

1. Preparing regional, rural and remote learners for success in tertiary education

Issues

- High quality early childhood, primary and high school education are major drivers in shaping student aspiration to complete year twelve and go on to successfully undertake tertiary education.
- There are many examples where regional, rural and remote (RRR) communities have developed high quality education programs drawing on partnerships with education institutions and industry. These programs often lead to outstanding outcomes for students and regional communities because learners have the opportunities to match their aspiration.
- This notwithstanding, year twelve or equivalent attainment rates tend to be well below those in metropolitan areas, with significantly fewer students undertaking higher-level vocational education and training (VET) or university study.
- Consultations have suggested a need for better resourcing of career advice in RRR areas and that information on career, tertiary education options, income support payments and scholarship programs for school students is difficult to access and navigate.
- In addition, while Vocational Education and Training (VET) in School programs can support pathways to employment and further education, there is significant variation in the level of access and quality of programs across different areas.
- More generally, as highlighted in a number of reviews over recent years including *The Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* undertaken by Emeritus Professor John Halsey (January 2018), there is a need for continued effort to improve teaching quality and support in RRR areas, recruitment and retention of teachers.
- Support for principals and school leaders is key area for further action here, including access to training, professional development and mentoring support, both before and after they take up new positions.

Discussion

Data shows that children in RRR areas are far more likely to commence school developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains ([Attachment A](#) - Table 1). Many schools in RRR areas and students achieve outstanding results despite a higher proportion of students starting school less prepared. RRR students face a range of additional challenges including limited access to early learning support, greater distances between schools and students, smaller student numbers, higher proportions of low socio-economic (SES) students and a less stable teacher workforce. Much of the success of RRR schools and students is made possible by the energy and commitment of educational and community leaders.

Nevertheless, student outcomes tend to be poorer than in metropolitan areas. NAPLAN results show that average scores (reading, numeracy and writing) are lower as remoteness increases ([Attachment A](#) - Table 2). The gap between city and RRR students is greatest in year three and actually reduces as a percentage by year 9. This may suggest that the school system is helping in closing the difference in educational attainment, however further research is required to demonstrate if this is the case or if there are other factors involved.

The difference in school achievement continues in the measure of year 12 (or equivalent) attainment. By age 19, 80 per cent of people in Major Cities have attained year 12 (or equivalent) compared to 66 per cent in Inner Regional areas, reducing to 40 per cent for Very Remote Australia ([Attachment A](#) Figure 1).

Young people in RRR areas also have different rates of tertiary education attainment and are around half as likely to have a university qualification or higher-level VET qualification by their mid-twentiesⁱ. This differential in attainment can be linked to a range of factors such as the views and expectations of their families and local community, their perceptions of local employment opportunities and concerns about the costs and barriers of relocating to undertake further study.

Consultations have suggested that school resources are often insufficient to support dedicated career advice positions in schools and teachers undertake this role, sometimes on a part-time basis, with little support. This can narrow the aspirations of students and impact on their education and career choices. In addition, concerns were raised about lack of availability of simple and comprehensive online information resources to help students and families navigate the system, which is exacerbated by poor internet access particularly in rural and remote areas. While challenges around access to careers advice and information appear to be widespread, they are felt more keenly in RRR areas where there may be fewer opportunities for students to gain exposure to a wide range of industries and career options.

VET in Schools programs can help in raising aspirations and provide a pathway to further education, training and employment. However, access varies from school to school and some stakeholders in the consultation process have explained that some students undertake VET courses just to obtain their year twelve certificate, with limited potential for employment post-school in the field. In general, consultations suggested that these programs tend to produce better outcomes when delivered by external training providers rather than directly by the school. This needs more research, however, as there are also a number of success stories identified through the [Australian Training Awards](#), School Pathways to VET Award that demonstrate excellent practice by schools delivering the VET programⁱⁱ.

While the Australian Government provides national leadership on VET in Schools, the states and territories are responsible for decisions on allocation of resources and delivery of programs. Joint work to map existing models of VET in RRR schools may assist in identifying the key components of successful models and driving greater consistency in quality across regions.

A number of reports over recent years have highlighted the importance of quality teaching and school leadership and the difficulty many RRR schools have attracting and retaining the highest quality teachers, including the Halsey Review completed in 2018. This review highlighted the importance of making the curriculum more relevant for RRR settings as well as implementing strategies to make it more attractive and feasible for student teachers and recent graduates to work in RRR areas. Consultations also highlighted the need for further action in this area and for further work, more generally, to improve teacher quality and teacher and principal support.

A range of existing initiatives are helping to better prepare learners for success, many with a RRR focus. These include recently announced [incentives to attract teachers to remote Indigenous communities](#), online resources such as the [National Career Education Strategy](#), [Quality in Learning and Teaching](#) and the [Job Outlook](#); and university outreach programs for low SES students. These initiatives are outlined further at <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/52531>.

Possible further actions

Drawing on the range of suggestions canvassed in consultations and submissions, and its consideration of these issues, the Expert Advisory Group is seeking feedback on the following ideas for further action:

- **Careers advice and aspirations:** Building on the recently announced National Career Education Strategy, governments to explore practical steps to improve career education in schools and access to careers advice, including:
 - Implementation of a regionally based model for independent career advice in RRR locations, separate from - but linked to schools - delivered by professional advisors, tailored to local needs and opportunities, and drawing on strong industry, parental and community engagement.
 - Ensure that these professional career advisors are provided with sufficient developmental opportunities to maintain their currency of knowledge and practice.
 - Improvements to online portals for providing careers information to students, particularly those in remote areas where access to face-to-face career advice is more difficult.
 - Investigate strategies to raise aspirations among students and families such as establishing a RRR ambassador program covering both VET and higher education (similar to the Australian Apprenticeships Ambassadors program and the National Training Awards) and initiatives to build local RRR alumni networks.
- **VET in Schools:** Collaborative work by the Australian Government and the states and territories to improve access to high quality VET programs in RRR schools, including mapping current programs to identify and share good practice. This work should include consideration of models for delivery of VET courses by external training providers that have been effective in improving local employment outcomes.
- **Teacher quality and support:** Building on the Halsey Review, governments to continue to work to improve teaching quality, support and supply in RRR areas, through strategies such as:
 - increasing the focus on RRR education practice in pre-service initial teacher training
 - providing paid practicums in RRR schools
 - additional incentives to train in RRR areas such as guaranteed employment on completion
 - allowing experienced teachers more flexibility to move between jurisdictions, and
 - consideration of RRR content as part of the 2020 review of the Australian curriculum.
- **Principals and school leaders:** As part of the work to improve teacher quality, explore further improvements to training, professional development, mentoring and other support for principals and school leaders in RRR areas, including to prepare them for when they start in these positions.

Further background material

Australian Early Development Census

The proportion of children in RRR areas presenting to their first year of school developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains of the Australian Early Development Index is substantially higher than in major cities. Table 1 shows that children in inner regional areas are more likely to be identified as developmentally vulnerable and this gap widens as you go further from major cities with children in very remote areas almost three times as likely to be developmentally vulnerable on 2 or more domains.

Geographic Location	Percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains			Percentage of children Developmentally Vulnerable on two or more domains		
	2009	2012	2015	2009	2012	2015
Major Cities	22.5	21.1	21.0	11.0	10.1	10.2
Inner Regional	23.9	22.4	22.4	12.3	11.2	11.7
outer Regional	26.9	24.9	25.2	14.1	13.1	13.3
Remote	31.0	26.0	27.5	16.5	13.5	15.4
Very Remote	45.3	44.5	47.0	29.7	28.0	31.8

Source: <https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/2015-aedc-national-report>

School education

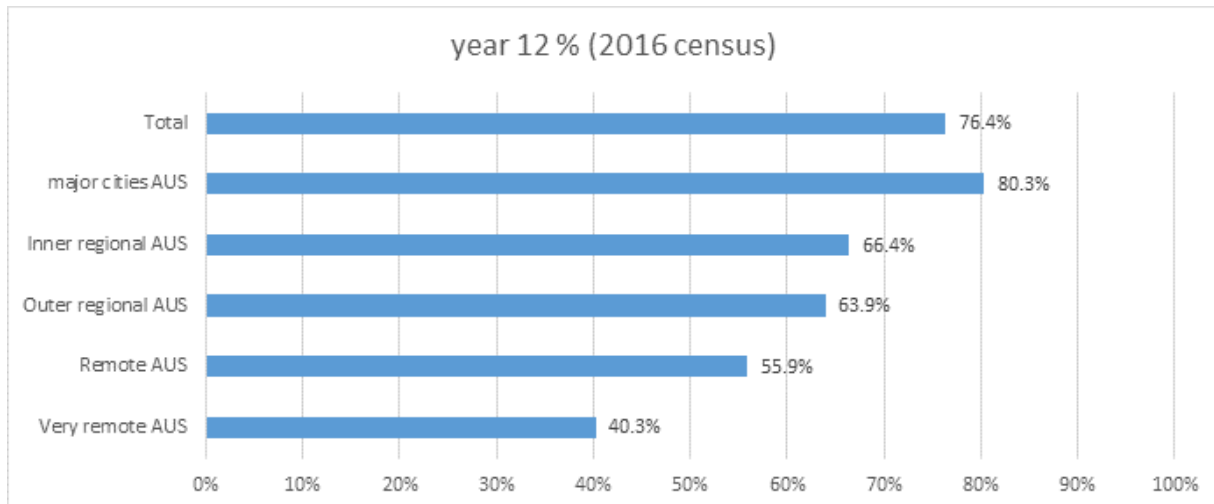
Table 2 NAPLAN Mean Scale Score, Australia, All students, by Domain, Year Level, and Geolocation, 2017

Reading	Major Cities	Inner Regional	Outer Regional	Remote	Very Remote
3	440.3	420.0	406.6	381.1	298.8
5	513.2	496.4	486.2	464.5	386.2
7	552.0	534.5	523.0	502.4	417.8
9	587.8	571.3	560.4	543.2	458.5
Numeracy					
3	417.1	399.4	387.7	369.7	304.8
5	501.4	482.9	474.1	455.8	402.0
7	562.5	538.6	530.1	510.7	443.4
9	599.8	577.0	571.5	557.2	505.2
Writing					
3	421.8	402.8	391.2	370.4	293.3
5	480.9	460.6	451.0	431.5	355.9
7	522.7	496.8	486.6	460.5	358.5
9	562.9	534.1	521.6	498.2	388.3

Source: [Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2017, NAPLAN Achievement in reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy: National Report for 2017, ACARA Sydney.](#)

Year 12 attainment rates

Figure 1 – Completion of Year 12 or equivalent at age 19 by remoteness



Source: [2016 Census of Population and Housing](#)

ⁱ Cardak, B., Brett, M., Bowden, M., Vecchi, J., Barry, P., Bahtsevanoglou, J. and McAllister, R. (2017) Regional Student Participation and Migration: Analysis of factors influencing regional student participation and internal migration in Australian higher education. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Curtin University, Perth, p. v

ⁱⁱ Including the Busselton Senior High School Program which had 75% of senior students enrolled in a VET program in 2018 and achieved a 100% attainment rate in 2017 through strong industry links
<https://www.australiantrainingawards.gov.au/finalists/busselton-senior-high-school>