wales were enrolled in a single distance education course.⁸⁵ In Western Australia, almost 4,000 students were studying at least one subject through the Western Australia School of Isolated and Distance Education, representing a growth of 42% in three years.⁸⁶ Concerns have been raised with the Commissioner that regional, rural and remote students who are completing their entire schooling through distance education may have their quality of delivery diminished given the rapid increase in students undertaking single subject distance education.

Commissioner's Note 4

States and territories should examine whether there is any impact of increased distance single subject enrolments on regional, rural and remote students undertaking their entire schooling through distance education and if quality is impacted, explore strategies to address the impacts.

83 Queensland Government, [Queensland Virtual Academy](#), accessed 11 September 2025.

84 NSW Department of Education, [Review of Distance Education in NSW](#), 2025, p 10.

85 NSW Department of Education, [Review of Distance Education in NSW](#), 2025, pp 13-14.

86 Hiatt, B, Big Rise in number of students studying subjects online, *The Geraldton Guardian*, 3 June 2025, p. 2.

Local delivery

Many secondary subjects, in particular STEM subjects, are unable to be delivered solely online, with practical, hands-on training in an in-person environment being a key requirement of the subject. Some smaller regional, rural and remote schools without resources to employ a wide variety of specialist teachers have creatively addressed this issue by forming clusters with other schools to share teaching resources. In South Australia, 16 regional schools work together as part of the Eyre Peninsula Secondary Alliance to deliver a wider range of secondary subjects, including VET courses, to their students.⁸⁷ These subjects allow students from different schools in the cluster to be taught by a specialist teacher in a combination of online and local delivery depending on subject requirements.

Out-of-field teaching

With teacher shortages across the regions, particularly in STEM subjects, many teachers are teaching 'out-of-field' (outside their area of specialisation) in order to deliver subjects to their students.⁸⁸

The Commissioner sees an opportunity for local teachers to be upskilled in specialist subjects through Microcredentials programs. This would both strengthen the local, homegrown workforce and increase the quality and breadth of teaching for regional, rural and remote students.

Courses such as those offered under the Australian Government's Microcredentials Pilot in Higher Education provide an opportunity for regional, rural and remote teachers to upskill. These include Charles Sturt University's Science for Out-of-Field Teachers and Mathematics for Out-of-Field Teachers, and Southern Cross University's Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching Mathematics for Out-of-Field Teachers.⁸⁹ Being able to undertake these courses online makes this professional development much more accessible for regional, rural and remote teachers, with no expense or time required for travel and minimising disruptions to their teaching schedule.

Commissioner's Note 5

The Commissioner proposes that regional, rural and remote teachers be offered subsidised courses to undertake upskilling in specialist subject areas.

Local school infrastructure

Regional, rural and remote communities are much more likely to have a primary school than a secondary school.⁹⁰ For those children that fall outside the primary years and remain in their communities where there is no secondary school, or the local school cannot meet their educational needs, their only option is usually distance education or travelling to a nearby town. However, while the quality of online learning has improved, it is difficult to replace the value and support received from face-to-face contact with teachers and peers.

Julia Creek State School is an example where primary school infrastructure provides educational opportunities to secondary school students.

87 Eyre Peninsula Schools Local Delivery, [About Us – EP Schools Local Delivery](#), accessed 11 September 2025.

88 Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, [National Trends Teacher Workforce, Australian Teacher Workforce Data, 2024](#), accessed 11 September 2025.

89 Department of Education, [Microcredentials Pilot in Higher Education](#), accessed 11 September 2025.

90 Bourne K, Nash A and Houghton K, [Pillars of communities: Service delivery professionals in small Australian towns 1981-2011](#), The Regional Australia Institute, 2017, p 18.

CASE STUDY: Julia Creek

Julia Creek State School is a P-6 school in the Julia Creek community, located 250km east of Mount Isa. Due to the school's significant distance from other secondary schools across Queensland, and the need in the community to support secondary students who do not wish to attend boarding school, the school and McKinlay Shire Council launched a Middle School to provide educational opportunities for years 7-10 students.

Students are enrolled in distance education classes with Mt Isa School of the Air and attend Julia Creek State School in a separate room specifically for secondary students. The students are supported by a teacher's aide during class time. The hub is an important model in ensuring secondary students can be able to access quality education options in their community.⁹¹

Commissioner's Note 6

Where there is a need to support secondary students in the community studying via distance education, consideration should be given to enabling local schools to provide these students with a classroom and teacher aide support.

Secondary students accessing Regional University Study Hubs

In 2025, the Commissioner continued to advocate for the enhancement and expansion of the Regional University Study Hub (RUSH) program, including the provision of support to regional, rural and remote secondary students. The Commissioner's 2024 Annual Report noted that some RUSHs were already supporting secondary students to undertake their school studies as well as preparatory courses for university. However, no formal structures currently exist to enable the RUSHs to support secondary students.

Where the opportunities exist, and these are supported by the community, the expansion of RUSH support for secondary students to access their facilities could have significant advantages in terms of enhanced utilisation of existing infrastructure and support, and nurturing aspiration for tertiary study whilst students are at school.

'This simple yet powerful expansion of existing services has the potential to bridge important educational gaps for rural and remote students and encourage stronger transitions to tertiary education.'

Jennifer Ruska, ICPA Federal Council Member, Tertiary Education Portfolio Leader

Stakeholders have discussed with the Commissioner potential models for supporting secondary students in RUSHs, acknowledging these may differ based on local context such as population size and presence of other educational facilities within the community. Support for secondary students at RUSHs should not duplicate or replace what is already available in the community, but instead address gaps impacting educational outcomes for students and communities.

91 McKinlay Shire Council, [Secondary Education](#), accessed 11 September 2025.

The academic support services and pastoral care available in RUSHs could provide secondary students with much-needed support as they consider their post-school options. This may include RUSH staff providing secondary students with career information or support that takes into account industry and career opportunities matched with students' strengths and interests.

Importantly, regional, rural and remote secondary students accessing a RUSH can study alongside other students in their community who are completing VET or university qualifications. In this way, RUSHs can play a role in motivating and inspiring regional, rural and remote secondary students to complete Year 12 and pursue tertiary studies.

In very remote locations, where there is no secondary school, RUSHs could also support local secondary students completing their schooling via distance education. Facilities such as study spaces and break out areas could be used for secondary students to socialise and study together, while the IT infrastructure of RUSHs would ensure distance education students have access to high-speed internet.

Stakeholders have also highlighted the possibility of utilising RUSH infrastructure to enable regional, rural and remote distance education students to access a greater range of Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETDSS) programs.

RUSHs have the potential to greatly expand access to a large number of regional, rural and remote students in their communities.

Issue for Consideration 12

Improve secondary education outcomes, and tertiary pathways, for regional, rural and remote secondary students by implementing more structured access to Regional University Study Hubs for secondary students where appropriate and supported by community needs.

Nurturing aspiration and building confidence

The development of a robust skills pipeline for the regional workforce, and the improvements in educational outcomes that underpin this, will be impossible to achieve without consideration of regional, rural and remote students' aspirations and confidence. Educational opportunities and university places are only as valuable as the number of interested students who take them up.

Throughout her time in the role, the Commissioner has consistently heard from people in the regions that often regional, rural and remote students do not lack aspiration, but rather they lack the knowledge they need and the confidence required to pursue their goals. Regional, rural and remote students must be provided with high quality careers advice to nurture these aspirations, preferably from primary school, as well as foundation skills and pathway programs to build the confidence, networks and experience they need to pursue those aspirations. This is echoed by recent research from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)⁹² and The Smith Family⁹³, which highlighted what students need to make that crucial step between school and their future career pathway.

92 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, [Teenage Career Readiness Dashboard](#), accessed 11 September 2025.

93 The Smith Family, [Pathways, Engagement and Transitions: How young people experiencing disadvantage navigate the first three years after leaving school](#), June 2025.

Although the OECD and The Smith Family studies focused on economic status rather than location, the findings clearly highlight the challenges that students who are historically under-represented in tertiary education face in determining their post-school career plans. In particular, the report identified lower levels of aspiration among financially disadvantaged young people, or where they aspired to a particular profession, a lack of awareness of the qualifications required to have a career in that profession. For example, only 55% of disadvantaged students aspire to work as a senior manager or professional (compared to 80% of advantaged students), however one in four of those disadvantaged students aspiring to work in a professional field were not planning to complete tertiary education.⁹⁴ This mismatch between aspiration and understanding of the qualifications required demonstrates a clear need for better career education, with detailed information about pathways and progression, to ensure students are able to fulfil their aspirations.

Access to high quality careers advice in the regions

Providing high quality careers advice to students as early as possible, from primary school onwards, is critical to help students in regional, rural and remote Australia understand options for their future pathways and to nurture their aspirations.

Careers advice is not a mandated part of the national curriculum and is delivered in a variety of forms by a wide range of stakeholders including schools, universities, TAFEs, RTOs, employment services, industry organisations, private companies, employers themselves and governments.⁹⁵

This wide-ranging approach to careers advice underpins the Commissioner's view that there should be a national comprehensive assessment of the accessibility, quality and impact of careers advice in the regions.

Whilst there is a commonly held understanding that access to, and quality of, careers advice in the regions is not as consistent as in metropolitan areas, the data is anecdotal and piecemeal. A national assessment of the current state of careers advice in regional, rural and remote Australia would be an invaluable resource that could also be used to inform a set of baseline standards, or national framework as recommended by the Australian Universities Accord, for careers advice in the regions.

'Careers advice in the regions is often just 'luck of the draw' as to whether someone has a good experience or not.'

Satara Uthayakumaran, 2025 Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations

Issue for Consideration 13

Acknowledging the importance of timely and relevant careers advice to students across all life stages, and its pivotal role in nurturing aspiration and building confidence and improving tertiary education attainment, improve careers advice through measures including, but not limited to:

- undertaking a national comprehensive assessment to investigate the accessibility, effectiveness and quality of current careers advice delivery, including identifying good practices
- developing a consistent national framework for careers advice across all life stages.

94 Walsh L, *I'm not going to give up: how to help more disadvantaged young people go to uni and TAFE*, The Conversation, June 2025.

95 Australian Centre for Career Education, *Submission of priorities for the Australian Universities Accord*, 13 December 2022.

Online careers advice

For students in regional, rural and remote areas that may not have access to information about a broad range of careers, or indeed who do not have the opportunity to see or experience the full breadth of career options available within or beyond their community, online tools and programs can be a valuable source to address this gap.

During the COVID pandemic the former National Careers Institute ran a School Leavers Information Service (SLIS) program as this cohort of school leavers was particularly affected by lockdowns and reduced opportunities for work experience and careers advice.⁹⁶ School leavers were able to call, text or email information officers, who would then help them navigate available resources, such as the School Leavers Information Kit and Your Career website. Referrals were also available for school leavers to meet with a qualified career practitioner for more personalised careers advice. The Commissioner has heard that the SLIS was effective in supporting young people impacted by the pandemic to explore and access available education, training and work options.

This program ceased in mid-2023. However, the Commissioner sees value in reinstating a program of this nature, in particular for regional, rural and remote students that may otherwise struggle to access specialised careers advice.

Issue for Consideration 14

Re-establish an online careers advice service, that builds on the School Leavers Information Service which was in place during the COVID pandemic, to enhance access to high quality careers advice for regional, rural and remote students and career changers.

Careers advice and pathways for students with disability

Several stakeholders have noted to the Commissioner that students with disability struggle with the transition from school to further education and employment, and this is compounded by low expectations and poor quality or non-existent career development at school. An inquiry into careers advice activities in Victorian schools found that young people with disability and their parents felt that school career development is inadequate and some described feeling like they 'have been dropped off a cliff' once the young person leaves school and reaches adulthood.⁹⁷ In particular, for those students with disability who do not complete year 12, they may miss out on careers advice if it is not delivered outside the senior high school years.⁹⁸

Students with disability in regional, rural and remote areas experience compounding factors that impact their ability to become aware of and pursue post-school pathways without substantial advocacy and networking from their parents and carers. Reform of careers advice in Australian schools should include a consideration of how better to assist students with disability in regional, rural and remote areas to nurture their aspiration and reach their full potential.

⁹⁶ National Careers Institute, School Leavers Information Service, *Your Career: What's next for you*, p. 17, accessed 15 October 2025.

⁹⁷ Parliament of Victoria, *Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools*, Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, August 2018, p 133.

⁹⁸ Parliament of Victoria, *Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools*, Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, August 2018, p 135.

Aspiration raising, outreach and experiences

An important part of aspiration building, particularly in the regions, is providing students with exposure to a diverse range of experiences and opportunities that inspire and inform their choices. A constant theme when it comes to aspiration in the regions is that 'you can't be what you can't see', and with young people's future study direction often being defined by choices made in their early years it is important that they are given exposure to a wide range of potential career experiences throughout their schooling.

Specialised programs in regional high schools

Providing students with access to hands-on and more in-depth training in school can allow for earlier building and nurturing of student aspirations, and training opportunities for future career pathways.

Taking agriculture as an example, specialised agricultural high schools, or agriculture programs embedded within the high school curriculum, are important strategies to support the training and development of the future agricultural workforce. For students who are interested in agriculture, these programs provide access to specialised facilities and the opportunity to gain practical experience on working farms or in other agricultural enterprises. Where relevant, students can also obtain VET qualifications and start on pathways into the workforce or further tertiary study.

Hands on experiences

Work experience programs provide support to young people in the regions, and can assist them in deciding on a potential career path. In 2025, the Commissioner heard from Chatham High School how the school is nurturing aspiration in its secondary students through work experience opportunities. The Commissioner also heard about the longstanding Passions and Pathways program in Bendigo that does outstanding work linking students with industry in their early years, inspiring them to future careers.

CASE STUDY: Chatham High School

Chatham High School, located on the Mid North Coast of New South Wales, is one of two public high schools in the town of Taree. In May 2025, Chatham High School began to pilot the Next Steps Program, a program aimed at helping bridge the gap between school and employment. Codesigned with local community organisations and elders, the program is making a real difference to its students and the Manning Valley.

Within their schooling community, Chatham High School teachers found that there were barriers facing some students, including lack of exposure to the workplace and that the traditional schooling model was not providing the opportunity for its students to gain real life workplace skills.

To help bridge this gap, the program offers traineeships and apprenticeships within a supportive environment, providing senior students the chance to gain experience in the workforce, access to vocational education and to build a sense of entrepreneurship.

CASE STUDY: Passions and Pathways, Bendigo

Passions and Pathways is a career related learning program aligned to the Victorian Curriculum and the Australian Blueprint for Career Development, and supported by the City of Greater Bendigo. For over 13 years,⁹⁹ the program has actively engaged year 5 and 6 students in diverse and hands-on experiences with local businesses to develop self-knowledge, confidence, and aspiration for future pathways.¹⁰⁰

Passions and Pathways offer a variety of different supports for participating students, schools and businesses. This support is through expos, educational immersion days, professional development for teachers, tours of local businesses and involving Young Industry Ambassadors who inspire young students about future industry opportunities in their local region. In 2024, the program engaged with 468 students across 10 schools, and facilitated 10 business and school partnerships.¹⁰¹

Even when students can access aspiration-nurturing, hands on experiences, it is important that they are followed up with targeted career education and support.

Young people in the regions should, where possible, have access to informed advice, clear and accessible training pathways, and rewarding work opportunities. Schools and other community organisations must therefore be appropriately resourced in order to provide students with a range of career education opportunities that encourage them to follow their aspirations. A program, similar to the New South Wales Educational Pathways Program,¹⁰² that provides resources and an organised high-level approach to career education in the regions could help to provide young people in the regions with a variety of opportunities that can help them move into the kinds of futures to which they aspire.

Careers expos

Careers expos or fairs have long been a relatively accessible way for students to receive information on the wide variety of potential study and career avenues, and the Commissioner continues to hear of successful expos and events for RRR students. However, they are just one avenue available for students to receive information and advice on future careers.

99 Career Development Association Australia, [Growing a Primary Career Program From the Grass Roots](#), accessed 24 October, 2025.

100 [Passions and Pathways](#), accessed 12 September 2025.

101 [Passions and Pathways](#), accessed 12 September 2025.

102 NSW Government, [Educational Pathways Program](#), accessed 12 September 2025.

CASE STUDY: CareerQuip Regional Careers Expo, Taree

On 31 July 2025, CareerQuip, a regional careers expo was held in Taree. Aimed at providing students from the Mid North Coast region of New South Wales with direct opportunities to access a diverse range of study and career opportunities.¹⁰³ Hosted at Taree's TAFE NSW campus, the event was held in collaboration with TAFE NSW, Mid Coast Connect, Taree Universities Campus (TUC) and the NSW Government's Regional Industry Education Partnership (RIEP).¹⁰⁴

This year, the expo brought together 65 exhibitors including universities, training organisations, government agencies and local businesses. The expo aims to inspire and guide students to explore various career pathways so that they can make informed decisions about their future, and to empower students to pursue meaningful careers within their community.

The event was made possible through the support of TAFE NSW, who provided the venue following the flooding in May 2025, ensuring that CareerQuip could proceed. This collaboration demonstrates the commitment of local organisations to support the wider Taree region and highlighted the importance of community spirit in times of adversity.

Outreach programs

University outreach programs provide students with valuable information and experiences as they consider their post-school options. However, as has been raised with the Commissioner previously, it is important that where possible this outreach has a collaborative and holistic approach rather than universities solely providing information about their own offerings.

In this manner, it has been very encouraging to see the ongoing work of the Eastern Australia Regional University Centre Partnership (EARUCP) that arose from the Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program. This project, facilitated by the Country Universities Centre and University of Technology Sydney, has seen over 30 universities and RUSHs work together with communities to deliver a range of locally tailored initiatives aimed at inspiring young people from the regions. The EARUCP highlights the potential of utilising the community presence of RUSH sites as an avenue for local outreach and aspiration-building.

103 [CareerQuip](#), accessed 12 September 2025.

104 Taree Universities Campus, [CareerQuip 2025 Inspires and Connects the Mid Coast Community](#), accessed 12 September 2025.

CASE STUDY: Eastern Australia Regional University Centre Partnerships

MyStrengths: This program is a collaboration between CUC Southern Shoalhaven, the Australian National University, the University of Wollongong and the University of Canberra. The program aims to empower year 8 students at Ulladulla High School with knowledge about their personal values and individual strengths. The program partners university students and community-based mentors with year 8 students, offering them the opportunity to draw on stories and relationships outside of their usual social circles to open their minds to alternative pathways and better understand themselves.¹⁰⁵

Peak Pathways: This program is a collaboration between CUC Ovens Murray, La Trobe University and RMIT University. The program works with students in years 5 to 8 to help students identify a broader range of local careers, employers and professionals within their region. Students can relate their strengths and interests to potential jobs and industries, and have developed the confidence to explore different education, job and career possibilities. Parents and teachers are engaged in re-framing and broadening career and education conversations.¹⁰⁶

Cape Country Careers: This program is a collaboration between CUC Cape York, James Cook University, Central Queensland University and the University of Queensland as a secondary partner. The program's goal is to introduce local youth to innovative career pathways and increase engagement in further education and employment. The program uses virtual reality workplace experiences, enabling students to explore career opportunities often inaccessible to them due to geographic limitations.¹⁰⁷

Regional leadership and mentoring programs

Another example of an opportunity that supports the aspirational and personal development of young people in the regions is the delivery of leadership and mentoring programs. In regional communities there are many different ways for young people to develop their confidence and leadership skills – whether it's in the playground, on the field or at a part-time job – but dedicated leadership and mentoring programs are a powerful avenue to access this kind of development in a formalised way.

This year, the Commissioner has engaged closely with Rural Youth Ambassadors from both Victoria and South Australia, speaking to them about their experiences growing up and accessing education in the regions. Their feedback and creative solutions to the many education-related issues they face in the regions has been invaluable. The Commissioner also had the opportunity to talk with the Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations, Satara Uthayakumaran, who was in the process of undertaking a national listening tour to hear from students all over the country including several regional and remote communities.

105 Country Universities Centre Southern Shoalhaven, [2024 CUC Southern Shoalhaven Annual Report](#), 2024, p 5.

106 RMIT University, [Regional and remote students](#), accessed 12 September 2025.

107 Country Universities Centre Cape York, [Cape Country Careers Program](#), accessed 3 October 2025.

CASE STUDY: Rural Youth Ambassadors Programs

To foster youth aspirations in regional, rural and remote communities, Victoria¹⁰⁸ and South Australia¹⁰⁹ have established Rural Youth Ambassador Programs. These programs provide year 11 regional, rural and remote students with the opportunity to develop their leadership and youth agency skills, connect with other students across the regions and represent the youth voice in regional Australia.

Issue for Consideration 15

Establish a national Rural Youth Ambassadors program to enhance education outcomes in the regions by nurturing the aspirations and strengthening the leadership skills of regional, rural and remote young people.

Educator workforce in the regions

During her time in the role, the Commissioner has met local teachers and principals throughout regional, rural and remote Australia making substantial contributions to their communities. She has repeatedly heard from these educators about the many benefits of living and teaching in the regions, with a focus on the close relationships built with students and families, strong community support, and how much they value the sense of community. However, this prominent role in the community requires teachers and leaders to have a specific and unique set of skills.

‘Teachers and school leaders play an important role in supporting regional and remote communities, long after the bell and well beyond the school gate.’

Tim Bullard, CEO, Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership

As noted in her previous Annual Reports, accessible professional development opportunities are critical for supporting teachers to navigate the unique complexities of teaching in regional, rural and remote schools. Accessing and participating in professional development opportunities can be more challenging for regional, rural and remote teachers due to a lack of local opportunities, the cost of travel and accommodation, and the availability and cost of casual and relief teachers to backfill staff.¹¹⁰

Microcredential programs such as the University of Canberra’s Professional Certificate in Education (Regional and Rural) provide an accessible opportunity for teachers already in the workforce at a regional, rural or remote school, or teachers planning to relocate, to gain new and relevant skills. The program is delivered via a combination of optional face-to-face workshops in regional centres and online learning resources to ensure accessibility.

108 Country Education Partnership, *Rural Youth Ambassadors – A Leadership and Student Agency Initiative*, 2020.

109 Department for Education *South Australia, South Australian Rural Youth Ambassadors program for country students*, accessed 12 September 2025.

110 Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, *Spotlight Professional Learning for Rural, Regional and Remote Teachers*, 2018, p. 3.

CASE STUDY: Professional Certificate in Education (Rural and Regional)

The Professional Certificate in Education (Rural and Regional) was recently developed as part of the Commonwealth Microcredential Pilot by the University of Canberra in collaboration with the NSW Department of Education. The professional certificate was co-designed with primary and secondary principal representatives and senior leaders responsible for rural areas.

The course is spread out over two school terms per unit to ensure a manageable workload, and where possible assessment is aligned to educators' everyday work. The course mixes current research with practical examples and is a unique offering focussing on the distinctive elements of rural professional practice.

In 2025, there have been some positive developments regarding educator shortages that have persistently impacted regional, rural and remote schools. For example, vacancies in regional and rural New South Wales schools have almost halved, with teacher vacancies falling to a 4-year low. There are now 654 teacher vacancies in 1,369 public schools compared to 1,235 in 2023.¹¹¹ Although a reverse in the trend is pleasing to see, there are still 654 vacancies that need to be urgently filled.

The Commissioner has heard from stakeholders that financial incentive programs alone will not support a sustainable regional teaching workforce. These financial payments supplement the cost of relocating to, and living in, a regional, rural and remote community. However, one of the main incentives for a teacher to move to a regional, rural or remote school is the opportunity to become part of a vibrant community and fulfil a valued role as a pillar of that community.

*'It is time to try something different to attract and retain teachers in regional, rural and remote schools. Instead of emphasising extrinsic motivations such as higher pay and professional incentives, perhaps we should shift focus to what is already there and waiting in RRR communities – opportunities for belonging, validation and flourishing.'*¹¹²

Christina Gray et al, 2025

A critical part of addressing workforce shortages in the regions is attracting more students to study teaching, including mid-career changers. In 2025, there has been a 24% increase in enrolments in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) across Australia.¹¹³ Tapping into the growing pipeline of teaching students, including from metropolitan locations, provides an opportunity to increase the number of teachers in the regions.

111 NSW Government, [Vacancies in regional and rural NSW schools almost halved as kids return to class with more teachers in front of them](#), Media Release by Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Early Learning, 4 February 2025.

112 Gray C, Lambert K, Macdonald M, Harris M, Beard T, Jackson K & Booth S., ["A bull stole my bike": Teachers' experiences of belonging in regional, rural and remote Australian communities](#), Issues in Educational Research, 35(1), 2025.

113 Scott M, [National pivot to skills will ensure new teachers are equipped for rewarding careers](#), The Daily Telegraph, 21 May 2025.

Attracting pre-service teachers to the regions

All students studying to become a teacher must undertake placements across their degree to gain the practical experience to enter the classroom as a high quality teacher. However, undertaking a placement in a regional, rural or remote school may seem unfeasible or overwhelming to a city student who may not have experienced the benefits of living and working in a regional community.

In 2025, the Commissioner heard from a group of pre-service teachers and principals who participated in the Coast to Country Program, a pre-service teacher support program run by the University of the Sunshine Coast. The aim of this program is to provide pre-service teachers with the opportunity to participate in a week-long experience in a rural or remote location to experience living and working in a country community. All participants who met with the Commissioner spoke highly of the program's value and the positive impact on their decision to undertake their placement and commence their careers in the regions.

CASE STUDY: University of the Sunshine Coast - Coast to Country program

For people who have not grown up or lived in a regional, rural or remote community, people may feel daunted to relocate to a regional community, particularly if they do not have any connections to that community. The University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC) has become a trailblazer in supporting their students to experience a taster of life in regional, rural and remote parts of Queensland.

The Coast to Country experience affords pre-service teachers attending UniSC with the opportunity to visit and interact with a range of school personnel in rural and remote locations. These trips are often a precursor to pre-service teachers undertaking a professional experience in one of these locations, often leading to permanent employment and the further development of partnerships between UniSC and schools.¹¹⁴

A participant in the program said: *'This experience has profoundly informed my perception of my readiness for teaching and living in regional, rural and remote areas. Interacting with dedicated and resilient teachers in these communities has highlighted the unique challenges and rewards of working in these locations. I now feel more prepared and motivated to contribute positively to regional, rural and remote education and embrace the lifestyle it involves.'*

Funding teaching students to undertake short-term excursions to regional, rural or remote schools would expose these students to the opportunities that teaching regionally brings and potentially increase the pipeline of teachers in the regions. It would also ensure that those students who are not suited to life in the regions can make this decision early, rather than taking on a placement or teaching position that they then depart from shortly after.

Commissioner's Note 7

The Commissioner encourages higher education providers to establish or expand programs that allow pre-service teachers to visit regional, rural and remote schools and communities for a short excursion prior to undertaking their placement.

¹¹⁴ Mahony L and Sanderson T, [Coast to Country: Immersing quality preservice teachers in regional, rural and remote schools](#), University of the Sunshine Coast, 2024.

Supporting pre-service teachers to have an engaging regional placement

Pre-service teachers undertaking a placement in a regional, rural or remote school should be supported to fully experience the benefits of living and working in regional Australia. Whilst financial support greatly assists those students undertaking a placement in the regions, a more holistic approach should include mentoring and community support.

Initiatives such as Country Education Partnership's Teach Rural program have successfully supported hundreds of pre-service teachers to experience an engaging regional placement. In March 2025, the Commissioner met with the Country Education Partnership (CEP) as well as pre-service teachers who have participated in their program. These pre-service teachers, the majority from metropolitan backgrounds, shared with the Commissioner that they were teaching or planning to teach in a regional, rural or remote school.

TERTIARY EDUCATION



Tertiary education can be lifechanging. Whether this is undertaking vocational education and training (VET) or higher education, tertiary education provides students with the opportunity to pursue and realise their ambitions, developing the skills and knowledge that they will utilise throughout their careers and lives. Tertiary education drives innovation and growth in our society, bolsters areas of workforce need, and increases overall prosperity.

Over the past few years, the tertiary sector has undergone a period of substantial review, with significant reform still to come. At the centre of this, the Australian Government has set a goal of lifting tertiary education attainment to 80% of working age people by 2050.¹¹⁵ It is widely discussed that this target will not be met without increasing the participation of, and providing meaningful support for, currently under-represented student cohorts. It is therefore a target that cannot be achieved without serious consideration of students in regional, rural and remote Australia.

Tertiary participation and attainment rates remain persistently lower in regional, rural and remote areas than in metropolitan Australia. This can be seen as a culmination of many of the issues raised throughout this report extending from limited access to early childhood education and care, children starting behind and falling even further behind during school, and ultimately lower school completion rates. The opportunities and life-changing benefits that tertiary study, whether it is VET or higher education, can bring to a student should not be limited by geography.

Regional, rural and remote students deserve the opportunity to access tertiary education and to then be supported through to successful careers, allowing them to develop the skills and confidence they will use throughout the rest of their lives. Increasing access to foundation skills and enabling courses, simplifying recognition of prior learning, and ensuring that students are either able to attend an education provider local to them, or are appropriately supported to travel or relocate, are all vital ways of increasing the number of young people in the regions accessing tertiary education.

Beyond this first step of improving access, these students must then be provided with the appropriate educational, financial and social supports to help them feel secure and confident in progressing through their tertiary studies. The specific needs of each student will differ, but we must continue to enhance the system and supports for these students so that they are provided with an equitable opportunity to succeed. Enhancing access to, and completion of, tertiary education in this way can unlock significant untapped potential in regional, rural and remote Australian communities.

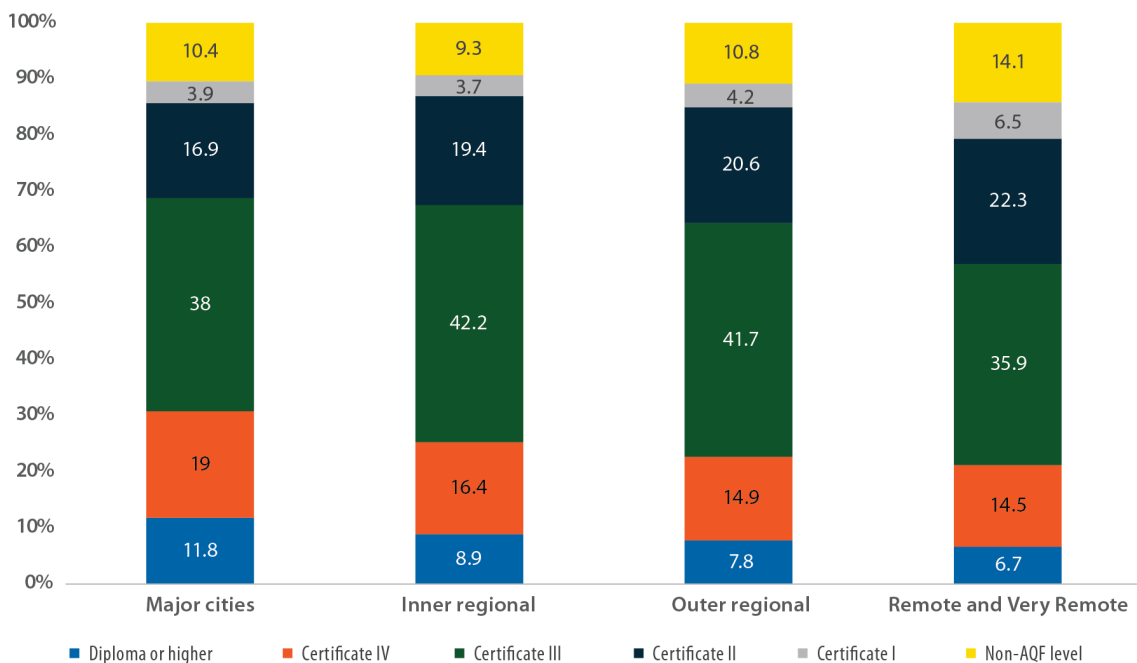
115 Australian Government, [Australian Universities Accord – Budget Summary](#), 15 May 2024, p 5.

Access to tertiary education in the regions

Vocational Education and Training in the regions

Vocational Education and Training (VET) remains a popular post-secondary training pathway in regional Australia. However, compared to the Major Cities, regional and remote students are more likely to be undertaking lower-level VET qualifications (Figure 6).¹¹⁶ Across Australia, private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) remain the most common provider type, with over half of all enrolments across all geographic areas - Major Cities, Inner Regional, Outer Regional and Remote areas, being in RTOs (Figure 7).¹¹⁷ Based on the latest available data, TAFEs enrol approximately 30% of students across each of the remoteness areas, with the remaining students completing their VET courses through schools, universities, community education or enterprise providers.¹¹⁸

Figure 6: VET program enrolments by qualification level and remoteness, 2024

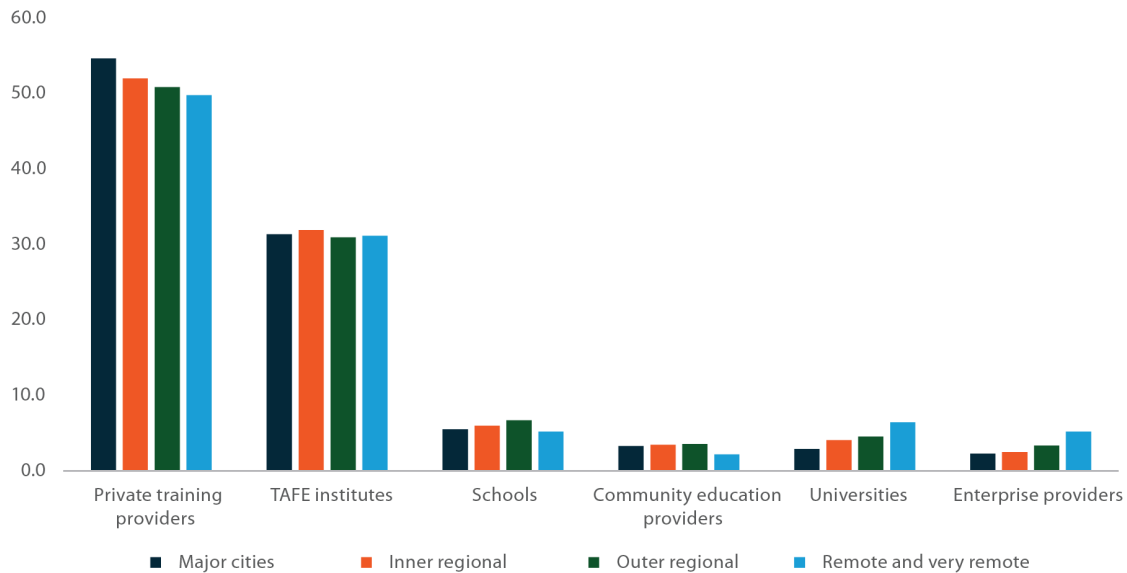


Source: NCVET 2025, Total VET students and courses 2024: program enrolments DataBuilder, Total, Remoteness region, Level of education by Year. Offshore and remoteness areas classified as not known are excluded.

¹¹⁶ Jobs and Skills Australia, [Towards a Regional, Rural and Remote Jobs and Skills Roadmap – Interim Report](#), October 2024, pp 68-69.

¹¹⁷ Jobs and Skills Australia, [Towards a Regional, Rural and Remote Jobs and Skills Roadmap – Interim Report](#), October 2024, pp 70-71.

¹¹⁸ Jobs and Skills Australia, [Towards a Regional, Rural and Remote Jobs and Skills Roadmap – Interim Report](#), October 2024, pp 70-71.

Figure 7: VET program enrolments, by remoteness and provider type, 2024

Source: NCVET 2025, Total VET students and courses 2024: program enrolments DataBuilder, Total, Provider type, Remoteness region by Year. Offshore and remoteness areas classified as not known are excluded.

Higher education in the regions

Regionally headquartered universities have some of the highest enrolment rates of students under-represented in higher education, including students from regional and remote areas and low SES backgrounds, First Nations students, and students with disability.¹¹⁹ These universities play a leading role in expanding access to higher education for under-represented cohorts, which is vital from both an equity perspective as well as meeting future regional workforce needs.

University early offers

Although early entry schemes are sometimes criticised, the Commissioner has heard that these programs can be of significant benefit to regional, rural and remote students, particularly with regard to boosting student confidence and providing certainty as they consider their options beyond year 12. As described in the School Education chapter of this report, students completing their senior secondary schooling in regional, rural and remote areas are already likely to be at a significant educational disadvantage due to limited subject selection, limited availability of specialist teaching staff and other potential barriers. Despite these disadvantages, students living in regional communities may have skills and experience beyond the school gates that can be showcased and recognised through well designed early entry schemes, such as La Trobe University's Aspire Early Offer Program.

¹¹⁹ In 2024, all regionally headquartered universities (CSU, UNE, CDU, CQU, JCU, UTAS, CDU, FedUni, UniSQ, SCU) had >40% of domestic undergraduate students from regional and remote locations (based on First Address in a Regional or Remote area, 2021 ASGS). Department of Education, Selected Higher Education Statistics, [2024 Student Data, 2024 Section 11 – Equity Groups](#), Table 11.7.

CASE STUDY: La Trobe University Aspire Early Offer Program

The Community Impact stream of La Trobe University's Aspire early offer program¹²⁰ recognises students for their volunteering or community contribution.

Bendigo Health and La Trobe University have engaged in a successful partnership that allows year 12 students who volunteer at Bendigo Health during their school holidays to receive an early conditional offer through the La Trobe University Aspire program.

This community-led initiative allows school students to experience working in healthcare and rewards them for volunteering their time through the early entry opportunity.

In their submission to the University Admissions Framework Project, the Regional Universities Network (RUN) outlined the benefits of early offers including relieving pressure and anxiety, supporting life planning for the following year, raising aspiration and allowing for students to be assessed for university at a much more holistic level.¹²¹ The Commissioner echoed these points when she met with the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) about this project, and reinforced the fact that early entry schemes also allow students and families additional time to plan; which is particularly important given that many regional, rural and remote students have no choice but to relocate to undertake their studies.

A joined up Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education system

A vital part of increasing access to and success in tertiary education for students in the regions, and indeed across Australia as a whole, is the recognition of the links between the higher education and VET systems and support for more deliberate integration and alignment. As has been recognised in previous Annual Reports from the Commissioner, the VET and higher education systems provide parallel pathways to success. Whilst serving different needs, neither system is inherently better than the other in enabling students to pursue their ambition and gain vital skills for their future, and so students should be encouraged to follow the post-school pathway that best suits them. To support accessible education for all students in the regions we must develop a tertiary sector with robust pathways to both the higher education and VET system and the ability to move seamlessly between them.

Over the last year the notion of a 'joined up' or 'harmonised' tertiary system has gained increased traction. The Accord final report highlighted the need for a 'more seamless tertiary education system' in order to make qualification attainment faster and easier for students.¹²²

120 La Trobe University, [Aspire Community Impact](#), accessed 3 October 2025.

121 Regional Universities Network, [ACER: University Admissions Framework Project](#), February 2025, pp 5-7.

122 Australian Universities Accord Review Panel, [Australian Universities Accord Final Report](#), February 2024, p 3.

Earlier this year, Jobs and Skills Australia released the Towards a Tertiary Harmonisation Roadmap,¹²³ a report that explores the current difficulties of navigating pathways between the tertiary systems and depicts the potential that an aligned tertiary sector holds to improve equitable access for currently under-represented student cohorts – including those from regional, rural and remote areas. The Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia also noted the specific benefits increased alignment between the two tertiary systems would bring to the regional jobs and skills system by supporting prospective students to continue their education in whatever post-school system best suits their needs.¹²⁴

Encouragingly, there is already a solid foundation of this kind of connection between VET and higher education in regional, rural and remote contexts. Three regionally headquartered universities, Charles Darwin University, Federation University and Central Queensland University, are existing dual-sector providers offering both VET and higher education qualifications and allowing for easier movement between them.

CASE STUDY: Federation University Dual-Sector Provision

With campuses across regional Victoria, Federation University has been aiming to provide its students with better mobility between vocational and higher education through its dual-sector provisions. Currently, Federation University recognises over 20 different TAFE programs, which students can use to transition into a related higher education course, whilst getting course credit. By facilitating a pathway into higher education, this enables more students the opportunity to study a university degree.¹²⁵

Beyond dual-sector universities, there are also many examples of partnerships between universities, RTOs, TAFEs, and local industry or community organisations that provide flexible pathways for students to move between VET and higher education. These 'one-stop-shop' partnerships, as identified in the Towards a Tertiary Harmonisation Roadmap,¹²⁶ represent the value of a targeted community approach in the regions that can provide local opportunities for people to forge their own career pathways whilst aligning with local community and economic goals.

123 Jobs and Skills Australia, [Opportunity and Productivity: Towards a Tertiary Harmonisation Roadmap](#), February 2025.

124 Jobs and Skills Australia, [Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia – Phase 1](#), July 2025, p 12.

125 Federation University, [From TAFE to undergraduate](#), accessed 3 October 2025.

126 Jobs and Skills Australia, [Opportunity and Productivity: Towards a Tertiary Harmonisation Roadmap](#), February 2025.

CASE STUDY: Charles Sturt University VET Pathways

Supporting the harmonisation between vocational and higher education is an important goal of Charles Sturt University (CSU). Currently, CSU supports students who have completed a TAFE or VET certificate and diploma with guaranteed entry into a variety of undergraduate courses. Not only does this give students the opportunity to study a degree, it also means that students can complete their degree more quickly and at a lower cost through recognition of prior learning. CSU also offers dedicated scholarships to VET pathway students, which can support their transition to university.¹²⁷ CSU has established partnerships with VET providers including GoTAFE, Holmesglen TAFE Institute and TAFE NSW to deliver undergraduate degrees in Veterinary Technology, Oral Health and Social Work.

Over 50% of students enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Work at CSU enrol through TAFE or other vocational pathways, broadening access and strengthening regional skills pipelines. The Bachelor of Social Work Integrated Pathway is a four-year program where students study concurrently for the CSU Bachelor of Social Work and a TAFE NSW Diploma of Community Services during the first two years. This integrated approach allows students to complete both qualifications within the same timeframe as a traditional degree. The program provides extensive practical experience by combining university theory with TAFE skill-building, preparing students for careers as social workers with the required professional accreditation.

CASE STUDY: Flinders University and TAFE South Australia

TAFE South Australia (TAFE SA) and Flinders University have a number of 'dual offer courses' where students have guaranteed entry, with credit, into Flinders courses upon successful completion of a VET qualification. Benefits include maximising credit transfer opportunities, graduating with two qualifications and the opportunity to commence tertiary studies in a regional area with less time in the city to complete the degree thus saving living expenses.¹²⁸

In selected Creative Arts disciplines, Flinders University and TAFE SA operate a single, integrated program structure. Students begin with hands-on learning in TAFE SA's specialist workshops while progressively engaging with university-level theory, critique and capstone work at Flinders. In this case, the vocational and higher education components fit together as one plan rather than separate awards connected after the fact. Importantly, student support is also organised around the integrated design resulting in a single experience across the two providers.

In August 2025, the Minister for Education announced that in response to the Accord and JSA's Towards a Tertiary Harmonisation Roadmap, the Australian Government would be tasking the newly established ATEC to lead development on a Tertiary Roadmap to strengthen the links between the higher education and VET sectors and ultimately produce better pathways for students.¹²⁹ As part of this, a Tertiary System Advisory Council has been established to guide this work.

127 Charles Sturt University, [TAFE/VET admission pathways](#), accessed 3 October 2025.

128 Flinders University, [TAFE and uni dual offers](#), accessed 29 October 2025.

129 Clare J and Rishworth A, [Next steps to deliver a joined up tertiary education system](#), Ministers of the Education Portfolio Media Centre, 19 August 2025.

Credit transfer and recognition of prior learning

The Commissioner's 2024 Annual Report identified limitations with a lack of standardised approaches to recognition of prior learning and the specific impact this is having on the educator workforce in regional, rural and remote Australia. The importance of improving systems for recognition of prior learning was brought into particular focus this year, with this being one of the key ideas presented in the Productivity Commission's Interim Report on Building a Skilled and Adaptable Workforce.¹³⁰

In addition to recognising formal education pathways, there are other forms of experience that could also help boost the pipeline of people entering tertiary education. For example, supervisors educating distance education students may wish to upskill with Certificates in Education Support, or even bachelor's degrees in education. The Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA) have advocated for the experience of supervisors educating distance education to be recognised as prior work experience.¹³¹

Commissioner's Note 8

The Commissioner supports the Isolated Children's Parents' Association's motion that the experience of supervisors educating distance education students be recognised as prior work experience if they undertake formal study in education.

Shorter and stackable courses

There is an increasing call from students and employers for VET and university courses to be available as 'stackable', smaller units of study that students can complete in a more timely and cost-effective way. A regional industry stakeholder in Western Australia spoke to the Commissioner this year about the need for their staff to only undertake specific units of competency from VET qualifications and the current challenges for students to enrol in just the units needed.

Similarly, the Accord identified the need for 'more flexible and efficient ways for individuals to attain the skills they need across their working life'.¹³² Microcredentials were suggested by the Accord panel as a way to achieve this, and progress has been made by many universities in expanding the suite of Microcredentials on offer.

130 Productivity Commission, [Building a skilled and adaptable workforce, Interim report](#), August 2025.

131 Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, [2025 Federal Conference Main Agenda Motions](#), Motion A62.

132 Australian Universities Accord Review Panel, [Australian Universities Accord Final Report](#), February 2024, p 3.

Supporting regional, rural and remote tertiary students to succeed

Whilst access to tertiary education is undoubtedly important, when it comes to improving educational outcomes for students in the regions getting them enrolled is only the first step. There is a persistent gap between the success and completion rates of tertiary students from regional, rural and remote backgrounds and their metropolitan counterparts.¹³³ Students from regional Australia need to be supported and able to see their courses through to completion. Unfortunately, regional, rural and remote students continue to experience significant financial barriers.

Youth Allowance

The primary avenue of Australian Government financial support available to students seeking to undertake tertiary study is Youth Allowance. The Accord final report acknowledged the need to examine student payments to ensure that they continue to meet the intended outcome of supporting young people to complete apprenticeships and tertiary education qualifications.¹³⁴

Over the past 20 years there has been a decline in the number of students receiving Youth Allowance payments, likely linked with a strong labour market and an increase in the rate of students working to support themselves whilst studying.¹³⁵

This year the Commissioner heard that funding through payments such as Youth Allowance is linked with student aspiration in regional, rural and remote areas. As a student progresses through secondary school, knowing that financial support is available makes tertiary education a feasible pathway for them.

Qualification for Youth Allowance can also be an important gateway to other student supports. Several payments, including the Fares Allowance, Relocation Scholarships, Rent Assistance, and some Equity Scholarships, are tied to Youth Allowance eligibility. The Commonwealth Prac Payment also considers Youth Allowance status as part of the eligibility criteria, alongside other program eligibility requirements.

Independent Youth Allowance for students from regional, remote and very remote areas

Realistically, students in regional, rural and remote areas who have no choice but to relocate for tertiary study become 'independent' the moment they leave home. However, currently students from regional, remote and very remote areas must demonstrate independence and qualify for independent youth allowance through having worked at least 15 hours a week for a minimum of two years or earned 75% or more of wage Level A of the National Training Wage Schedule over a 14-month period.¹³⁶

The Commissioner continues to advocate for students who have no choice but to relocate from a regional, rural or remote area to be automatically considered independent.

133 Napthine D, [National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy: Final Report](#), Department of Education, 19 August 2019, p 23.

134 Australian Universities Accord Review Panel, [Australian Universities Accord Final Report](#), February 2024, p 145.

135 Medhora S, [Number of students on Youth Allowance drops significantly in 20 years](#), ABC News, 1 July 2025.

136 Department of Social Services, [Youth allowance concessional workforce independence criteria for regional students](#), Social Security Guide, Version 1.322, 4 November 2024.

Issue for Consideration 16

Expand access to, and boost attainment of, tertiary education qualifications for people from regional, rural and remote areas by undertaking a review of the regional, rural and remote Independent Youth Allowance eligibility criteria and making necessary adjustments to ensure that regional, rural and remote students who have no choice but to relocate for tertiary study are appropriately financially supported to do so.

Commonwealth Prac Payment

Implementation of the Commonwealth Prac Payment in July 2025 was an important and positive step in addressing placement poverty. Students are working an increasing number of hours whilst studying, and the requirement for compulsory unpaid placement can severely impact a student's ability to complete their degree.

Students enrolled in teaching, nursing, midwifery and social work degrees are now eligible for the \$331.65 per week payment (benchmarked to the single Austudy rate on 1 January each year).¹³⁷ Early feedback on this program from regional universities indicates that there has been an overall positive response to the introduction of the Commonwealth Prac Payment and very strong demand from students.

The Commissioner continues to hear from regional stakeholders about the need to expand this program to additional disciplines with workforce shortages in regional, rural and remote areas. Given the positive impact of rural placements on students' intent to work in the regions upon completion of their degree, the Commissioner supports an approach to expanding the CPP that accounts for disciplines with known regional workforce shortages and extended placement blocks in regional, rural and remote areas.

Commissioner's Note 9

The Commissioner strongly supports expansion of the Commonwealth Prac Payment program to identified additional disciplines with regional workforce shortages and extended placement periods in regional, rural and remote Australia.

Relocation and accommodation expenses

An increase in the number of courses available for online study, and the expansion of the Regional University Study Hub program, are allowing more regional, rural and remote students to remain in their hometowns to complete their VET qualifications or higher education degrees. Fortunately, these students can avoid the high cost of relocation. However, there remain a significant number of courses where online study is simply not an option and, in these instances, regional, rural and remote students have no choice but to relocate. Even in instances where courses may be available for online study, regional students should be afforded the opportunity to choose on-campus study if that is their preferred mode of study. Higher education completion data clearly shows that full-time, on-campus students have significantly higher completion rates compared to part-time, online cohorts.¹³⁸

137 Department of Education, [Commonwealth Prac Payment](#), accessed 5 November 2025.

138 Department of Education, Higher Education Statistics, [Completion Rates of Higher Education Students – Cohort Analysis, 2005-2022](#), Table 1.

Tertiary Access Payment

Payment timing and communications

Expanding the eligibility of the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) to students who have undertaken a gap year has been well received by regional students, families and communities. However, the timing of the payment remains problematic. The Commissioner understands that the current payment timing centres around the session census date, where a student's enrolment in their subjects is confirmed, but this date is at least four weeks into the session and payment at this time does not align with the policy intent to support students with upfront relocation costs.

As discussed in the Commissioner's 2024 report, while the preference is to change the timing of the payment, if that is not possible a reasonable approach would be to improve the communications sent to the students to reassure them prior to their relocation that the payment will be forthcoming following confirmation of enrolment after the census date, all eligibility requirements having been fulfilled.

Issue for Consideration 17

Improve uptake of the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) by providing students with the financial support, or at least confirmation that the payment will be made upon verification of their tertiary study enrolment after the census date, prior to relocation rather than after they commence their studies.

Expanding TAP to apprentices

Cost of living pressures continue to affect university students and apprentices alike. Currently, first-year apprentices relocating to undertake their training are eligible for the Commonwealth Living Away from Home Allowance, a payment of \$120 per week, which does not reflect the actual cost borne by rural, regional and remote apprentices who have no choice but to relocate to complete their qualifications.¹³⁹ This payment decreases to \$90 per week and \$45 per week, in their second and third year of training, adding to the financial challenges for apprentices completing their training.¹⁴⁰

Consistent with ongoing advocacy from the ICPA, the Commissioner supports a call for expansion of the TAP to apprentices who need to relocate from their hometown to undertake their training.

Issue for Consideration 18

Extend the eligibility for the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) to include regional, rural and remote Australian Apprentices who must relocate from their place of residence to undertake their apprenticeship.

On-campus accommodation for first year university students

As discussed above, many regional, rural and remote students have no choice but to leave home to undertake tertiary study. The availability and affordability of housing for students is an increasingly important issue and can be a determining factor for regional students when deciding to undertake tertiary study or not. The Anglicare Australia 2025 Rental Affordability Snapshot reported that no rentals were affordable for a person on Youth Allowance,¹⁴¹ highlighting the need for affordable, on-campus accommodation options for regional students.

139 Australian Government, [Financial support for apprentices](#), accessed 3 October 2025.

140 Australian Government, [Financial support for apprentices](#), accessed 3 October 2025.

141 Anglicare Australia, [Rental Affordability Snapshot, National Report 2025, Sixteenth Edition](#), p 6.

Many universities offer accommodation or equity scholarships. There are also numerous not-for-profit or community organisations that provide accommodation support for regional university students. After talking with stakeholders throughout 2025, the Commissioner believes that additional investment in on-campus student accommodation for first year regional students undertaking their study on a regional campus would have a significant positive impact on higher education access and attainment for regional students.

Issue for Consideration 19

Expand access to, and boost attainment of, higher education by providing Government funding for first year on-campus accommodation costs for regional, rural and remote students who relocate and reside on a regional university campus.

Affordability aside, the support and connection offered by on-campus student accommodation can also improve student success and lead to higher retention rates and ultimately improved attainment. At the University of Wollongong, students who live in university residences were more likely to achieve higher academic results, with the university implementing a residential peer-based learning model in 2017.¹⁴²

The ICPA passed a motion at their 2025 Federal Conference to encourage 'residential colleges to prioritise rural and remote tertiary students who seek on campus accommodation to pursue their tertiary education'.¹⁴³ A number of regional and metropolitan universities already offer first year on-campus accommodation guarantees for regional students, such as Charles Sturt University.

CASE STUDY: Charles Sturt University First Year Accommodation Guarantee

For many regional, rural and remote students who need to relocate to attend university, finding suitable student accommodation can be the difference between a student being able to accept or decline an offer to study. To ensure all first-year students have this opportunity, Charles Sturt University (CSU) offers all first-year students who apply for on-campus accommodation a guaranteed place. Offering guaranteed accommodation to first-year students not only gives them a safe and vibrant community in which to live and study, but also peace of mind that their accommodation is secured.¹⁴⁴

CSU and Country Education Foundation Partnership

Although living on campus can be a significant expense for students, the Country Education Foundation (CEF) has partnered with CSU to increase direct financial support for CEF students enrolled at the university. From 2025, \$400,000 in funding will be distributed over the next three years to support CEF students studying at university, which can help ease the transition into tertiary education. With students being able to put the scholarships towards study or living expenses, it supports them through this significant transition.¹⁴⁵

142 Vickery S, [First year students living in UOW residences perform better academically](#), University of Wollongong, September 2017, accessed 3 October 2025.

143 Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, [2025 Federal Conference Main Agenda Motions](#), Motion A61.

144 Charles Sturt University, [First year student guarantee](#), accessed 3 October 2025.

145 Country Education Foundation Australia, [CEF announces official partnership with Charles Sturt University](#), May 2025.

Commissioner's Note 10

The Commissioner encourages all universities to have programs in place to ensure regional, rural and remote students, who have no choice but to relocate to undertake tertiary study, have priority access to on-campus university accommodation.

Accommodation for regional apprentices

The accommodation challenges for regional students undertaking apprenticeships, and blocks of in-person study, are perhaps even greater than those for university students. It is uncommon for training organisations including private RTOs or TAFEs to provide student accommodation facilities. The Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia identified the need to examine the 'availability of accommodation in Regional Australia for Vocational Education and Training (VET) students. ...to support access to in-person training blocks for vocational students in regional centres.'¹⁴⁶

A positive development in 2025 was the Australian Government's announcement of \$5.1 million to build culturally safe and supported accommodation at the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education in the Desert Knowledge Precinct in Alice Springs.¹⁴⁷ The Batchelor Institute is Australia's only First Nations dual-sector tertiary provider offering a range of VET courses and post-graduate research programs.¹⁴⁸

*'This new accommodation at the Desert Knowledge Precinct will create a home away from home for our students, many of whom travel vast distances to learn with us. By providing a culturally supportive environment, we're ensuring they can thrive in their studies whilst staying connected to their communities and cultures.'*¹⁴⁹

Professor Kathryn Gilbey, Executive Dean of Higher Education and Research at Batchelor Institute

Commissioner's Note 11

Further consideration needs to be given to the accommodation needs of regional, rural and remote students relocating to undertake their apprenticeship or intensive on-campus learning blocks.

146 Jobs and Skills Australia, [Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia – Phase 1](#), July 2025, p 12.

147 Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, [Batchelor Institute Secures \\$5.1 Million for New Student Accommodation in Alice Springs](#), March 2025, accessed 3 October 2025.

148 Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, [Find a course](#), accessed 3 October 2025.

149 Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, [Batchelor Institute Secures \\$5.1 Million for New Student Accommodation in Alice Springs](#), March 2025, accessed 3 October 2025.

Regional universities and regional campuses

Regionally headquartered universities

There is no doubt that the mission of regional universities is unique when compared to universities headquartered in a major city. In addition to their core teaching and learning and research functions, regional universities have a significant and personalised responsibility to their local communities and regional economies. Regional universities are often described as ‘anchor institutions’ in their communities, a role that is amplified during challenging times.

Regional universities provide contemporary educational facilities and research infrastructure as well as critical social and cultural infrastructure for the benefit of all community members. Through droughts, bushfires, floods, and the COVID pandemic, regional universities have supported students through scholarships and emergency assistance. They also deliver widespread community assistance, from providing immediate accommodation to emergency workers, through to undertaking research projects on future disaster preparedness. This is a role that is unique to regional universities, arising from their position as anchors in their communities.

Regional universities have also led the way in providing flexible, high quality online offerings to allow students to access higher education who would otherwise be prevented by their location or circumstances. They also deliver specialised and regionally focussed courses and subjects that equip their students to work in regional careers, for example rural medicine or large animal veterinary science. Regional universities and industry work closely together on the pipeline of skilled workers, from placement opportunities, career advice, through to graduate employment or upskilling.

The 2024 Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) data confirms that regional universities continue to outperform the national average (all universities) in student satisfaction, graduate employment rates and salaries and graduate employer satisfaction.¹⁵⁰

‘The 2024 QILT data tells a similar story to the results of previous years, which points to the broader social and economic impact that regional universities are consistently delivering to the communities they serve. The 2024 QILT data is testament to the world class learning and teaching that occurs at regional universities.’¹⁵¹

Alec Webb, CEO, Regional Universities Network

150 Regional Universities Network, [Regional Universities lead nation in student satisfaction and graduate outcomes](#), Media Release, 17 September 2025.

151 Regional Universities Network, [Regional Universities lead nation in student satisfaction and graduate outcomes](#), Media Release, 17 September 2025.

Regional campuses of metropolitan universities

In addition to regionally headquartered universities, regional campuses of metropolitan universities can also play a significant role in the communities in which they are embedded. The Commissioner has seen firsthand a number of metropolitan universities, including La Trobe University and Edith Cowan University, who are committed to supporting the communities in which their regional campuses are located.

One initiative under La Trobe University's Regional Growth and Innovation Strategy 2030 is to encourage the use of campus facilities by regional, rural and remote students from other universities, VET and schools, making all regional La Trobe University campuses operate like 'Regional University Study Hubs' and expanding access to tertiary education for everyone in the community.¹⁵²

In late 2023, the Commissioner attended the opening of Edith Cowan University's Learning Centre in Busselton. The university recently provided an update to the Commissioner indicating that so far over 230 individual students have accessed the facilities and support available, with students reporting that the Learning Centre has assisted them in achieving improved local educational and employment outcomes.

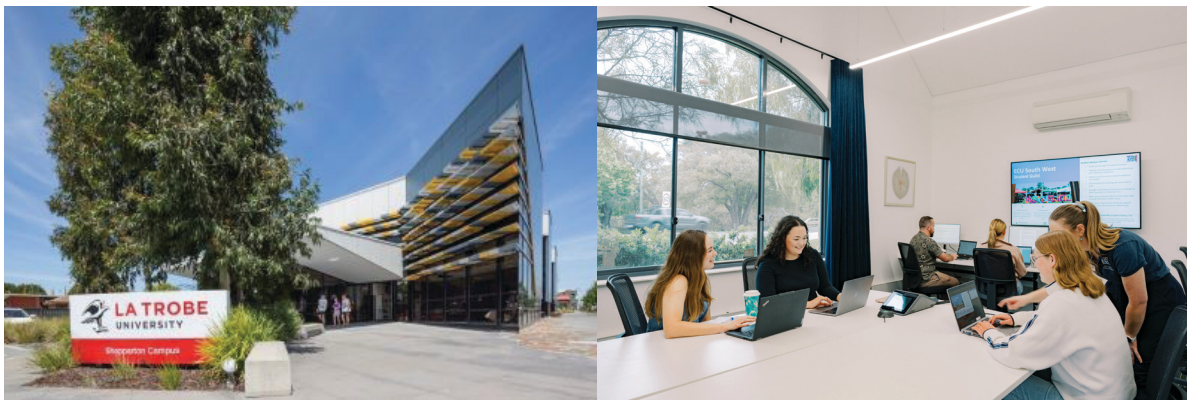


Image caption: Left - La Trobe University Shepparton Campus, Victoria; Right - Students studying at the Edith Cowan University Learning Centre in Busselton, Western Australia

152 La Trobe University, [Regional Growth and Innovation, 2030 Strategy](#), May 2025.

International education and regional universities

The Commissioner continued to hear concerns from regional universities and their peak body about the impact of uncertain and changing policies in international education. The financial pressures faced by regional universities have not eased, and the international education market remains an important source of revenue.

There are positive signs with the announcement of 2026 international student allocations for regional universities.¹⁵³ However, international student allocations for four regional universities remain below their pre-COVID international enrolments.

With the establishment of the ATEC and the enhanced mission-based compacts process, there is an opportunity for regional universities to negotiate appropriate levels of international student growth. This is important given the dependence of regional universities on this income to cross-subsidise their operations and support their mission to increase access to, and attainment of, higher education for under-represented cohorts.

Australian Tertiary Education Commission

As an Accord panel member, the Commissioner welcomes the establishment of the interim Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) and is optimistic about the stewardship role this new commission will play in ensuring higher education access and attainment improves for regional, rural and remote Australians.

Mission-based compacts

One of the key roles of the ATEC, subject to the passage of legislation, is to negotiate enhanced mission-based compacts with providers that will support a diverse, responsive and high performing sector. The new mission based compact process presents a genuine opportunity for regional universities to showcase their unique missions and be rewarded for the significant contributions made to their students, local communities and regional economies that may have gone unnoticed under previous performance evaluation systems.

Given the local and national importance of existing regional universities, including meeting future workforce needs and boosting Australia's productivity, regional universities require significant investment to ensure their long-term sustainability and success. In a period of change to Australia's higher education sector, it is important that the vital role of regional universities is recognised.

The Commissioner supports the emerging area of focus in the Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia, which identified that the ATEC 'should work with regional universities (including those who have a regional presence) to explore incorporating regional focussed performance indicators into Mission Based Compacts'.¹⁵⁴

In addition, it is important that regional providers continue to be assessed against the relevant traditional sector-wide measures. This is not intended to create a 'second tier' university performance system for regional universities but instead valuing the unique role they play in their communities.

The Commissioner acknowledges that it is difficult, and potentially expensive, for universities to measure community engagement, regional economic development or 'social good' more broadly and would encourage the use of a narrative, including feedback from the community, where appropriate.

153 Regional Universities Network, [Regional international student recovery underway](#), Media Release, 14 October 2025.

154 Jobs and Skills Australia, [Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia – Phase 1](#), July 2025, p 12.

Issue for Consideration 20

To reward and recognise regional universities and regional university campuses for their unique role in delivering strong education outcomes for regional students, engagement with and support for regional communities, and contribution to regional economic development, the Australian Tertiary Education Commission should implement regional university and regional campus impact measures as part of the mission-based compacts process.

Managed Growth Funding System

In line with recommendations from the Accord final report, the interim ATEC is also working to design and implement a new Managed Growth Funding System (MGFS) for Commonwealth supported places in higher education. The MGFS, alongside Needs-based funding, is intended to 'increase opportunity for students from under-represented backgrounds and create a more diverse and flexible system of higher education'.¹⁵⁵

The Australian Government has indicated its intent to implement a 'demand driven system for all students from disadvantaged backgrounds' from 2027.¹⁵⁶ However, the model proposed by the interim ATEC applies 'hard caps' to all universities; including those who enrol significant cohorts of under-represented students. Considering the need to significantly increase the number of tertiary students from regional, rural and remote areas, the Commissioner believes hard caps should not be applied to regional universities.

Although it has been put forward that universities will be able to negotiate additional 'managed demand-driven' places with the ATEC, there is a risk that regional students will be turned away from their local or preferred regional institution, or that delays from negotiating additional places will deter students from undertaking tertiary study. This would be the worst possible outcome.

Regional universities already do the 'heavy lifting' by enrolling and supporting a high proportion of under-represented students, and prospective students from these cohorts do not need any additional barriers, real or perceived, to getting a place at their local university. It is important that the policy settings allow seamless access and entry for these students.

155 Department of Education, [Managed Growth Funding](#), accessed 3 October 2025.

156 Clare, J, [Address to the Australian Student Equity Symposium hosted by the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success](#), Ministers of the Education Portfolio Media Centre, 9 September 2025.

Issue for Consideration 21

To enable higher education access for regional students, sustainable growth for regional universities, and to deliver the regional workforce needed, remove 'hard caps' on enrolments from all regionally headquartered universities.

Needs-based Funding

Needs-based funding (NBF) presents a significant opportunity to boost tertiary education participation and attainment for groups traditionally under-represented in higher education, provided that the true cost of supporting these students to succeed is captured, and that the money is directed towards activities to facilitate their success.

The identified target cohorts within NBF include students from low SES backgrounds, First Nations students and students studying at regional campuses. It is positive that the proposed new funding system recognises the cumulative and compounding effects of disadvantage for students who belong to multiple target cohorts, with students attracting multiple loadings if they belong to more than one of the target cohorts.

Regional loading

It is widely understood that the cost of delivering high quality education in regional, rural and remote areas is significantly higher than in the cities.¹⁵⁷ The 'regional' component of the NBF acknowledges the higher costs regional providers face to deliver courses and undertake world class research; however, funding based on student load doesn't take into account the challenges of operating in areas of lower population density (i.e. thin markets). Nor does it consider the breadth of costs, other than student teaching and support, relating to areas which sit at greater cost with regionally located universities as compared to metropolitan universities, such as maintaining physical and digital infrastructure. Regional universities are also under pressure to continue to offer face-to-face learning for students in low enrolment courses, which is unsustainable unless financially supported.

Many regionally headquartered universities historically specialised in distance education, which subsequently moved to online learning as the technology evolved. Seven of the nine regionally headquartered universities had more than 59% of their 2024 commencing, domestic students enrolled externally (online). Only one publicly funded metropolitan university had a similar proportion of external students (Swinburne University of Technology, 57% external).¹⁵⁸

There are many online courses offered by regional universities where the students must travel to the regional campus to complete the practical (or residential) components of their degrees. These residential schools are compulsory and often tied to the accreditation requirements of the degree (for example, Nursing, Social Work and Psychology).

Given the additional costs of building and maintaining these facilities in regional areas, the Commissioner encourages the ATEC to reconsider the formula for the regional loading for online students studying at a regionally headquartered university.

157 Australian Universities Accord Review Panel, [Australian Universities Accord Final Report](#), February 2024, pp 267-9.

158 Regionally headquartered universities include - CSU, UNE, CDU, CQU, JCU, UTAS, FedUni, UniSQ, SCU. FedUni and JCU had 36% of commencing domestic students enrolled externally; all other regionally headquartered universities had >59% commencing domestic students enrolled online. Department of Education, Selected Higher Education Statistics, [2024 Student Data, 2024 Section 1 – Commencing Students](#), Table 1.7.

A reasonable starting point for considering adjustments to the proposed NBF contribution for online students would be to identify online courses where students complete compulsory activities on-campus and ensure these students attract an amount that considers their utilisation of on-campus facilities.

Issue for Consideration 22

To enable regional communities to continue to have access to high quality university education, the Australian Tertiary Education Commission and Government should ensure the regional loading component of the Needs-based funding system accounts for the true cost of delivering higher education in the regions and supporting regional students to succeed.

Regional university infrastructure funding

Despite the unique and pivotal role of regional universities described above, the Commissioner continues to hear about the substantial challenges faced by these universities including poor economies of scale, difficulties attracting and retaining staff, and the cost of maintaining a comprehensive range of courses and research opportunities. Many regional universities are 'multi-campus' institutions, compounding the associated infrastructure and maintenance costs.

NBF is a positive development; however, based on the proposed policy settings, it appears it will not address the critical gap in funding for the construction and maintenance of world class tertiary infrastructure at regional universities, particularly given that the funding will be determined by student load. Unfortunately, as the Commissioner has heard from regional universities, they do not have the economy of scale to fund their infrastructure requirements within their current budget.

Current infrastructure programs, such as the Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program, are welcomed for new infrastructure projects. However, feedback from regional universities highlights that they have a significant backlog of basic maintenance and an urgent need to upgrade existing ageing campus infrastructure, alongside the concurrent requirement to make significant investment in their digital infrastructure. The Commissioner supports a proposal from the Regional Universities Network to establish a dedicated Regional Education Infrastructure Fund.

'No dedicated infrastructure funding pool has been available for over a decade, resulting in an accumulation of urgent, unmet infrastructure priorities for regional universities.'

Alec Webb, CEO, Regional Universities Network

Issue for Consideration 23

Establish a dedicated Regional Higher Education Infrastructure Fund to address the critical shortfall in funding available for current and future infrastructure requirements at regional universities, and to ensure regional universities have the facilities to provide a quality student experience, to support tertiary education access and attainment, and to contribute socially and economically to their regional communities.

FIRST NATIONS REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION

Throughout 2025, the Commissioner met with a group of First Nations education experts from across the country (the First Nations Regional, Rural and Remote Education Roundtable) to better understand the educational needs and experience of First Nations people in regional, rural and remote communities, and how educational outcomes can be improved.

The Roundtable members have proposed the establishment of a National First Nations Education Commissioner, who could provide strategic leadership for the sector and advice to the Australian Government in First Nations education, informed by stakeholder engagement and research.

Issue for Consideration 24

Establish a First Nations Education Commissioner to improve education outcomes for First Nations people by working with First Nations education sector stakeholders and providing advice to the Australian Government on First Nations education.

As part of their Roundtable discussion, the Roundtable members identified key priorities for improving education outcomes in regional, rural and remote First Nations communities. These included the need for community-led, funded, long-term initiatives built on trust; nurturing aspiration in First Nations students; delivery of a flexible, local and culturally informed curriculum; investing in a sustainable, First Nations teaching workforce; and supporting students in their post-school pathways, in particular through opportunities to study and work in their community. Their expertise and insights based on lived experience informed the themes and opportunities explored below.

Community-led initiatives and building relationships

With 60% of First Nations people living in the regions, education-related challenges specific to regional, rural and remote areas have a significant impact on First Nations people.¹⁵⁹ In very remote parts of Australia, First Nations people make up almost 50% of the population.¹⁶⁰ This means that all regional education policies and programs need to actively consider the needs and aspirations of First Nations people and their communities.

First Nations communities are diverse.¹⁶¹ National one-size-fits-all policies simply do not work. Place-based solutions, designed and led by community, are most effective at addressing the unique needs of individual First Nations communities in the regions.

159 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [Demographic and social context](#), 2025, accessed 14 October 2025.

160 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [Demographic and social context](#), 2025, accessed 14 October 2025.

161 Horton D R, [Map of Indigenous Australia](#), Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), 1996, accessed 14 October 2025.

The Commissioner heard from the Roundtable members that even when policymakers consult with local communities, local ideas get lost in translation or are not properly considered. Policy and program design needs to follow advice from First Nations communities, respecting the views of Elders who are best placed to know the needs of their communities. Whether it involves traditional practices or innovative ways to approach a challenge, First Nations people have a wealth of knowledge to contribute to offering solutions in their own communities.

Building trust in relationships is foundational in First Nations culture. The Roundtable members discussed how First Nations communities in the regions want governments to place trust in local leadership as the people who understand how their communities operate and what measures will best address issues on the ground. Governments also need to support local leaders to try innovative and different ways to address long-term challenges.

'There is a misalignment between the way that Aboriginal communities function and the way that government thinks they function. We need trust at a local level.'

Nathan Towney, Pro Vice Chancellor Indigenous Strategy and Leadership, Head of the Wollotuka Institute, The University of Newcastle

Initiatives such as the Connected Communities Strategy demonstrate how community-led programs can produce positive outcomes for First Nations students in regional, rural and remote Australia.

CASE STUDY: Connected Communities Strategy

The Connected Communities Strategy is an approach that brings schools and communities together to strengthen educational outcomes for Aboriginal students and all students. Implemented in 2013 by the New South Wales Government, the Strategy commenced as a way to address the educational and social aspirations of all students, particularly Aboriginal children and young people in over 30 schools across NSW. The majority of schools are in regional, rural and remote parts of NSW.¹⁶²

Co-constructed with the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), the strategy embodies the school as a 'community hub', with the local community, teachers and school leaders supported to deliver innovative teaching and learning programs, leading to improved educational and life outcomes for Aboriginal students and all students. As part of the program, the school immerses Aboriginal students in their culture and supports them with high expectations so that they are enabled to reach their full potential.

Overall, Connected Communities is showing promising results. In the 2020 evaluation of the program, it found that the Connected Communities has had a positive impact in schools, particularly early years outcomes including year 3 NAPLAN, school attendance among primary students, and school readiness. Additionally, most school staff and communities generally support Connected Communities and feel that it is benefitting their school overall.¹⁶³

162 Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, [Connected Communities Strategy Final evaluation report](#), NSW Department of Education, 2020.

163 Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, [Connected Communities Strategy Final Evaluation Report](#), NSW Department of Education, 2020.

Flexible, long-term and sustainable funding

In order for education programs to be truly transformative in a First Nations regional, rural or remote community, funding needs to be long-term and sustainable. Too often programs are only funded for short-term cycles, creating uncertainty for the community. Shifts in government priorities or changes of governments can also disrupt funding to successful programs. Bipartisan support and sustained, multi-year investment into these programs is vital for progress to continue.

In conversations with the Commissioner, the Roundtable members raised the importance of ensuring that policies and programs are sufficiently flexible so that individual communities can make informed decisions about their community, and to define what success looks like to them.

'Community needs certainty and we need to know that what is being invested in is for the long term, because one of the things I hate to do is create hope and at the end of three years it's hopeless.... I think the biggest gap is that level of security of investment for community, which is beyond three-year life cycles.'

Professor Anne Poelina, Chair Indigenous Knowledges & Senior Research Fellow, Nulungu Research Institute, University of Notre Dame

Nurturing aspiration

Nurturing aspiration in First Nations young people, so they can see and pursue the opportunities available to them, is a key role for educators, communities, families and Elders in regional, rural and remote communities. The Roundtable members discussed the importance of engagement with First Nations culture to support aspiration in First Nations young people, as well as exposing young people to work and study opportunities through excursions.

Embedding cultural activities within the local schooling system can help increase self-esteem and encourage First Nations students to participate in schooling. Educational outcomes of First Nations children in immersion, bilingual and bi-cultural schools across the world have shown comparable or better educational outcomes than English-only education.¹⁶⁴

'As a life member of the NSW AECG my experience and our evidence shows that if our young people are engaged in Aboriginal cultural and language - it increases their attendance and participation, it builds their confidence, self-esteem and their Aboriginal identity.'

Anne Dennis, Regional President, New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council North West Region and Vice President, NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.

Nurturing this aspiration can also be done through taking students outside of their comfort zone and participating in excursions whether it be On Country or not. Doing this in a supportive environment can enable First Nations young people to see what they could be in their future. This also fosters emerging leaders to take the steps to become leaders within their own community and school environment.

¹⁶⁴ Children's Ground, [The M.K. Turner Report](#), 2023, p 29.

'Excursions are the best thing to open kids eyes. When we do the excursions, we connect with kids that went to school here in Menindee, so they can see that these people are still connected to us even though they've gone away. But we also have lots of people that have gone away and been trained and come back to work. If we look back at the statistics, the kids that went on more excursions are the ones who are in jobs and doing the further training.'

Fiona Kelly, Executive Principal, Menindee Central School

CASE STUDY: Children's University – Menindee Central School and University of Newcastle Partnership

Beginning in the United Kingdom, and then expanding to Australia, New Zealand, Asia and Africa, Children's University is a program aimed at engaging children and young people in exciting, out-of-school learning opportunities to show them what life is like at university.

As part of this program, Menindee Central School and the University of Newcastle formed a partnership where children, between seven and 14 years old, are encouraged to discover new learning experiences outside of the classroom, in their local and regional community and on campus.¹⁶⁵ The children build their own learning program by engaging in extracurricular activities throughout the year, recognising that learning happens everywhere and doesn't have to be constrained by curriculum.

As the only New South Wales-based university offering the initiative, the University of Newcastle has connected with primary aged students across local regions. According to Principal Fiona Kelly, Menindee Central School is showing regional children just how big their dreams can be.

*'Through Children's University, potentially, our kids are going to be going to the University of Newcastle from basically year 3 right up to year 8. We love the connection, and graduation was just amazing, honestly. Seeing the pride in the place, we know that that's just going to change expectations for a lot of people. It's attainable not only for that one student, but for their families where they see their brother or their sister that's got that little cap on in the photos – suddenly, university is not such a scary thing to think of for them.'*¹⁶⁶

Relevant curriculum and assessment

The Commissioner has heard from First Nations stakeholders that embedding First Nations ways of teaching and learning within the school curriculum enriches learning for all students as well as connecting First Nations students with their culture. Additionally, tailoring curriculum to the context of local communities makes learning more relevant and accessible for First Nations students.

¹⁶⁵ Wellington S, [Big dreams built through remote community partnership](#), Hippocampus, The University of Newcastle, 2024.

¹⁶⁶ Wellington S, [Big dreams built through remote community partnership](#), Hippocampus, The University of Newcastle, 2024.

'We come from a world where everything is holistic. Land, water, people, environments, all intrinsically entwined.'

Professor Bob Morgan AO, Chair, Board of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Research (BATSIER), Conjoint Professor, Wollotuka Institute, University of Newcastle (Organiser)

The Roundtable members spoke of the recognition, implementation and widespread accessibility of First Nations led education in other countries, including New Zealand. In 1989, the Education Act in New Zealand formally recognised Māori-language immersion schools as educational institutions and in 1990, the Education Act was again amended to recognise Māori universities as tertiary educational institutions.¹⁶⁷

International research has shown that the impact of First Nations cultural and language immersion schools extends beyond learning outcomes for First Nations communities. These schools empower the community, enabling their self-determination, protect their cultural knowledge and improve health and wellbeing outcomes.¹⁶⁸

There are regional, rural and remote schools in Western Australia¹⁶⁹ and the Northern Territory¹⁷⁰ that are governed by the local community and frame their delivery of the Australian curriculum from a First Nations perspective. However, these schools are still subject to operating within the Australian Curriculum framework with standardised materials and assessments, and it has been raised by Roundtable members that these schools should have the flexibility to design a local and culturally informed curriculum. First Nations children across regional Australia should have access to schooling that places their culture at the heart of their learning.

CASE STUDY: Nyikina Mangala Community School

Established in 2000 in the Jarlmadangah Burru community in the Kimberley, the Nyikina Mangala Community School is a remote Aboriginal school providing education for children from Pre-Kindergarten through to year 10. The school is an Aboriginal Independent Community School (AICS), one of 14 AICSs operating in Western Australia.

The school aims to embrace the cultural heritage of the Nyikina and Mangala people, integrating traditional knowledge and values with a modern, evidence-based curriculum and working closely with community elders and families.¹⁷¹ The school prioritises the learning and wellbeing of each child, fostering a strong connection to country, language, and culture while equipping students with the academic and social skills they need for future success.

The schools deliver mainstream education (implementing the Australian Curriculum) in an environment where learning is nurtured by cultural identity, traditional language in many instances, and a sense of belonging to place. These schools have had vastly improved literacy results for students over the past decade but also play a key role in supporting community wellbeing within Jarlmadangah Burru.

167 Children's Ground, [The M.K. Turner Report](#), 2023, p 27.

168 Children's Ground, [The M.K. Turner Report](#), 2023, p 28.

169 Aboriginal Independent Community Schools, [AICS Support](#), accessed 10 November 2025.

170 Independent Aboriginal Community Schools, [AISNT](#), accessed 10 November 2025.

171 Nyikina Mangala Community School, [Welcome to Nyikina Mangala Community School](#), accessed 14 October 2025.

An important part of First Nations culture and one of the benefits of smaller classes in the regions is the opportunity for mixed age classrooms. The Roundtable members spoke about the many positive aspects of including Elders in school learning, to benefit both the students learning cultural knowledge as well as the Elders participating in the learning activities.

'In one remote community, the Elders would be sitting up the back doing their painting and listening to what their young people are learning and taking it all in. At this school where there were no lines, there was no front gate. There was this interaction between the community and the young people and the learning process.'

Ian Perdrisat, Researcher, University of Newcastle, and Director of Operations, Madjulla Inc.

Sustainable high quality teaching workforce

Across Australia there have been challenges in attracting and retaining a high quality teaching workforce, and First Nations communities are no exception. First Nations teachers bring cultural expertise to their local communities and act as role models in the classroom for First Nations young people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers accounted for just 1.3% of the total number of registered teachers nationally in 2020, and this figure was 4.6% in the NT.¹⁷² Meanwhile, Australian Bureau of Statistics data for the same year show Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students accounted for 6% of all students nationally, and 39% in the NT.¹⁷³ Supporting First Nations students and community members to pursue a teaching pathway is vital to increasing the number of First Nations teachers in the regions.

The Australian Government has allocated \$2.4 million to develop and implement the First Nations Teacher Strategy to help attract and retain more First Nations teachers, which is a key recommendation of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan.¹⁷⁴ In 2025, the Commissioner engaged with the department to share her observations on opportunities and challenges for growing the number of First Nations teachers based on discussions with the Roundtable members and other First Nations consultations. The Commissioner emphasised that any national model or strategy should be sufficiently flexible to be able to meet the specific needs of diverse First Nations communities and aspirations of students within those communities, and be supported by long-term funding (5-10 years) to give initiatives the opportunity to succeed.

In addition, the Commissioner put forward that First Nations Assistant teachers, Student Liaison Support Officers (SLSOs) be supported to pursue teaching careers as their ties to the community will ensure the delivery of cultural expertise and form part of a sustainable teaching workforce. In the Commissioner's 2024 Annual Report, she proposed that a new category of teacher be created in recognition of the cultural expertise held by assistant teachers.

172 Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, *In Focus: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers*, AITSL, 2024.

173 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Schools*, 2020, accessed 14 October 2025.

174 Department of Education, *Funding for the First Nations Teachers Strategy, Budget 2024-25*, 2024, accessed 14 October 2025.

Issue for Consideration 25

Elevate First Nations assistant teachers to 'partner' teachers to value the importance of their cultural knowledge and expertise, and to support a sustainable workforce in First Nations communities.

The Roundtable members also highlighted the importance of First Nations teachers in mentor and leadership roles. First Nations teachers need the support of mentors as well as the education sector to take on opportunities for leadership roles.

'There's a lot of amazing teachers out there, Aboriginal teachers, but there's a lot that are leaving because they haven't got the right support.'

Fiona Kelly, Executive Principal, Menindee Central School

It was also raised that pre-service teachers may experience feelings of displacement, with many having to relocate from their communities to study.

'With few exceptions, teacher preparation programs require a major relocation for the aspiring preservice teacher.'

Professor Rob Tierney, Dean Emeritus of Education, University of British Columbia

Opportunities to study teaching On Country assist with addressing pre-service teachers' feelings of isolation as well as attracting more First Nations students into the profession.

Nurturing aspiration for young people to become teachers is another pipeline for increasing the number of First Nations teachers. A new study aimed at boosting the number of First Nations teachers has found that Aboriginal students would like someone to speak to them about teaching as a possible career. The study found that First Nations students greatly benefit from having First Nations teachers as role models, and their own positive school experience is a major motivation for First Nations people wanting to be a teacher.¹⁷⁵

'Aboriginal students just want to be asked whether they would like to be a teacher, to know that it is an option, and to not be afraid of giving it a go.'

Dr Tracy Woodroffe, Senior Lecturer and researcher in Indigenous Knowledges, Charles Darwin University's Northern Institute

Because not all communities and schools will be able to have a fully First Nations teaching staff, supporting teachers who relocate to First Nations communities is critically important to reduce turnover of staff and ensure an understanding of community relationships. Induction processes that value relationship building with the community for new staff members, such as Menindee Central School's program that was highlighted as good practice in the 2024 Connected Communities Strategy evaluation,¹⁷⁶ can greatly assist teachers relocating to First Nations communities.

¹⁷⁵ Woodroffe, T, *Increasing the Numbers of Aboriginal Teachers in the NT*, Charles Darwin University, 2025.

¹⁷⁶ Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, *Connected Communities Strategy Final Evaluation Report*, NSW Department of Education, 2020.

On Country education and post-school pathways

For those students who want to stay in their communities to study and work, it is vital that they are provided with support and resources to be able to do so.

This year, as part of the Closing the Gap Implementation Plan,¹⁷⁷ funding grants were made to four community organisations across Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory to deliver community-led, culturally appropriate distance education models in six remote communities. Depending on the needs of the individual community, the funding will support upgrading IT infrastructure, developing place-based curriculum resources and providing wraparound supports for participating students.

Distance Assistance Study Hubs proposal

In her 2024 Annual Report, the Commissioner proposed establishing Distance Assistance Study Hubs (DASHs) in First Nations regional, rural and remote communities to support On Country distance education learning for First Nations students. Under this model, based on the principles of the Regional University Study Hubs program, local communities could apply for funding that would enable them to provide the facilities (space to study, devices, high speed internet connection), staff, and administrative, academic and wellbeing support that they determine would best benefit students in their First Nations community to successfully undertake study through distance education schools.

This model would enable students to study together On Country at a specialised distance education study hub, creating a peer group and supportive environment with learning delivered by a partner distance education school and in-person support provided by local staff. Ideally, these support staff could be drawn from the local community, providing employment opportunities and potential teacher training pathways for these staff members as well as a sustainable, homegrown workforce with a connection to the community and culture to support students through their secondary education. To ensure that the program meets the needs of First Nations students, the partner school would be required to demonstrate suitability, including their cultural awareness capability. Local support staff could also work with students on specific First Nations learning, such as having sessions delivered by local Elders.

Issue for Consideration 26

Create a new program in First Nations communities to establish Distance Assistance Study Hubs (DASHs) to support On Country distance education learning for First Nations students, potentially commencing through a pilot, based on the principles on the Regional University Study Hubs program.

On Country tertiary education

There needs to be more opportunities and support for First Nations students to study tertiary education On Country. Places like the Wuyagiba Regional Study Hub in south-east Arnhem Land described below, as well as the Garrthalala Bush University Study Hub in north-east Arnhem Land, provide the resources and facilities that First Nations students need to study and succeed without having to travel far from their communities.

177 Commonwealth of Australia, [Commonwealth Closing the Gap Implementation Plan](#), 2025, p. 23.

CASE STUDY: Wuyagiba Regional Study Hub, Northern Territory

Located in south-east Arnhem Land, 120km and 100km from the communities of Ngukurr and Numbulwar respectively, lies the Wuyagiba Bush Study Hub. Funded under the Regional University Study Hubs Program, this Hub was the first of its kind.¹⁷⁸ The Hub provides a university pathway program through Macquarie University focusing 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.

Between 2018 and 2022, 66 First Nations students graduated with Wuyagiba Microcredentials which were accredited by Macquarie University, and then 28 students proceeded to enrol into Bachelor degree qualifications at Macquarie University in Sydney.¹⁷⁹

The Commissioner's 2024 Annual Report discussed implementing an On Country nursing education program in a remote community. Through a pilot program, this would aim to trial an innovative model that emphasises local First Nations knowledge and cultural protocols and educates First Nations students where they live for rewarding careers as nursing and health professionals On Country.

Importantly, through providing education and training opportunities On Country, the community would be able to 'homegrow' a local nursing workforce and greatly assist with persistent workforce shortages whilst also understanding the local cultural nuances that impact on the sector.

Critical to the success of this pilot is the ground up and community-led approach to generating ideas and designing the solutions. For each diverse regional, rural and remote First Nations community, local stakeholders must be engaged to ensure that the program is tailored for the unique needs of that community, rather than expecting that a successful program from another community can simply be replicated.

Another important element is ensuring that the university partner has developed successful and sustainable partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and has a history of achievement and innovation in supporting First Nations students to access and succeed in tertiary education.

Issue for Consideration 27

In collaboration with a remote First Nations community, design and pilot a program to support First Nations students to complete their nursing education On Country.

178 Jaggi A, Guyurruyuru Rogers K, Gabibi Rogers H, Yulumburruja Daniels A, Ens E and Pinckham S, [We Need to Run Our Own Communities – Creating the Wuyagiba Bush Uni in Remote Southeast Arnhem Land, Northern Australia](#), Australian and International Journal of Rural Education, Volume 34, 2024.

179 Jaggi A, Guyurruyuru Rogers K, Gabibi Rogers H, Yulumburruja Daniels A, Ens E and Pinckham S, [We Need to Run Our Own Communities – Creating the Wuyagiba Bush Uni in Remote Southeast Arnhem Land, Northern Australia](#), Australian and International Journal of Rural Education, Volume 34, 2024.

BUILDING A STRONGER REGIONAL WORKFORCE

The education needs and composition of the Australian workforce is in a period of transformation. It is expected that more than 90% of new jobs over the next decade will require post-secondary qualifications.¹⁸⁰ A changing and highly skilled workforce means that education pathways are more important than ever – and of course this does not mean only higher education. An education-workforce pipeline made up of a variety of pathways for upskilling and reskilling is vital to allow individuals to find the career path that suits them best whilst also building the Australian workforce of the future.

Regional Australia makes an outsized contribution to the Australian economy – serving as the backbone of the agricultural, resources, tourism and other sectors, and representing over one-third of the national economic output and approximately two-thirds of sovereign export wealth.¹⁸¹ However, as previous iterations of the Commissioner's Annual Report have highlighted, there are notable and persistent issues that are holding the regional workforce back from reaching its full potential. Critical workforce shortages in vital sectors like health, education and veterinary science, inconsistent or complete lack of local education pathways, and variable access to high quality careers advice are persistent issues that necessitate targeted solutions.

The Commissioner's 2024 Annual Report spoke about the importance of an overarching strategic view of the regional Australian workforce and the education and skills pathways that underpin it. This year, the Commissioner has been closely involved in the work of Jobs and Skills Australia in the development of their Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia as an Advisory Group member. The Commissioner is very supportive of this deliberate focus on jobs and skills in the regions and the central role played by the education sector. This strategic approach, alongside other work such as Regional Australia Institute's Regionalisation Ambition,¹⁸² holds real potential to bring together the many different needs of stakeholders across the regional jobs and skills system under a shared objective and deliver a skilled and productive workforce for the regions now and into the future.

This chapter highlights the key findings of the Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia and provides further commentary and support that has arisen from the Commissioner's extensive stakeholder engagement and research across the year.

The regional jobs and skills system

As outlined above, the regional economy provides huge benefits to Australia. However, much like the rest of the country it is a workforce in flux –adapting to changing job markets and economic conditions, and necessitating a more highly skilled workforce than ever.

180 Jobs and Skills Australia, [Better Together - The Jobs and Skills Report 2024](#), November 2024, p 81.

181 Regional Australia Institute, [Rebalancing the Nation, Regionalisation Consultation Paper](#), March 2022, p 28.

182 Regional Australia Institute, [Regionalisation Ambition 2032: A Framework to Rebalance the Nation](#), 13 September 2022.

Recent reporting by Jobs and Skills Australia has found that there remain persistent and acute job shortages in key sectors. Employers in regional, rural and remote Australia face greater difficulties with recruitment than those in metropolitan areas, with the vacancy rate five percentage points worse in the regions.¹⁸³ These regional workforce shortages, particularly in critical occupations like medicine, health, or education have significant impacts on the regional economies and communities.

Conversely, there is also a notable concentration of employment in particular industries, often resource related, within specific regions. Whilst regional Australia's natural resource endowments provide great advantages, this concentration of employment can heighten vulnerability to economic, environmental and geopolitical shocks. Diversification of employment pathways and ensuring that regional students have exposure to a wide variety of career options will help to ensure that regional communities can better absorb these types of shocks.

Currently 15.3% of youth (18-24 years) in regional and remote Australia are not in employment, education or training, and the general tertiary participation rate for youth (18-24 years) is only 22.2%.¹⁸⁴ Similar trends were demonstrated in the Accord final report, which found that tertiary education outcomes for regional and remote students significantly lag behind their metropolitan peers.¹⁸⁵ These are important statistics in the context of a changing workforce in which nine out of 10 new jobs are expected to require a tertiary qualification. We need to ensure that these young people in the regions are supported and encouraged to engage with further education – whether this is university or the VET sector.

Alleviating regional skills shortages

Whilst skills shortages are a reality of the Australian economy across the country, the persistent skills shortages facing the regional, rural and remote workforce are particularly critical. Access to key services like health, child and aged care, and education are key drivers of the regional economy. They facilitate someone's choice to stay in their hometown to raise their family, or for a young professional to relocate to a regional town for work. In many regional and remote areas, disparate populations and increased costs mean that there may only be a single childcare provider, local doctor or veterinary practice – or indeed none at all. This can have a compounding effect, where a lack of skilled workers places significant strain on the small existing workforce – increasing burnout and leaving fewer experts available to train or mentor the next generation.

Encouraging migration to the regions and offering incentives for skilled workers to relocate to regional, rural and remote areas are both ways to alleviate skills shortages and these should be supported where possible. This includes easing the move to a new community for key workers relocating to the regions, such as through programs to help access housing, childcare and other services as well as integrating through local community events.

Review of the HELP debt reduction program

Financial incentives are one strategy to encourage people to work in rural and remote parts of Australia. Programs are currently in place to reduce the HELP debt of medical and nurse practitioners, and teachers, who move to eligible locations. The program for medical and nurse practitioners utilises the Modified Monash Model (MMM) geographic classification system, with rural, remote and very remote locations currently eligible. The teacher program uses the ABS Remoteness Area (ASGS-RA) classification to define eligible areas, with only Very Remote locations included in the program.

183 Jobs and Skills Australia, [Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia – Phase 1](#), July 2025, p 85.

184 Jobs and Skills Australia, [Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia – Phase 1](#), July 2025, p 46.

185 Australian Universities Accord Review Panel, [Australian Universities Accord Final Report](#), February 2024, p 260.

The Commissioner was consulted as part of a legislated review of these programs in September 2025. The terms of reference for the evaluation covered the program effectiveness, appropriateness of the eligibility requirements, consistency of the two programs, and possible future expansion to other disciplines. In line with Issues for Consideration in the 2023 and 2024 Annual Reports, the Commissioner encouraged the evaluators to consider expanding this program to other professions with critical workforce shortages in regional, rural and remote Australia, especially large animal veterinarians working in these areas.

The use of two different geographic classification systems may cause confusion within regional communities and better alignment not only regarding the classification systems used but also the geographic areas included in the programs could be helpful.

An important issue raised by the Commissioner was the impact of boundary changes when geographic classification systems are updated in line with population movements, as occurs every five years for the ASGS-RA system. Regional towns that sit on the 'edge' of a geographic category can sometimes move between two categories, for example from Very Remote to Remote classification, thus affecting the community's eligibility for these programs. It is unfair for teachers who moved to a location whilst the community was eligible for the program to become ineligible during the required service period (four years of teaching within a six-year period).

Commissioner's Note 12

The Commissioner supports a requirement for policy makers to ensure that when updates are made to geographic classification systems, in line with population or other changes, that individuals already engaged in regional, rural and remote education programs retain their initial eligibility regardless of subsequent boundary or classification changes.

The Commissioner also put forward her support for a proposal from the Isolated Children's Parents' Association to allow teachers who are working in very remote schools where they are granted their 'Permission to Teach' to count this time towards the HELP debt relief program service period.¹⁸⁶ Pre-service teachers learn a significant amount whilst they are undertaking placements, with some students starting their careers in the classroom whilst they are still studying, through gaining their Permission to Teach provision. These provisions are alternative authorisations to teach and are used to address workforce shortages in schools. Each jurisdiction has different approaches and authorisations for granting Permission to Teach, but given that pre-service teachers are undertaking the role of a teacher this time should be included in the service period.

Commissioner's Note 13

The Commissioner supports a proposal from the Isolated Children's Parents' Association that pre-service teachers working under a Permission to Teach authorisation in Very Remote schools should have this time included in the service period for the HELP debt reduction program.

186 Isolated Children's Parents Association of Australia, [2025 Federal Conference: Agenda Motions](#), Motion A66.

Homegrowing the regional workforce

Although incentives and workforce attraction measures can be effective, in the longer term, a potentially more sustainable way to address regional workforce shortages is to develop a robust pipeline of ‘homegrown’ graduates. Research has shown that students who attend a regional school and who go on to attend a regional university are more likely to stay in the regions.¹⁸⁷ Analysis from Jobs and Skills Australia found that 70% of regional school students who attended a regional university were living in a regional area five years later. In contrast, 76.9% of regional school students who moved to a major city for university study were still living in a major city five years later.¹⁸⁸ As the evidence shows, if we train regional people at tertiary providers located in regional areas then they are highly likely to remain there to work.

It is therefore critical that regional students, both those in schools and recent school-leavers, are able to access local tertiary education where possible, and are supported with a variety of locally tailored specialist pathways that can lead them to their preferred career.

CASE STUDY: Pilbara Kimberley University Centres and Central Queensland University Bachelor of Nursing Partnership

The Pilbara Kimberley University Centres (PKUC), part of the Regional University Study Hub network, have partnered in recent years with Central Queensland University to deliver Bachelor of Nursing courses to the local community. In-person coursework is offered in block units in South Hedland, with subsidised accommodation adjacent to the training centre, which minimises travel costs and time away from home for remote students. The first cohort of 21 to complete a full nursing degree locally in the Pilbara graduated in a ceremony this year.

PKUC Director Susan Grylls commented: *This nursing cohort is proof that with the right support and local delivery models, regional students can complete high-quality university degrees without leaving their communities.*¹⁸⁹

Regional workforce: Rural veterinarians

A pertinent example of a critical regional workforce in crisis is the case of rural veterinarians. As has been raised in previous reports from the Commissioner, the veterinary workforce in regional, rural and remote Australia is in severe shortage. These shortages represent a potential crisis for Australia’s food safety, animal welfare and biosecurity, and could have severe repercussions for both the regional and national economy.

Education is a vital factor in addressing these kinds of workforce shortages and alleviating the compounding effects that they can bring about. For students in the regions, accessing and completing veterinary training can be a difficult and expensive prospect. Nurturing the confidence of young aspiring veterinarians in the regions through opportunities to engage with the sector during their schooling, and then providing them with ample support as they move into tertiary education, clinical placements, and then into the workforce, could develop a pipeline of ‘homegrown’ rural veterinarians.

187 Jobs and Skills Australia, [Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia – Phase 1](#), July 2025, p 67.

188 Jobs and Skills Australia, [Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia – Phase 1](#), July 2025, p 67.

189 Regional University Study Hubs Network, [Celebrating Success: 44 Regional Graduates Honoured by PKUC in 2025 Ceremony](#), accessed 4 November 2025.

CASE STUDY: Charles Darwin University – Certificate in Animal Care, Katherine

Supporting local school students to aspire to become a regional veterinarian is needed to help address persistent veterinary workforce shortages in the Northern Territory. In 2024, there were 15,000 registered vets across Australia, however in the Northern Territory, there are just 144 registered vets.¹⁹⁰

In partnership with high schools and veterinary practices across the Katherine region, Charles Darwin University (CDU) offers more than 50 high school students across the region the chance to learn firsthand how to care for animals of all sizes. To support the transition into the industry, CDU has increased its offerings to include a Certificate in Animal Care, which gives students experience working in vet clinics and animal care centres.

Programs like this ultimately help demystify careers in the veterinary industry and will support workforce outcomes in the Katherine region.¹⁹¹

CASE STUDY: Southern Cross University – Veterinary Science

In 2025, Southern Cross University (SCU) began teaching a new Bachelor of Veterinary Technology program and in 2026 the Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine will have its first intake. Importantly, students enrolled in these programs will undertake practical components of their training in local clinics throughout the Northern Rivers.¹⁹²

The establishment of another regionally focussed veterinary science program is an important step in addressing the critical shortage of veterinarians across regional, rural and remote Australia.

This year, the Commissioner was pleased to see a significant focus on rural veterinarians in Jobs and Skills Australia's report on the Food Supply Chain Workforce after having raised a number of concerns in her submission to the study.¹⁹³ The Essential Ingredient report made several recommendations related to the rural veterinary workforce and the skills pathways leading to it, including:

- Reconsider funding arrangements for university-level veterinary science courses to minimise reliance on cross-subsidisation.
- Include veterinarian students in any expansion of the Commonwealth Prac Payment initiative.
- Work with state and territory governments to develop a national veterinary workforce strategy in consultation with key stakeholders.
- Skills Insight should review the mapping of veterinary nursing skills standards in training products in light of potential mandatory registration for veterinary nurses.¹⁹⁴

The Commissioner has advocated for the development and implementation of a National Rural Veterinary Workforce Strategy led by an expert panel appointed by the Minister for Skills and Training. Such a strategy would provide an overarching framework that could enable the kind of comprehensive action needed to address such a complex and cross-sectoral workforce challenge.

190 Schindler C, [NT fights vet shortage with high school students studying animal care](#), ABC News, 9 August 2025.

191 Schindler C, [NT fights vet shortage with high school students studying animal care](#), ABC News, 9 August 2025.

192 Southern Cross University, [Veterinary science](#), accessed 5 November 2025.

193 Jobs and Skills Australia, [An Essential Ingredient – The Food Supply Chain Workforce](#), January 2025, Chapter 4.

194 Jobs and Skills Australia, [An Essential Ingredient – The Food Supply Chain Workforce](#), January 2025, p 86.

Issue for Consideration 28

Develop and implement a cross-portfolio National Rural Veterinary Workforce Strategy to address the critical veterinary workforce shortage in regional, rural and remote Australia.

The National Rural Veterinary Workforce Strategy may include, but not be limited to, education measures including:

- providing HELP fee relief to encourage early career veterinarians to work in rural areas
- extending the eligibility of the Commonwealth Prac Payment to include veterinary science students
- supplementing university admissions processes to ensure places for students with a commitment to regional, rural and remote practice
- increasing Commonwealth funding to universities delivering veterinary degrees focussed on large animal and rural practice and/or end to end training in regional, rural and remote areas
- developing a network of rural veterinary practices and/or clinical training facilities that can provide teaching in collaboration with veterinary schools and the development of a rural-specific veterinary training pathway.

Regional workforce: Rural health professionals

The Commissioner was encouraged to see the Australian Government's announcement of 100 additional Commonwealth Supported medical places a year from 2026, increasing to 150 from 2028.¹⁹⁵ The requirement for more medical CSPs was raised in previous Annual Reports from the Commissioner and by the Accord panel. However, the availability of additional places is only the first step, consideration also needs to be given to which universities these additional places are allocated and the targeted recruitment of students who are likely to end up working as GPs in regional, rural and remote areas.

James Cook University (JCU) continues to lead the way in producing a medical workforce for regional, rural and remote Australia. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) recently calculated the proportion of graduates from each medical school choosing general practice and rural generalist training in 2025; with only JCU and the University of Notre Dame having more than 50% of their average cohort size entering General Practice / Rural Generalist training.¹⁹⁶

Charles Sturt University will celebrate a significant milestone at the end of 2025 with its inaugural cohort of students graduating from the Doctor of Medicine joint medical program.

Commissioner's Note 14

Appropriate scrutiny needs to be given to the allocation of the 100 additional Medical Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) to ensure that the current medical workforce maldistribution issues are addressed, and that places are specifically allocated to medical schools which enrol students committed to living and working in regional, rural and remote areas.

195 Department of Education, [More General Practitioners and First Nations doctors](#), Budget 2025-26.

196 Burge K, [How do universities shape Australia's future GP workforce?](#), The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, 5 September 2025.

The Commissioner continued her close engagement with the National Rural Health Commissioner, Professor Jenny May AM, throughout 2025, including co-hosting a 'Rural Place Based Training and Education Workshop' with Professor May at the Rural Health International Place-based Education and Research (RHIPER) Conference in Murray Bridge. The workshop presenters showcased numerous ground-up and innovative place-based models highlighting collaboration between education providers, health professionals and communities to train and support the future regional health workforce.

CASE STUDY: Riverland Academy of Clinical Excellence

The Riverland Academy of Clinical Excellence (RACE) is a multidisciplinary division with the Riverland Mallee Coorong Local Health Network that was created in 2021 to enhance clinical training and employment within the region. RACE was established 'to embrace the responsibility of training its own workforce, contribute to a robust evidence-based healthcare framework and provide excellence in care that rural communities rightfully deserve'.¹⁹⁷

Since its establishment RACE has expanded beyond a focus on medicine to also include allied health, mental health, nursing and midwifery, and leadership development. RACE is focussed on cultivating local talent and building the future medical and health workforce from within their communities.

'In two years, RACE has created transformation within the Riverland Mallee Coorong Local Health Network, starting from the ground up and achieving accreditations for all the postgraduate training required from intern to Rural Generalist Fellowship. RACE has already recruited more than 30 new doctors to live and work in these rural communities and train for a Rural Generalist Fellowship - this number will rise to more than 40 by February 2025. This process has fostered a substantial increase of over 25% in the region's medical workforce'.¹⁹⁸

CASE STUDY: Charleville End-to-End Nursing Pathway

The University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ), South West Hospital and Health Service, and Southern Queensland Rural Health (SQRH) have established an end-to-end Bachelor of Nursing pathway delivered in Charleville. Students study at the SQRH Clinical Training Facility with intensive onsite teaching, free accommodation, and dedicated academic support from a UniSQ Program Coordinator. Strong partnerships with local health services and the community ensure supervised clinical learning and a clear path to employment.

The program was launched in 2022 with 33 rural students enrolled. The first cohort graduated in February 2024, with 80% securing full-time employment within the region. These outcomes demonstrate that a locally delivered model can remove travel barriers, keep learners connected to the country and community, and directly strengthen the regional workforce.

197 Champion W, Worley P, Phegan C, Frahn S, Eske H, Schuwirth L, Mendham A, [Creating a centre of excellence in rural health care: strategy, tactics and initial outcomes of the Riverland Academy of Clinical Excellence](#), Rural and Remote Health, 2025; 25:9233.

198 Champion W, Worley P, Phegan C, Frahn S, Eske H, Schuwirth L, Mendham A, [Creating a centre of excellence in rural health care: strategy, tactics and initial outcomes of the Riverland Academy of Clinical Excellence](#), Rural and Remote Health, 2025; 25:9233.

Connecting education, community and industry

The regional workforce is a complex system made up of a multitude of stakeholders with varying needs and interests. The development of a regional jobs and skills system that accounts for this complexity, whilst also seeking to nurture the aspirations of young people and build a pipeline of 'homegrown' regional workers, requires the kind of strategic approach outlined in the Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia.¹⁹⁹ In order to meaningfully facilitate this Roadmap in practical terms people are needed on the ground in regional communities who can deliver locally led solutions. As noted in the Roadmap report itself, the use of 'place-based' and centralised hubs for students and jobseekers alike has proven successful in some regions.²⁰⁰

CASE STUDY: Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network

Funded by the Victorian Government, Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network (NMLLEN) is one of the 31 Local Learning and Employment Networks across the state that were established in 2001 with the objective of improving career pathways for young people. NMLLEN engages with industry and schools to provide schools with access to quality Work Based Learning opportunities that meet the needs of local students and industry. This includes Structured Workplace Learning Placements, Work Experience, and School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships.

NMLLEN also undertakes a range of school industry engagement activities such as guest speaker presentations, workplace visits, industry tours, work-readiness or life skills programs, multi-school events involving employers and industry representatives and provides support for place-based planning for Vocational Education Training Delivered to Secondary Students (VETDSS) for the Victorian Certificate of Education.²⁰¹



Image caption: Regional Education Commissioner visit to Mildura, hosted by the Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network (NMLLEN)
Image 1 (L-R): Wayne Ketchen, General Manager, Education Delivery, Sunraysia Institute of TAFE; Brett Millington, CEO, Sunraysia Institute of TAFE; the Hon Fiona Nash, Regional Education Commissioner; Dale Harvey, NMLLEN; Sharyn Wright, General Manager, Student Experience, Sunraysia Institute of TAFE; David Cleary, Education Delivery Manager - Primary Industries, Sunraysia Institute of TAFE; Matt Wilson, Senior Manager - SMART Farm Campus, Sunraysia Institute of TAFE.

Image 2 (L-R): Dale Harvey, NMLLEN; Stuart Putland, Industry Development Officer, Murray Valley Wine Growers; the Hon Fiona Nash, Regional Education Commissioner; Grant Leyden, General Manager, Mildura Fruit Company; Haidee Jones, People and Culture - Recruitment Officer, Mildura Fruit Company.

199 Jobs and Skills Australia, [Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia – Phase 1](#), July 2025.

200 Jobs and Skills Australia, [Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia – Phase 1](#), July 2025, p 11.

201 [Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network](#), accessed 3 October 2025.

CASE STUDY: Tasmania Regional Jobs Hub Network

An initiative under Jobs Tasmania, the Regional Jobs Hub Network (the Network) provides Tasmanians with a variety of employment supports. This includes free career advice, training and upskilling and helping Tasmanians find work. Working with seven hubs across Tasmania, the Network aims to help people access employment opportunities. A state-led and community driven model, the Network aims to advance regional issues to inform statewide policy and program implementation.

The Network has achieved positive results and supported 4,200 people to find work and helped over 2,000 people enrol into training courses. Despite its short history, the initiative has led to stronger training and employment outcomes; supported innovative workforce solutions for the region and led to greater alignment between policy, programs and resources in Tasmania.²⁰²

Regional Education Collaborate and Connect Program

To facilitate strong and sustainable connections between regional, rural and remote education providers, industry and community, the Commissioner proposes establishing a Regional Education Collaborate and Connect (REC Connect) program.

The REC Connect program would provide opportunities and clear pathways to support regional students and career changers to engage with tertiary education. Through increased education access and tertiary attainment in the regions, this program would provide improved outcomes for regional, rural and remote students and help produce a stronger homegrown regional workforce to address persistent skills shortages.

The REC Connect program would involve the establishment of a local Regional Program Director for each region with comprehensive knowledge of the school and tertiary system and a strong understanding of local skills needs. The Regional Program Director would draw on and build local connections to forge strategic relationships between relevant education, industry and community stakeholders. Through these relationships the Regional Program Director could undertake mapping of community workforce needs, educational availability and access to pathways and supports. Using this knowledge, they could then engage in long-term regional education planning, coordinate and oversee the delivery of outreach and aspiration raising activities, support the delivery of high quality careers advice, and act as a respected advocate for the region in engagement with local, state and federal policymakers.

These are examples of the sorts of activities that the Regional Program Director could undertake, however the key aspect of the program is the flexibility to be guided by the needs of the community. It is vital that the Regional Program Director be a local with community knowledge and connections.

202 Social Policy and Research Centre, [Regional Jobs Hubs Initiative Final Evaluation Report](#), April 2024.

The REC Connect program, via the work of its Regional Program Directors, would seek to address many of the issues raised by stakeholders, such as careers advice, aspiration and outreach. Careers advice currently differs greatly in delivery, quality and scope across regions. When outreach is solely delivered by individual universities, regional, rural and remote students are not provided the full range of opportunities that are available to them. As it stands, many of the relationships between educational stakeholders in the regions tend to be competitive or simply absent altogether. This results in inconsistent access to information regarding pathways and support (financial, academic or pastoral) for tertiary study, and ultimately lower overall confidence of regional, rural and remote students in pursuing post-school options.

Regional Program Directors would sit within regional community organisations and be funded through an open contestable grants program that would allow organisations to put forward proposals that are tailored to local needs and contexts. An expert panel, informed by program guidelines, could select a small number of grant recipients to act as an initial pilot to measure success and potential of future expansion. Once a grant is successful, Regional Program Directors would be selected and guided by a local community board to foster local ownership of the program. This model would seek to draw on the success of the Regional University Study Hubs program in tailoring the needs of each Hub to its regional context.

The REC Connect program could play a significant role in improving access to, and uptake of, education in the regions and providing students with the resources to navigate a pathway into tertiary education and the workforce beyond.

Proposal for Consideration

Establish a 'Regional Education Collaborate and Connect' program to facilitate strong and sustainable connections between regional, rural and remote education providers, industry and community to:

- nurture the aspiration and build the confidence of regional, rural and remote students
- ensure regional, rural and remote people are better informed about, and supported to pursue, post-secondary education and career pathways
- increase tertiary participation and attainment for people in regional, rural and remote communities
- facilitate a strong and sustainable 'homegrown' workforce that can address region-specific skills and workforce needs
- work towards shared community goals, and ultimately seek to deliver stronger regional, rural and remote communities.

COMMUNITY-LED SOLUTIONS



Regional Australians are resilient and don't hesitate to improvise, innovate and create solutions to any challenges they may face. As seen from the stories throughout this report, there is no one size fits all solution to the education issues affecting the diverse communities of regional Australia. National policies that fail to consider the unique characteristics of regional, rural and remote communities, will not succeed. Decisionmakers need to listen to the expertise and experience of people on the ground in regional Australia and learn from grassroots initiatives.

The Commissioner continues to hear a strong message from regional stakeholders and communities that policies and programs need to be designed 'with' them not 'for' them. The Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia proposes a practical step to achieving this goal. Phase 1 of the roadmap proposes 10 design principles for the regional jobs and skills system to ensure that the reality of the regional context is accounted for (see Information Box for a full list of the principles).²⁰³

These design principles cut across sectors and are intended to be used by policymakers at all levels in both new policy formation and in review of existing policies and programs. It is also important to note that these principles are designed to be used as a collective set rather than individually, acknowledging the relationships between them.

Jobs and Skills Australia continue to seek feedback from stakeholders to refine and improve these principles. Once finalised, the Commissioner proposes that all Australian, state and territory government departments consider, and where relevant adopt, the final '10 Design Principles for the Jobs and Skills System in Regional Australia' to inform decision-making on regional, rural and remote policy.

203 Jobs and Skills Australia, [Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia – Phase 1](#), July 2025, pp 112-114.

10 Design Principles for the Jobs and Skills System in Regional Australia (draft from Phase 1 report)²⁰⁴

Consultation Principles

1. Are local communities being supported to develop and deliver solutions including by empowering the people and communities most affected by an issue or opportunity?
2. Has the policy been developed in line with the spirit of co-design with stakeholders in Regional Australia (including by ensuring any steering committees have appropriate representation of stakeholders from Regional Australia) and genuinely refined in response to feedback?
3. Does the policy align with, and complement, existing initiatives in Regional Australia, including by leveraging existing areas of success and strength and fostering collaboration in the system?
4. Does the policy recognise the differing workforce and skills needs of Regional Australia, including the local needs of individual regions, and provide appropriate flexibility to adapt and respond accordingly?

Service design principles

5. Does the policy seek to initially pilot or trial new approaches or initiatives (including undertaking evaluations), and provide long-term funding (preferably for a minimum of 4 years) for known models of success?
6. Does the policy ensure continuity of access to quality services, and allow government to deliver services where appropriate (such as through TAFEs, local governments, Government-Business Enterprises and so forth)?
7. Does the policy consider using block-grant funding to support service delivery in situations where it is difficult to achieve viable cohorts of participants (rather than using activity or outcome-based funding)?

Funding principles

8. Does the policy provide higher levels of funding to Regional Australia – including for remote areas – in response to higher costs of delivery and thin markets?
9. Does the funding incorporate periodic (or annual) uplifts in funding in response to changes in the cost of delivery in Regional Australia?
10. Does the policy ensure any substantial changes to funding or service delivery in Regional Australia (including cessations or extensions) occur progressively over time and with sufficient notice for regions to adapt?

Issue for Consideration 29

Ensure all Australian, state and territory government departments consider, and where relevant adopt, Jobs and Skills Australia's final '10 Design Principles for the Jobs and Skills System in Regional Australia' to inform decision-making on regional, rural and remote policies and programs.

204 Jobs and Skills Australia, [Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia – Phase 1](#), July 2025, p 114.

Successful community-led models

The Regional University Study Hubs (RUSH) program is a great example of innovation and how the 10 design principles above can be put into practice. The program drew on existing community initiatives including the Geraldton Universities Centre in Western Australia and the Cooma Universities Centre (now CUC Snowy Monaro) in New South Wales, and expanded the concept to more communities across regional, rural and remote Australia.

RUSHs operate in very different communities, from larger regional centres to very remote communities. The local community is at the centre of the development of each RUSH, and this means that each RUSH reflects its unique local context, and no two RUSHs are the same.

In the relatively short time that RUSHs have existed, they have gone from strength to strength and are regularly expanding the services and value they provide to their local communities. They are now much more than just spaces for tertiary students to study and receive support. RUSHs are deeply involved in providing careers advice to learners, delivering outreach programs to school students, hosting community events, and much more.

The success of this program is a blueprint for community-led solutions that successfully maintain community leadership and focus while constructively working with government.

CASE STUDY: Gippsland East Study Hub



Image Caption: Rick Coleman, Study Hub Team Leader, presenting at the Gippsland East Study Hub five year celebration in Bairnsdale

The Gippsland East Study Hub (GESH) is a network of seven sites across communities in the East Gippsland operated by the Gippsland East Local Learning and Employment Network (GE LLEN). The original GESH site is located in Bairnsdale, with an additional site in Sale. GESH Outreach sites are located in Mallacoota, Orbost, Omeo, Heyfield and Yarram.²⁰⁵ These hubs allow students to study locally and provide valuable support including high-speed internet, computers, printing, video conferencing, podcasting spaces and one-on-one tutoring.

Since opening their first site in 2019, the GESH and GESH Outreach sites have supported 542 students. Of the students currently being supported across the network of Hubs, 8% identify as First Nations, and 55% were First In Family to undertake tertiary education. The most popular fields of study are Health (46% of registered students) and Education (22% of registered students).

²⁰⁵ [Gippsland East Study Hub](#), accessed 3 October 2025.

Throughout her travels around regional, rural and remote Australia, and time spent in online stakeholder meetings, the Commissioner continues to hear of many examples of ground-up, community-led solutions to education-related issues. Models showcased throughout this report that could be considered for expansion at a national level include:

- Federation Council Mobile Preschool Service (Early Childhood Education and Care chapter)
- Julia Creek State School (School Education chapter)
- Passions and Pathways Program (School Education chapter)
- Nyikina Mangala Community School (First Nations Regional, Rural and Remote Education chapter)
- Riverland Academy of Clinical Excellence (Building a Stronger Regional Workforce chapter)

All these models have one thing in common – the idea came from community, and the activities continue to be led, evaluated and improved within community. As was the case for the RUSH program expansion, when scaling any initiatives across regional Australia it is critical to retain local governance and oversight whilst also reaping the benefits of shared learnings across diverse communities.

Community partnership models to achieve scale in regional education

Every chapter of this report has echoed the significant impact of geographic distances, thin markets and the additional cost of delivering high quality education in regional, rural and remote Australia. Community-led partnership models are one strategy to respond to these challenges where a viable scale can be achieved whilst still allowing communities to maintain a significant level of control over the design of the services, to ensure they work in their local context.

Approaches that combine central administrative, operational and regulatory functions with local delivery of services have been successful in expanding access to education for more local regional, rural and remote communities.

CASE STUDY: Country Universities Centre Remote Area Planning and Development Central West Queensland

One of the newest Regional University Study Hubs is the Country Universities Centre Remote Area Planning and Development, Central West Queensland (CUC RAPAD CWQ). It has been set up as a single CUC, operated by RAPAD. The centre aims to address the logistical challenges of delivering education across seven Local Government Areas in the region.

CUC RAPAD CWQ operates an innovative model with eight sites spread across Central West Queensland, an area one and a half times the size of Victoria. The sites are all located in towns with populations between 100 and 3,330 people and distances of 960 – 1,700km from Brisbane. The hub has separated operations into three sub-areas (Longreach, Winton & Jundah, Barcaldine & Blackall and Boulia, Bedourie & Birdsville) with staff travelling between sites within their area. The hub employs one Centre Manager who oversees the daily operations all eight sites and set the strategic direction of the hub.

In addition to the Centre Manager, the Hub has three part-time Student Services Co-ordinators who provide in-person and virtual support to students as well as support from local council personal where needed. For example, the hub in Bedourie is overseen by staff from Diamantina Shire Council on a daily basis. The Centre Manager and Students Services Co-ordinator (based in Boulia) periodically travel to the hub to provide in person support to students. Outside of staffed hours, registered students can access the hub via swipe card access (accessible 24/7).²⁰⁶

In the first seven months of operation, CUC RAPAD CWQ has supported 137 students from 26 different institutions, 45% of which were the first in their family to undertake tertiary study.

Commissioner's Note 15

The Commissioner has seen many examples that showcase how collaboration and partnerships within and across regions can enable programs in small regional, rural and remote communities to achieve scale, whilst still maintaining their local, ground-up focus. The Commissioner encourages all levels of government and policy makers to consider ways to enable this type of approach through their programs and initiatives.

Regional Australia continues to be an incredible place to live, study and work. Although people in regional, rural and remote communities face greater challenges in accessing, participating in and completing education, it is inspiring to see the innovative solutions that are being led from within communities. The initiatives highlighted in this chapter, and in the report more broadly, are just a few of the successful, community-led programs that are being undertaken all across the regions with one sole purpose – to support each and every member of our regional, rural and remote communities to fulfil their aspirations and build a stronger regional Australia for the future.

206 [Country Universities Centre Remote Area Planning and Development Central West Queensland](#), accessed 3 October 2025.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Regional Education Commissioner consultations from 27 November 2024 to 26 November 2025

Stakeholders

Students, parents and community organisations

- Country Education Partnership
- Country Women's Association of New South Wales
- Deborah Nielsen, Louth
- Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA)
- Raise Foundation
- Regional Development Australia Great Southern WA Inc.
- Regional Development Australia Mid North Coast
- Regional Development Australia Riverina
- Regional Development Australia Wheatbelt
- Regional Disability Advocacy Service
- Rotary Melbourne
- Satara Uthayakumar, 2025 Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations
- STEM Sisters
- The Bryan Foundation

Early Childhood Education and Care

- Cowra Early Childhood Services Cooperation Ltd
- Early Childhood Australia
- Family Day Care Australia
- Federation Council Mobile Preschool
- RAISEducation
- Regional Childcare Desert Advocacy Project
- The Parenthood

School Education

- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
- Blackwater State School
- Capella State School
- Capella State High School
- Charleville State High School
- Chatham High School
- Coalition of Regional Independent Schools Australia
- Gindie State School
- Hunter School of the Performing Arts
- Menindee Central School
- Mildura Senior College
- Rural Youth Ambassadors of South Australia
- Springsure P-10 State School
- St Philip's Christian College Cessnock
- Stronger Smarter Institute
- The Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales
- Victorian Rural Youth Ambassadors
- Wingham Public School

Tertiary Education (including Vocational Education and Training & Higher Education)

- Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success
- Australian Technology Network of Universities
- Bond University
- Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion, University of Technology Sydney
- Charles Sturt University
- Country Universities Centre
- Country Universities Centre Norfolk Island
- Country Universities Centre Remote Area Planning and Development Board Central West Queensland
- Edith Cowan University
- Gippsland East Study Hub
- Great Southern Universities Centre
- Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia
- James Cook University
- La Trobe University
- Lumen Wheatbelt Regional University Study Hubs
- Online Education Services
- Pilbara Kimberley University Centre
- Regional Universities Network
- TAFE Queensland

- Taree Universities Campus
- The University of Melbourne
- The University of Queensland
- Universities Australia
- University of Canberra
- University of New England
- University of Newcastle
- University of Southern Queensland
- University of Tasmania
- University of the Sunshine Coast
- University of Wollongong

Industry and employment

- Agriculture Food and Animal Management – New South Wales Industry Training Advisory Body
- Agrifutures Australia
- Australian Veterinary Association
- Business Council of Co-operatives and Mutuals
- Committee for Gippsland
- Evolve Network
- Gippsland East Local Learning & Employment Network Inc.
- Goldfields Local Learning & Employment Network Inc.
- GrainGrowers
- NBN Co
- National Farmers' Federation
- Northern Mallee Local Learning & Employment Network Inc.
- Partnerships for Local Action and Community Empowerment
- Skills Insight

Health

- Australian Society of Medical Imaging and Radiation Therapy
- Georgia Gosse, PhD Candidate, University of South Australia, Allied Health and Human Performance
- HumanAbility
- Mable
- National Rural Health Commissioner
- Ngoara Child and Adolescent Wellbeing
- Riverland Academy of Clinical Excellence
- Riverland Mallee Coorong Local Health Network
- Royal Far West
- Rural Doctors Network

Cross-sector

- Australian Council for Educational Research
- Australian Public Policy Institute
- BackTrack
- Cameron Baker, South Australian Skills Commissioner
- Deloitte Access Economics
- Instructure
- Lil Gordon, Acting National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People
- Nous Group
- Professor Barney Glover AO, Commissioner, Jobs and Skills Australia
- Professor Mary O’Kane, Interim Chief Commissioner, Australian Tertiary Education Commission
- Regional Australia Institute
- Regional Disability Advocacy Service
- Reign-Maker Advisory
- Research Australia
- The Smith Family
- Tony Mahar, Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner

Government Ministers and Shadow Ministers

- Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education
- Hon Andrew Giles MP, Minister for Skills and Training
- Hon Julian Hill MP, Assistant Minister for International Education
- Senator the Hon Jonathan Duniham, former Shadow Minister for Education and Early Learning
- Hon Scott Buchholz MP, Shadow Minister for Skills and Training
- Dr Anne Webster MP, Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories, Shadow Minister for Regional Communications
- Mr Sam Birrell MP, Shadow Assistant Minister for Regional Education and Regional Health

Local councils

- Cr Kevin Mack, Mayor, Albury City Council
- Cr Tony Rayner, Mayor and Brett Walsh, CEO, Longreach Regional Council
- Cr Peta MacRae, Mayor, Mount Isa City Council
- Cr Shaun Radnedge, Mayor and Bruce Scott OAM, CEO, Murweh Shire Council

Public Service

Commonwealth

- Tony Cook PSM, Secretary, Australian Government Department of Education
- Ben Rimmer, former Deputy Secretary, Higher Education, Research and International Group, Australian Government Department of Education
- Jasmina Joldić PSM, Deputy Secretary, Higher Education, Research and International Group, Australian Government Department of Education
- Kylie Crane PSM, Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood and Youth Group, Australian Government Department of Education
- Meg Brighton, Deputy Secretary, Schools Group, Australian Government Department of Education
- Nathan Smyth, Deputy Secretary and Senior Responsible Officer, Building Early Education Fund, Australian Government Department of Education
- Danielle Donegan, former Executive Director, Australian Tertiary Education Commission
- Anne Twyman, First Assistant Secretary, Programs, Payments and Early Learning Division, Australian Government Department of Education
- Fabian Harding, First Assistant Secretary, Funding and Collection Division, Australian Government Department of Education
- Adi Smith, Assistant Secretary, Early Childhood Data and Preschool, Australian Government Department of Education, former Assistant Secretary, Funding and Pricing Policy Branch, Australian Government Department of Education
- Brett Nordstrom, Assistant Secretary, Higher Education Program Delivery Branch, Australian Government Department of Education
- Simon Puckett, Assistant Secretary, Research Programs Delivery Branch, Higher Education Program Delivery Branch, Australian Government Department of Education
- Dr Esmeralda Rocha, Assistant Secretary, Inclusion and Disability Branch, Australian Government Department of Education
- Genevieve Watson, Assistant Secretary, Teacher Preparation Branch, Australian Government Department of Education
- Rachel O'Connor, Assistant Secretary, Quality and Inclusion Branch, Australian Government Department of Education
- Annette Cannell, A/g Assistant Secretary, HELP and Student Experience Branch, Australian Government Department of Education
- Kristie van Omme, A/g Assistant Secretary, Higher Education Program Delivery Branch, Australian Government Department of Education
- Nikini Weragoda, A/g Assistant Secretary, Social Cohesion and Place-based Partnerships Branch, Australian Government Department of Education
- Olivia Stossich, A/g Assistant Secretary, Building Early Education Fund, Australian Government Department of Education
- Anti-Bullying Rapid Review Taskforce, Australian Government Department of Education
- Commonwealth Prac Payment Team, Australian Government Department of Education
- Data Governance and Collections Management Team, Australian Government Department of Education
- ECEC Reforms Team, Australian Government Department of Education

- Future Teachers Team, Australian Government Department of Education
- Inclusion Support Programs Team, Australian Government Department of Education
- Needs Based Funding Team, Australian Government Department of Education
- University Study Hubs Team, Australian Government Department of Education

State

- Mark Barraket, Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood Outcomes, New South Wales Department of Education
- Mark Grant, Deputy Secretary, Chief Operating Officer, New South Wales Department of Education
- Stuart Hollingsworth, Executive Director, Economy and Jobs Strategy, Tasmanian Department of State Growth
- Dean White, Executive Director, Regional, Rural, Remote and Unique Settings Directorate and Executive Director, Home Schooling Directorate, NSW Department of Education

Government Agencies

- Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority
- Australian Tertiary Education Commission
- Jobs and Skills Australia

Regional Education Commissioner convened roundtables

First Nations Regional, Rural and Remote Education Roundtable convened on 24 March 2025, 20 August 2025, 20 October 2025 (continuing)

First Nations Regional, Rural and Remote Education Roundtable Members

- Professor Bob Morgan AO, Chair, Board of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Education and Research (BATSIER), Conjoint Professor, Wollotuka Institute, University of Newcastle (Organiser)
- Professor Anne Poelina, Chair Indigenous Knowledges, Senior Research Fellow, Nulungu Research Institute, University of Notre Dame (Broome)
- Professor Wendy Brabham, Director and Board Member, Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative
- Professor Rob Tierney, Dean Emeritus of Education, University of British Columbia
- Councillor Anne Dennis, Councillor, New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council North West Region and Vice President, New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.
- Nathan Towney, Pro Vice Chancellor Indigenous Strategy and Leadership, Head of the Wollotuka Institute, The University of Newcastle
- Fiona Kelly, Executive Principal, Menindee Central School
- Daniel Fusi, Senior Leader, Community Engagement, Menindee Central School
- Ian Perdrisat, Researcher, University of Newcastle, Director of Operations, Madjulla Inc.
- Doreen Peters, Senior Leader Community Engagement, Walgett Community College High School
- James Ballangarry, Project Analyst and Research Coordinator, The Wollotuka Institute, The University of Newcastle
- Raymond Ingrey, President, New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.
- Kiel Williams-Weigel, Assistant Secretary, First Nations Participation and Place Based Partnerships Branch, Department of Education

Remuneration for Distance Education Supervisors Roundtable convened on 27 October 2025

Remuneration for Distance Education Supervisors Roundtable Members

- Louise Martin, Federal President, Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA)
- Kelly Ostwald, Federal Secretary, ICPA
- Jill Greenfield, Federal Distance Education Portfolio Leader, ICPA
- Lauren Lewis, Distance Education Portfolio Leader, ICPA WA
- Moira Lanzarin, State Council President, ICPA NT
- Belinda Hatcher, State President, ICPA SA
- Wendy Henning, President, Early Childhood Portfolio Leader, ICPA QLD
- Laura Stalley, Secretary, ICPA NSW
- Dean White, Executive Director, Regional, Rural, Remote and Unique Settings Directorate and Executive Director, Home Schooling Directorate, NSW Department of Education
- Judith King, Director, Agricultural Education and Residential Colleges, WA Department of Education
- Jasmin Aldenhoven, Chief Financial Officer, NT Department of Education and Training
- Dale Atkinson, Director, External Relations, SA Department of Education
- Mel Buckley, Director, Rural and Remote Team, QLD Department of Education
- Martin Banks, A/g Director, Student Payments Policy, Department of Social Services
- Nathan Dean, A/g Branch Manager, Carers, Disability and Student Payments Branch, Department of Social Services
- Benjamin Peoples, Group Manager Participation and Family Payments, Department of Social Services
- Zac Rayson, Senior Policy Officer, Rural Affairs, National Farmers Federation
- Tim Bullard, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)
- Karen Peel, Senior Lecturer (Curriculum and Pedagogy), University of Southern Queensland
- Daniel Rattigan, President, Australasian Association of Distance Education Schools (AADES)
- Lauren Watson, Assistant Director of Digital Inclusion, Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) – Tasmanian Government
- Rosemary White, Assistant Director, Student Equity, Regional and Parent Engagement, Wellbeing and Equity Branch, Australian Government Department of Education

Engagements and Consultations

- Anti-Bullying Rapid Review Consultation - 11 March 2025
- Child Safety Review Public Consultation - 28 May 2025
- Commonwealth Prac Payment Stakeholder Reference Group - 11 November 2025
- Country Women's Association of New South Wales Far Western Group Public Speaking Competition - 27 May 2025
- Early Childhood Australia Regional, Rural and Remote Early Childhood Forum - 11 April 2025
- Early Education Service Delivery Price Project Consultation - 3 September 2025
- Higher Education Advisory Industry Leaders' Briefing - 25 February 2025
- Higher Education Disability Roundtable - 14 November 2025
- Independent Review of the Rural and Remote Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) Debt Reduction Program Consultation - 1 September 2025

- Isolated Children's Parents' Association Federal Conference - 30 July 2025
- Jobs and Skills Australia, Regional Jobs and Skills Advisory Group – 3 April 2025, 15 May 2025, 5 June 2025 and 27 October 2025
- Jobs and Skills Australia, Launch of Australia's Regional Roadmap - 3 July 2025
- Jobs and Skills Australia, Regional Roadmap Webinar - 8 July 2025
- Menindee Central School Visit – 10 December 2024
- Murweh Shire Council Visit - 2-3 December 2024
- Narrabri High School Visit - 6 December 2024
- National Regional University Study Hub Widening Participation Forum - 17 November 2025
- National Rural and Remote Health Awards - 5 November 2025
- National Teacher Workforce Roundtable - 19 September 2025
- Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network Visit - 1 July 2025
- NSW Department of Education, RRR Research Pitch - 29 August 2025
- Queensland Commitment Summit, the University of Queensland - 18 August 2025
- Regional Deputy Senior Officials Meeting convened by Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts - 19 June 2025
- Regional Development Australia National Forum - 5 November 2025
- Remote Australian Matters' Healthy Horizons Summit (online presentation) - 7 October 2025
- Rural Education Forum, Charleville State High School - 15 October 2025
- Rural Health International Place-based Education and Research Conference - 31 October 2025
- St Philip's Christian College Cessnock Visit - 10 April 2025
- Taree Universities Campus Visit - 20 February 2025
- Tertiary Reform Group Meeting - 26 November 2025
- Universities Australia National Press Club Lunch - 27 August 2025
- Universities Australia Solutions Summit 2025 - 26 February 2025
- University of New England Visit - 5 December 2024
- University of Tasmania Visit - 6 March 2025
- Yass Early Childhood Centre Association Visit - 4 June 2025

Appendix B: Update on federal education measures relevant to regional, rural and remote education*

*Provided by the Department of Education and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to the Regional Education Commissioner to include in this report.

Early Childhood Education and Care

Community Child Care Fund (CCCF) Round Four

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$80.3 million over two years	July 2024 to June 2026	CCCF competitive grant opportunities help providers and services address barriers to early childhood education and care (ECEC) participation. Grants help to support longer-term sustainability for services operating in, or servicing, communities experiencing disadvantage and vulnerable communities, as well as those in far regional and remote areas. 439 services were offered grant funding through this round.

CCCF Special Circumstances

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$4 million (per financial year)	Ongoing	CCCF Special Circumstances grants help ECEC services stay open when something unexpected happens. Grants are targeted to services in vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, and aim to provide continuity of care when unexpected events disrupt service delivery. Grants can be applied for at any time.

Practicum Exchange Living Allowance (PELA)

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$2.262 million over five years	January 2025 to September 2025	PELA was available to support students, with living and travel costs, undertaking a practicum in a rural or remote location other than their home location. PELA was linked to the Practicum Exchange network, a website used to connect ECEC services and educators in training.

ECEC Workforce Professional Development subsidy (PD)

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$34.4 million over five years	July 2023	PD subsidises ECEC services to backfill early childhood educators, early childhood teachers and centre directors to undertake mandatory or highly recommended training, or to subsidise wages if training is undertaken outside work hours. Applications for regional and remote staff are prioritised. As at July 2025 over 83,000 PD subsidies have been funded.

ECEC Workforce Paid Practicum subsidy (PP)

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$33.1 million over five years	July 2023	PP provides financial assistance for educators in the ECEC sector to undertake a paid practicum in initial teacher education courses at a bachelor, post-graduate or diploma-level. Applications for regional and remote staff are prioritised. As at July 2025 over 2,850 PP subsidies have been funded.

Early Education Service Delivery Prices (SDP) project

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$10.4 million has been committed for the project	The SDP project was announced in December 2024 with final reporting expected end of 2026.	<p>The Early Education Service Delivery Prices project will provide a data-driven understanding of the reasonable costs of safe and quality ECEC service delivery, including where costs vary by remoteness, location or cohort.</p> <p>As at October 2025, a series of consultations and focus groups have been completed with stakeholders including providers, peak bodies, state and territory representatives and parent associations. The data collection is scheduled to begin late 2025.</p>

Family Day Care Capability Trial

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$2.5 million (GST inclusive) over 2 years.	6 June 2024 to 30 June 2026	<p>The Family Day (FDC) Capability Trial (the Trial) aims to provide much needed ECEC supply in selected regional areas and explore alternative models of care that would benefit the FDC sector. Family Day Care Australia developed and implemented a Recruitment Strategy under the Trial to attract, recruit and retain new FDC educators to help build sustainability in SA2 regional areas.</p> <p>Under the Trial, Business Service Support payments are available and are paid to the educator and provider who are approved under the Trial. Since March 2025, 21 educators have been placed under the Trial in regional SA2 areas.</p>

Building Early Education Fund (the Building Fund)

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
<p>\$500 million in capital funding</p> <p>\$500 million provisioned for future Commonwealth investment in owning and leasing a portfolio of ECEC services, with \$2.3 million over two years from 2024–25 to undertake a business case to inform final design</p>	<p>The Building Fund was announced in December 2024.</p>	<p>The Building Fund provides capital funding to build new and expand existing ECEC services in areas of need.</p> <p>The \$500m in capital funding will be delivered through multiple rounds and will be targeted to priority and under-served markets, including regional areas.</p> <p>The Government is working with stakeholders, including state and territory governments and peak bodies, to inform Fund design and identify priority locations. Priority areas will also be informed by analysis of relevant data on supply, need and disadvantage.</p>

School Education

Better and Fairer Schools Agreement		
Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
Additional \$16.5 billion in Commonwealth funding nationwide over 2024-25 to 2034-35	2025-2034	<p>The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025-2034 and the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement – Full and Fair Funding 2025-2034 (collectively known as the BFSA) will provide around an additional \$16.5 billion over 10 years to government schools.</p> <p>This additional funding is tied to practical reforms that will improve student outcomes, including students living in regional, rural and remote locations who are a priority equity cohort under the BFSA.</p> <p>The BFSA also includes realistic yet ambitious improvement measures to track progress against reforms, this includes specific measures for rural and remote students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By 2030, upward trends in NAPLAN Reading and Numeracy, of Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 for the proportion of outer regional, remote and very remote students in the Strong and Exceeding proficiency levels. By 2030, a return to the 2019 Student Attendance Rate levels for students from regional and remote locations including outer regional, remote, very remote. By 2035, the Student Attendance Rate is the same as overall student population. By 2030, upward trend compared to 2022 the proportion of students with Year 12 (or equivalent) for students from regional and remote locations including outer regional, remote, and very remote. <p>State and territory governments and non-government representative bodies are also required to provide an Annual Implementation Report to the Australian Government, outlining progress against the reform activity in the bilateral agreements, with first round of reporting due in November 2026.</p>

City-Country Partnerships Program		
Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$26 million over 4 years	2022-23 to 2025-26	<p>The City-Country Partnerships Program supports partnerships between high-performing schools and remote schools with a high proportion of First Nations students.</p> <p>Partnerships are designed to be self-sustaining after the Australian Government's initial financial contribution.</p> <p>Program provider, Yadha Muru Foundation, continues to work with partner schools, with 22 approved partnerships totalling \$19.963 million as of 23 January 2025.</p> <p>Examples of partnership activities include professional development for teachers and administrators, access to specialist staff such as psychologists, IT support including electronic tablets for students, and cultural exchanges.</p>

Commonwealth Teaching Scholarships

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$160.1 million over 8 years (2023-24 to 2031-32)	2023-24 to 2031-32	<p>The Commonwealth Teaching Scholarships (CTS) Program, action 2 under the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan, aims to attract high achievers into teaching through scholarships worth up to \$40,000. There are 5,000 scholarships available over 2024-28. The scholarships include a requirement for recipients to commit to teach for up to four years (undergraduate) or up to two years (postgraduate) in government schools or government-run early learning settings (eligible schools) in Australia.</p> <p>In Round 1 (2024) 985 scholarships were awarded and in Round 2 (2025) 991 scholarships were awarded.</p> <p>To encourage more people to teach in remote schools, CTS recipients may be eligible for an additional \$2,000 payment if they undertake their final professional experience placement at an eligible school in a remote or very remote location.</p> <p>Around a third of CTS recipients in Rounds 1 and 2 are from regional, rural or remote areas.</p>

Expansion of the High Achieving Teachers Program

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$78.8 million over 5 years	Commenced June 2022–23 ending 2026–27	<p>The expansion of the High Achieving Teachers (HAT) Program, as part of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan, is providing more places to support alternative pathways into teaching.</p> <p>In Phase 1, 105 participants are being delivered through La Trobe University's Nexus Primary Program, with participants being placed in schools in Victoria and NSW.</p> <p>In 2024, ten providers were selected to pilot new and innovative HAT programs. There are 1,497 places being delivered under the Phase 2 expansion, with cohorts having commenced this year (2025).</p> <p>Program participants are from a diverse range of backgrounds, including STEM specialists, First Nations peoples, people with disability, teacher aides and people based in remote locations.</p> <p>Participants are placed in teaching positions in Australian primary and secondary schools experiencing teacher workforce shortages, including regional, rural and remote schools. In schools, they receive a high degree of training and support while they complete an Australian accredited teaching qualification and develop into high quality teachers.</p>

Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) program extension

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$36.6 million from 2021-22 to 2026-27	Commenced 30 June 2022 and ending 31 December 2026	<p>PACER program supports civics and citizenship education by helping school students improve their understanding of Australian democracy through on-site learning experiences at national democratic, historical and cultural institutions in Canberra.</p> <p>Schools are provided a subsidy (a rebate) to support the costs of students' travel to Canberra.</p> <p>Providing this rebate allows schools from regional, rural and remote areas of Australia that may not have the chance otherwise to gain an experience of democracy in Canberra.</p> <p>Schools must visit three of the following four national institutions: Australian Parliament House, the Australian War Memorial, the Museum of Australian Democracy and the Electoral Education Centre.</p> <p>All PACER approved Institutions provide educational programs that align to the Australian Curriculum.</p>

Indigenous Boarding Provider Grants

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$44.2 million until the end of 2026	Commencing 2025-2026	This will support approximately 2,500 students attending more than 50 boarding schools and stand-alone boarding facilities and deliver wrap-around supports to boost students' success at school.

Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$10.9 million from 2023-24 to 2029-30	Commencing 2023-24 and ending 2029-30. Note: Scholarships commence from the 2024 school year and will conclude by the end of the 2029 school year.	<p>The Australian Government is investing \$10.9 million in the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program pilot. This pilot program offers scholarships to students from regional, rural and remote areas in Australia, to assist with secondary school boarding fees and associated costs.</p> <p>The program comprises the following per-student funding amounts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 50 scholarships of \$20,000 per student per year for students from low-income families (Tier 1) ▪ 50 scholarships of \$10,000 per student per year for students from low-to-middle income families experiencing financial hardship (Tier 2) <p>Scholarships commenced from the 2024 school year, with scholarships available for up to 6 years.</p>

Good to Great Schools Australia (GGSA): Expanding access to evidence-based teaching in rural, regional and remote Australia

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$5 million over 4 years	Commencing 2025–26 ending 2028–2029	<p>This proposal would provide \$5 million in funding to partner with Good to Great Schools Australia to strengthen the teacher workforce in regional and remote areas.</p> <p>This would help build the capacity of teaching assistants and teachers in regional and remote Australia and explore the development of new qualifications to upskill teaching assistants.</p> <p>The Department of Education is in the process of finalising the grant round in line with Commonwealth Grants Rule and Principles.</p>

Scaling Up Proven Primary Reading Programs

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$31.79 million over five years (2021–22 to 2025–26)	Commenced June 2021–22 and ending 31 December 2026	<p>The Scaling Up Proven Primary Reading Programs measure expands three targeted evidence-based literacy programs to support teacher professional practice and improve early reading outcomes for Indigenous students addressing issues that prevent Indigenous students from completing Year 12.</p> <p>These programs include the MultiLit (Making Up Lost Time in Literacy) Program, the Good to Great Schools Australia (GGSA) Pilot Program, and the Scaling Up Success in Remote Schools Program (SUSRS) an expansion of learnings from the Kimberley Schools Project in WA).</p> <p>MultiLit supports 42 majority Indigenous primary schools in regional and remote schools. These schools have been participating since the start of the program, and there is a waitlist of schools wanting to join the program.</p> <p>SUSRS commenced with 14 schools in 2024 (in the Goldfields and Mid-West regions) and will be expanding to 23 participating schools in 2026 (adding the Pilbara region). The expansion has been due to program efficiencies and capacity to expand within existing budget.</p> <p>GGSA supports 20 schools in regional and remote areas.</p>

On Country Learning Measure		
Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$40.4 million over 2 years	2023-24 to 2024-2025	<p>As part of the Better, Safer Future for Central Australia plan, the On-Country Learning measure supports improved attendance and education outcomes at all operating government and non-government schools in Central Australia region of the Northern Territory.</p> <p>The measure included more than 150 consultation sessions held with communities to discuss their vision, aspirations, and activities to be funded.</p> <p>Enrolment and attendance figures from the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (DET) show:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An increase in attendance and enrolment in very remote areas (outside of Alice Springs and surrounds) in 2024 compared to 2023, across both Government and non-Government schools. ▪ In remote areas (Alice Springs and surrounds) relatively stable attendance at Government schools and a slight decrease at non-Government schools, and a slight decrease in enrolments in both. ▪ A strong outcome has been the reduction of the number of students disengaged from government schools in very remote areas by 80 young people on average. <p>The On-Country Learning measure has had significant employment outcomes, around 210 staff were employed through the measure with more than 42% identifying as First Nations people.</p> <p>The NT Bilateral Agreement under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025–2034 was signed 31 July 2024. Under this agreement, funding levels provided to government and non-government schools in Central Australia in 2024 through the On-Country Learning measure will be maintained in 2025.</p>

Central Australia Boarding Response Fund (administered by NIAA)

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$18 million	2024-2025	<p>The Central Australia Boarding Response Fund provides funding (administered by NIAA) to build new, and improve existing, boarding facilities in Central Australia for First Nations students from remote Northern Territory communities.</p> <p>In 2024, Yirara College was offered up to \$10 million and St Philip's College up to \$1.7 million to upgrade existing facilities. These grants have now been executed by NIAA.</p> <p>In 2025, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education was offered \$5.1 million towards construction of its new culturally safe and supported accommodation centre in the Desert Knowledge Precinct in Mparntwe (Alice Springs), and; Alice Springs Youth Accommodation & Support Services (ASYASS) was offered \$1.2 million to construct a new accommodation facility for pregnant young women and young mothers and their children experiencing homelessness and family and domestic violence.</p> <p>This fund was established in response to the Assessment of Boarding Capacity and Options in Central Australia.</p> <p>This investment complements the \$40.4 million allocated to all schools in the Central Australia region for On-Country Learning under the landmark \$250 million plan for A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia.</p> <p>This is also in addition to the funding uplift for Northern Territory schools in the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (BFSA).</p>

English Language Learning for Indigenous Children (ELLIC)

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$5.5 million over 3 years	2024-25 to 2026-27	<p>The Australian Government has expanded the ELLIC program from 20 to 100 sites to preschools and schools (Foundation to Year 3) in remote or very remote areas.</p> <p>The program provides educator and community resources and a series of play-based, digital apps to help First Nations preschool children, for whom English is an additional language or dialect, learn English in a fun way.</p>

The Clontarf Foundation

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$32.8 million for the 2025 school year	2025	<p>Supporting up to 12,500 First Nations boys and young men to continue their education. The Clontarf Foundation encourages students to build their confidence, attend school, finish year 12, and enter employment, through in-school and extracurricular school activities.</p> <p>In 2024, Clontarf supported 10,851 First Nations boys and young men (a 7% increase from 2023), across 160 academies (opening 9 new academies) with 1,009 participants completing year 12 (a 21% increase from 2023).</p>
\$33.6 million for the 2026 school year	2026	

Australian Indigenous Education Foundation (AIEF)

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$20 million	2025-26	<p>In 2024, a total of 337 secondary school scholarships were awarded, with 46% going to First Nations girls and 54% to First Nations boys. Additionally, 35% of the recipients were enrolled in Year 11 or 12 studies.</p> <p>AIEF accumulative scholarships of 5,403 compared to the target of 3,147 for the period. The accumulative number of scholarships is 71% over the target for the 16 years of program delivery as of 2024.</p>

Tertiary Education

HELP Debt Reduction Program for doctors and nurse practitioners who live and work in rural, remote and very remote areas, and teachers who work in very remote areas.

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
<p>Very Remote Teachers - \$19.6 million over 5 years ongoing</p> <p>Rural Health Practitioners - \$27.2 million over 5 years ongoing.</p>	<p>Very Remote teachers – 1 January 2019</p> <p>Rural health Practitioners – 1 January 2022</p>	<p>The Very Remote Teachers HELP Debt Reduction initiative supports teachers working in very remote areas as defined by the ABS Remoteness Area (ASGS-RA) classification. This initiative is led by the Department of Education.</p> <p>The Rural Doctors and Nurse Practitioners HELP Debt Reduction initiative supports medical practitioners and nurse practitioners living and working in rural, remote and very remote areas as defined by the Modified Monash Model (MMM) classification. This initiative is jointly led by the Department of Education and Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.</p> <p>The HELP debt reduction program aims to attract and retain teachers in very remote areas, and doctors and nurse practitioners to rural, remote and very remote areas of Australia to help address issues of access and equity in education and healthcare.</p> <p>The HELP debt reduction programs allow eligible individuals to apply for a waiver of indexation on their accumulated HELP debt while working in an eligible area and/ or a reduction to their accumulated HELP debt after a minimum period of service in an eligible area.</p> <p>Since the program commenced, the Program has provided HELP debt waivers and/or HELP debt reductions to 1,099 teachers and 215 doctors and nurse practitioners (as at 6 November 2025).</p> <p>An Independent Review of the HELP Debt Reduction Program was undertaken by Ms Rachel Hunter AO PSM and reported to the Minister for Education in November 2025. The Regional Education Commissioner was consulted as part of the Independent Review.</p>

Regional Education Commissioner		
Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
Ongoing measure with \$14 million of departmental funding allocated over 10 years (2020–21 to 2030–31)	13 December 2021	<p>The Regional Education Commissioner, The Hon Fiona Nash, was reappointed for a further 2 years from 13 December 2024.</p> <p>As required under her Terms of Reference, the Regional Education Commissioner provided her third Annual Report to the Minister for Education in November 2024, and her Annual Workplan to the Minister in February 2025.</p> <p>The Regional Education Commissioner's Annual Reports are publicly available via the Commissioner's web hub.</p> <p>The 2024 Annual Report covers the Regional Education Commissioner's activities from December 2023 to November 2024. The report provides an update on the current state of regional, rural and remote education in the areas of early childhood, schools, vocational education and training and higher education. The Report highlights successful case studies, details the Commissioner's stakeholder engagement and consultation activities, and notes progress of the relevant education reviews and programs impacting education across regional, rural and remote Australia.</p> <p>Two projects commissioned by the Regional Education Commissioner were published in 2025: Best practice methods for retaining students in regional, rural and remote areas to Year 12 in January and an Evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of the measures responding to the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy in October.</p>

Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program (RPPPP)		
Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$8.3 million (over 4 years) 2022-23 to 2025-26	From 2022	<p>The RPPPP provides partnerships funding for projects to trial innovative outreach initiatives to enable higher education aspirations for students in regional and remote areas.</p> <p>Program is using a two-phase process to co-design (Phase 1) and deliver (Phase 2) targeted outreach initiatives in regional and remote Australia.</p> <p>Six Phase 1 projects commenced in August 2022, with total funding of \$704,628 awarded. The 6 project teams comprise 21 Hubs and 33 universities working with local communities across Australia.</p> <p>Two successful Phase 2 projects were awarded a further total of \$6.5 million and commenced delivery in July 2023.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Northern Territory Youth Engagement in Allied Health (YEAH!) project, led by Flinders University, is supporting regional and remote First Nations youth in the NT to consider an allied health higher education pathway. ▪ The Eastern Australia Regional University Centre Partnership project, led by University of Technology Sydney, is working with over 30 Hubs and universities to deliver targeted outreach projects to communities across QLD, NSW and VIC. <p>As Phase 2 projects have been delivering for over 2 years, early outcomes will be used to inform future design of national outreach funding.</p>

Regional University Study Hubs (RUSH)

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$132.1 million from 2024-25 to 2028-29	2018	<p>Regional University Study Hubs help students in regional and remote areas to access and succeed in higher education without having to leave their community.</p> <p>The hubs are community-based facilities that provide study spaces, computing facilities, and internet access, as well as academic skills and wellbeing support for students studying at any Australian tertiary education provider.</p> <p>Once all Hubs are open, there will be 56 RUSH supporting tertiary students across Australia.</p> <p>As of Reporting Period 1 (June) 2025, 6,511 students were registered with 46 hubs operating at that time, which is a 48% increase in the past year. Of these students, 76% identified as female, 43% first in family to undertake tertiary study, 8% having a disability and 13% as First Nations.</p>

Tertiary Access Payment (TAP)

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$150.8 million from 2024-25 to 2028-29	1 January 2021	<p>The TAP is a payment of up to \$5,000 to encourage and assist regional and remote individual students to access tertiary study (Certificate IV and above) following completion of Year 12.</p> <p>As of 31 December 2024, 13,368 payments have been made to eligible university, VET and Non-University Higher Education Providers (NUHEP) students since the commencement of the program. This includes;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2,125 payments in 2021 ▪ 3,896 payments in 2022 ▪ 3,716 payments in 2023, and ▪ 3,631 payments in 2024. <p>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.</p> <p>A second stage evaluation of the TAP is planned for 2026.</p>

Indigenous, Regional and Low SES Attainment Fund (IRLSAF)

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
HEPPP: \$163,809,424	Jan-Dec 2025	<p>HEPPP is to promote equality of opportunity in higher education by improving:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> access to undergraduate courses for persons from a low SES background, persons from regional areas and remote areas, and Indigenous persons; and the extent to which persons from a low SES background, persons from regional areas and remote areas, and Indigenous persons participate, remain and succeed in higher education. <p>Note: the HEPPP program ceases at the end of 2025 when it transitions into the Needs-Based-Funding model</p>

Increased Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding for regional university campuses

Funding	End date	Implementation and outcomes
\$146 million over 4 years from 2020-21	31 December 2025	<p>This measure provides additional Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) funding for non-medical bachelor places from 2021.</p> <p>It is based on the proportion of students at campuses in regional, high-growth metropolitan, and low-growth metropolitan areas.</p> <p>Funding increases by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.5 per cent a year for regional campuses 2.5 per cent a year for campuses located in high-growth metropolitan areas 1 per cent per year for campuses located in low-growth metropolitan areas. <p>This measure will cease as part of the transition to the Managed Growth Funding System (MGFS) in 2026. The MGFS was announced in the 2024-25 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook.</p>

Charles Darwin University grant under the National Priorities Pool Program (NPPP): Closing the Gap: Investing in First Nation Educational Outcomes

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$6.05 million over two years from 2025-26	April 2025	<p>The project is to increase the number of First Nations students from rural and remote areas who access, participate, remain in and succeed higher education programs by providing training that is relevant for jobs on Country by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> piloting First Nations-led hubs that deliver culturally safe, accredited training; and increasing the number of First Nations peoples undertaking higher education programs in the areas of teaching and health. <p>The project is being delivered through CDU campuses in Darwin, Katherine, Alice Springs and Nhulunbuy.</p>

Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP)

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
Approx. \$35.84 million from 2025-26 to 2028-29	From 2017	<p>The ISSP provides supplementary funding to all eligible Table A and some Table B universities to help First Nations students succeed in higher education. Funding may be used for activities including scholarships, additional tutorial assistance, mentoring, safe cultural spaces and other personal support services.</p> <p>The total ISSP funding pool comprises weighted funding components. The figure quoted is for the Regional and Remote Component only. The figure is subject to change due to annual indexation being applied once the indexation rate is advised to the Department of Education.</p>

Charles Darwin University medical school

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$24.6 million from 2024-25 to 2027-28	<p>Funding for capital, establishment costs commenced from the 2024-25 financial year.</p> <p>Students to commence from January 2026.</p>	<p>Charles Darwin University (CDU) is being supported to establish a new Northern Territory medical school.</p> <p>Following the Government's investment through the 2024-25 Budget, CDU obtained Australian Medical Council accreditation to operate a medical school in late 2024. CDU is expected to commence its first medical students in Semester 1 of 2026.</p> <p>Establishing a new medical school at CDU will help develop and retain a locally trained medical workforce equipped to respond to the NT's unique health challenges.</p>

Demand driven First Nations medical places

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$3.2 million from 2025-26 to 2028-29.	1 January 2026	<p>From 2026, Commonwealth supported places (CSPs) in medicine for First Nations students will be uncapped, subject to the passage of legislation. This ensures all First Nations students who meet the entry requirements for courses in medicine can enrol in a CSP.</p> <p>This responds to Recommendation 3b of the Accord Final Report and complements recent investments in more medical training, particularly in regional Australia.</p> <p>The measure will help to address the under-representation of First Nations people in Australia's health workforce.</p> <p>Evidence shows First Nations patients receive the best care from First Nations practitioners. First Nations doctors are also more likely to practise in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and in regional, rural and remote communities.</p>

Commonwealth Prac Payment

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$427.4 million over 2024–25 to 2027–28	1 July 2025 (ongoing)	<p>The Commonwealth Prac Payment (CPP) provides financial support to eligible teaching, nursing, midwifery and social work students.</p> <p>The CPP is expected to deliver tangible benefits for regional and remote students by helping reduce financial barriers to completing placements. According to 2023 student data, students in CPP-eligible disciplines have a higher proportion of regional and remote enrolments (24.8%) compared with students in all higher education courses (18.0%).</p>

Tertiary Harmonisation Budget Package 2024-25

Funding	Commencing date	Implementation and outcomes
\$27.7 million	1 July 2024 (ongoing)	<p>The Tertiary Harmonisation Budget Package responds to the Australian Universities Accord by laying the foundations for a more connected and responsive tertiary education system that leverages the strengths of the vocational education and training (VET) and higher education sectors.</p> <p>The measures will deliver actions that include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Facilitating higher education and VET providers to come together to improve credit recognition in key occupations, improving the mobility of students between sectors. ▪ Enabling regulatory alignment for dual-sector providers, and scoping and piloting ASQA delegating its course accreditation function to selected TAFEs, so qualifications can respond more quickly to emerging industry needs. ▪ Building better data and digital capability to understand how students are accessing and moving between VET and higher education.

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GLOSSARY

3-day guarantee is a policy from January 2026 that provides at least 72 hours (three days) of subsidised early childhood education and care per fortnight for eligible families, regardless of their work or study activity.

Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) is a classification of Australia into statistical areas based on population, as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). It is a social geography, developed to reflect the location of people and communities. In this report, Remoteness Areas are used to distinguish between regions.

Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) is an independent steward for the higher education system, tasked with creating a better and fairer tertiary education system that delivers for students and on national economic and social objectives. The ATEC commenced interim operation from 1 July 2025 and intends to be fully operational by 2026, subject to the passage of legislation.

Australian Universities Accord (Accord) was a review of Australia's higher education system, led by an independent expert panel and initiated in 2022. The Accord Panel delivered a final report to the Australian Government in December 2023.

BFSA is the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025–34, and the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement – Full and Fair Funding 2025–34 (collectively known as the BFSA), a joint funding agreement between the Commonwealth, states and territories.

Building Early Education Fund is a \$1 billion fund to build early childhood education and care centres to improve access to quality ECEC in areas where it is needed most.

Census Date is the last date a student can finalise or withdraw from any units of study, finalise residency status, suspend studies or discontinue their course, without it affecting grades or making a student financially liable for units of study.

Commonwealth Prac Payment is a \$331.65 per week payment (benchmarked to the single Austudy rate on 1 January each year) to eligible students while they are undertaking a mandatory placement in a Bachelor's or Master's degree in teaching, nursing, midwifery or social work.

Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) are places at a university or higher education provider where the Australian Government pays part of the student's fees. This part is a subsidy, not a loan, and the student is not required to pay it back. This subsidy does not cover the entire cost of the student's study. The remaining portion is called the 'student contribution amount', which the student is liable for.

First year of school is known by different names in states and territories as set out below.

State/Territory	First Year of School	Year before School
Australian Capital Territory	Kindergarten	Preschool
New South Wales	Kindergarten	Preschool
Northern Territory	Transition	Kindergarten
Queensland	Preparatory	Kindergarten
South Australia	Reception	Preschool/Kindergarten
Tasmania	Prep	Kindergarten
Victoria	Preparatory	Kindergarten/Pre-Prep
Western Australia	Pre-primary	Kindergarten

Higher Education in Australia refers to awards spanning Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) levels 5-10. Higher Education providers are regulated by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).

Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) provides a financial loan to eligible students to pay student contributions or tuition fees from a university or other higher education provider. Students repay this loan through the Australian tax system, indexed to the cost of living, once they earn above the compulsory repayment threshold. The rate of repayment is dependent on the student's income.

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) is a pre-service, compulsory qualification to equip graduate teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills and dispositions to start their teaching career in any Australian school.

Jobs and Skills Australia is an agency established in July 2022. The agency's remit includes workforce planning and developing closer partnerships with state and territory governments, unions, industry and education providers to help Australia meet its present and future skills needs.

Managed Growth Funding System is a component of the proposed new higher education funding system designed to increase opportunity for students from under-represented backgrounds and create a more diverse and flexible system of higher education. The Managed Growth Funding System will be introduced through a staged implementation with a transition year in 2026 and full commencement in 2027.

Metropolitan refers to urban areas that are classified as Major Cities as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) under the ASGS Remoteness Area (ASGS-RA).

National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is an annual, nationwide assessment for students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 to allow parents/carers and educators to compare student progression in literacy and numeracy over time and against national standards.

Needs Based Funding is a core component of the proposed new higher education funding system to be implemented from 1 January 2026. Needs based funding will provide universities with additional per-student funding contributions over and above core Commonwealth Supported Place funding to better support students from under-represented backgrounds to complete their studies.

Out-of-field teaching is when a teacher is assigned to teach a subject for which they lack formal qualifications, expertise or specialised training.

Pre-service teacher is a student enrolled in a teacher education program and working towards teacher qualifications.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is an assessment process that involves assessment of an individual's relevant prior learning (including formal, informal and non-formal learning) to determine the credit outcomes of an individual application for credit.

Regional is used as a broad term for non-metropolitan areas of Australia, also referred to collectively as regional, rural and remote areas. Where the terms 'Inner Regional', 'Outer Regional', 'Remote', 'Very Remote' and 'Major Cities' are used, they generally correspond to the five classes of remoteness under the ASGS-RA, as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) based on relative access to services. While many people and communities identify as rural, the term is not explicitly defined and does not correspond to any specific class of area within the ASGS.

Regional University Study Hubs (formerly Regional University Centres), also known as RUSHs, provide facilities for the use of regional, rural and remote students to study tertiary courses delivered by distance. Hubs provide local infrastructure including study spaces and internet access, administrative and academic support services, and student support services. Hubs are not registered higher education providers and cannot award higher education qualifications.

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 subsidised VET services.

Schooling Resource Standard is an estimate of how much total public funding a school needs to meet its students' educational needs. It is based on recommendations made in the 2011 Review of Funding for Schooling led by David Gonski AC. It is made up of a base amount and up to six needs-based loadings. The Department of Education calculates an SRS for each school every year by adding the base amount and loadings it has calculated for the school using the formulas in the Australian Education Act 2013. The SRS is increased each year by the SRS indexation factor.

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) are collectively referred to as 'STEM'.

Socio-economic status (SES) is the social and economic position of an individual, group, community or region. Common measures include income, consumption, wealth, education and employment.

Technical and Further Education (TAFE) is a government-run system of tertiary education providers providing Vocational Education and Training (VET).

Tertiary education refers to all vocational education and training (VET) and higher education in Australia. Higher education and VET qualifications are described in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), the national policy guide for regulated qualifications in the Australian education and training system. Some providers are dual-sector providers, offering qualifications in both VET and higher education.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) refers to the training and work-ready qualifications related to occupational skills, trades and competencies. The VET sector recognises AQF qualification levels 1-6 and 8. The VET sector is regulated by the Australian Skills Qualification Agency (ASQA).

VET Delivered to Secondary Students (VETDSS) refers to programs delivered as part of the secondary education system which provide students with the opportunity to engage in vocational learning and work towards attaining a nationally recognised VET qualification as part of their secondary study.

Year before school is known by different names in states and territories as set out in the table under First year of school above.

