

National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy

Final Report

ISBN 978-1-76051-733-5 [PDF]
ISBN 978-1-76051-734-2 [DOCX]



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Foreword

The Regional Education Expert Advisory Group (the Advisory Group) is pleased to present the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy (the Strategy). For the purposes of this Strategy, tertiary education is defined as both higher education and vocational education and training (VET), focusing on post-secondary education qualifications.

At its heart, this Strategy is about equal opportunity and educational equity.

As laid out in the Terms of Reference, this Strategy is focused on improving the participation and outcomes of regional, rural and remote (RRR) students in post-secondary education.

The Strategy is the culmination of a detailed literature review, public submissions and responses to a series of issues papers, face-to-face consultations around Australia, and analysis of available data and evidence.

The Advisory Group would like to thank everyone who took the time to meet with the group, make a submission and respond to the issues papers.

The Advisory Group would also like to express our sincere appreciation for all the hard work and support of the taskforce team in the Department of Education.

The Strategy sets out a vision, objectives and targets and includes a number of recommendations with associated actions. These correspond to the key issues impacting RRR students' participation and outcomes in tertiary education:

- there are fewer options available for tertiary education in RRR communities
- individuals from RRR areas often face additional financial costs and social dislocation associated with the need to relocate for their studies
- as a result of the greater academic, geographic, social and financial challenges they experience, RRR students are much less likely to undertake and complete tertiary study.

We firmly believe that all Australians deserve fair and equal access to high quality tertiary education, regardless of location or personal circumstances.

In addition, addressing the disparity in educational outcomes that currently exists for RRR students is vital to increasing the future fairness and prosperity of our nation, as we all benefit when citizens have the encouragement, support and opportunity to achieve their best. Increasing tertiary education access and outcomes for RRR students will directly benefit the economic and social development of RRR communities as students from RRR areas are much more likely to remain in, or return and work in these areas.

This Strategy, with its associated recommendations and actions, will strengthen and build the skills of individuals and communities and contribute to Australia's broader economic and social capacity.

Regional Education Expert Advisory Group

The Hon Dr Denis Napthine
Ms Caroline Graham
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Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ASGS	Australian Statistical Geography Standard
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
CSP	Commonwealth supported place
CUC	Country Universities Centre
DAAWS	Disabled Australian Apprenticeship Wage Support
DoE	Department of Education
DSP	Higher Education Disability Support Program
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDR	Higher Degree Research
HEPPP	Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program
ISSP	Indigenous Student Success Program
LSAY	Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NDCO	National Disability Coordination Officer Program
NPP	National Priorities Pool
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QILT	Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RRR	Regional, rural and remote
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
RUN	Regional Universities Network
SES	Socioeconomic status
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VETiS	Vocational education and training in Schools
VET	Vocational education and training
WIL	Work integrated learning

Executive summary

Why Australia needs a National Strategy for RRR tertiary education

Every Australian, no matter where they live, should have the opportunity to access Australia's world class tertiary education system. Currently, however, individuals who grow up in regional, rural and remote (RRR) areas are around 40 per cent less likely to gain a higher-level tertiary education qualification and less than half as likely to gain a bachelor and above qualification by the time they are 35 years old, compared to individuals from metropolitan areas. This report proposes a Strategy that aims to reduce this disparity and provide equal opportunity for every individual from RRR Australia to access tertiary education, regardless of personal circumstances and location.

There are many social and economic reasons and potential benefits providing a strong rationale for why the nation should give priority to addressing the disparity in tertiary education participation and attainment in RRR areas. This Strategy focuses on the following themes:

- **Individuals will benefit** from having more opportunity to reach their potential and gain better employment with higher incomes and improved health outcomes.
- **Communities will benefit** and remain vibrant through releasing the currently untapped potential of many RRR Australians.
- **The nation will benefit** through maximising the talents and skills of more Australians, which will strengthen the national economy, as well as foster greater aspiration in young people.

Issues and findings

Five key issues have been identified as significant in driving lower levels of tertiary education participation and attainment by individuals from RRR areas. These issues are:

1. **Access, opportunity and choice:** There are fewer tertiary education options in RRR communities. Policies that increase access to tertiary education in RRR areas are critical to improving tertiary education participation and attainment.
2. **Student support:** There is insufficient support for RRR individuals who want to participate in tertiary education. Improving financial support is a necessary part of increasing access to, and completion of, tertiary education. There also needs to be a holistic range of support services available to RRR students.
3. **Aspiration, career advice and schooling:** The aspirations of RRR individuals are hampered by additional challenges and they are less likely to be prepared for tertiary education. Policies that enhance the role and positive impact of schools and career advice will increase tertiary education aspiration, participation and attainment.
4. **Equity groups:** There is insufficient targeted support for underrepresented groups who experience multiple, compounding challenges. Identified equity groups, including low socioeconomic status (SES) students, Indigenous Australians, students with disability and those from more remote areas, require additional support due to the cumulative challenges they face, which impact on their learning.
5. **Regional development:** The contribution of RRR areas is not being maximised. Boosting the contribution made by RRR Australia, including the capacity of education institutions, will build the nation, increase productivity, and promote decentralisation. RRR students who successfully complete tertiary education are also more likely to return to RRR areas. Increasing the participation of RRR students will directly and positively contribute to the economic and social development of RRR areas.

This report includes 25 findings related to these issues which provide a basis for the recommendations and actions included in the Strategy.

Plan for change

At the core of the Strategy is a vision of a tertiary education system which supports equal opportunity and access for individuals from RRR areas. This vision is underpinned by several core objectives and targets, specifically focused on halving the current disparity between RRR and metropolitan students in relation to tertiary education attainment and participation by 2030.

No single recommendation or action can solve the education challenge facing RRR Australia on its own. The additional barriers facing individuals in RRR areas are multifaceted and require cultural and social shifts that cut across governments, communities and families. It will be a combination of actions taken together that will shift the tide. Recently, there has been significant investment in initiatives to provide RRR students with greater choice and access to opportunities. However, given the scale and complexity of the problem, more needs to be done.

The Strategy includes seven recommendations and proposes 33 related actions:

Recommendation one: Improve access to tertiary study options for students in RRR areas by:

- providing demand-driven funding for university places in regional areas
- exploring new higher education offerings focused on professional skills development
- expanding access to Regional Study Hubs
- addressing problems with student access to affordable, reliable, high speed internet services, and
- improving access to high quality VET programs in RRR areas.

Recommendation two: Improve access to financial support, to support greater fairness and more equal opportunity by:

- introducing a new tertiary education access payment for students who relocate for study from an outer regional or remote area
- allowing greater flexibility in pathways to qualify for independent Youth Allowance
- providing greater assistance to students and families to meet costs associated with travel to and from their home communities, and
- promoting and improving the clarity of online information about available financial support.

Recommendation three: Improve the quality and range of student support services for RRR students to address the challenges of transition and higher rates of attrition by:

- identifying and disseminating information on best practice student support services
- introducing new requirements for providers to publish transparent information on available service offerings, and
- working with state and territory governments to improve transport options for students.

Recommendation four: Build aspiration, improve career advice and strengthen RRR schools to better prepare RRR students for success by:

- implementing a regionally-based model for independent, professional career advice
- improving online career related information and advice
- establishing aspiration-raising initiatives covering both VET and higher education
- expanding access to high quality VET programs in RRR schools
- undertaking further work to improve RRR schools and Year 12 completion rates, and
- improving support available to teachers, principals and school leaders.

Recommendation five: Improve participation and outcomes for RRR students from equity groups including low SES students, Indigenous students, students with disability and remote students by:

- modifying the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) to better target funding to cost effective RRR programs
- providing demand-driven funding for RRR Indigenous university students, and
- establishing tailored initiatives for equity groups and those experiencing hardship.

Recommendation six: Strengthen the role of tertiary education providers in regional development and grow Australia's regions by:

- increasing the research capacity of regional universities including identifying opportunities to establish research infrastructure
- continuing to explore strategies to attract domestic and international students, and
- increasing opportunities to undertake work integrated learning in RRR areas.

The Advisory Group's seventh recommendation is related to implementing and monitoring the Strategy:

Recommendation seven: Establish mechanisms to coordinate the implementation effort and support monitoring of the Strategy by:

- establishing an RRR Education Commissioner, with a broad remit in relation to RRR education matters, and
- developing an improved geographical classification tool for tertiary education purposes.

Implementing the Strategy

The Advisory Group notes that for the Strategy to be successful, concerted and sustained effort is needed from a range of players, including all levels of government, tertiary education providers, employers, communities and families. The establishment of an RRR Education Commissioner would assist in this process – providing a national focus for RRR education and coordinating the Strategy's implementation and monitoring. In addition, policy solutions need to recognise the diversity of RRR communities and their tertiary education needs.

The development of monitoring tools to track the progress of the Strategy and achievement of the proposed targets over its ten year timeframe will be important, as well as the development of an improved geographical classification tool specifically designed for tertiary education purposes. This new tool could enable better targeting of support to RRR communities and students, which will aid the success of the Strategy.

Together, the recommendations and actions of this Strategy provide a comprehensive plan that seeks to address the challenges current and prospective RRR students face. Progress towards providing equality of access and opportunity will drive benefits for individuals, communities and the nation. A roadmap of this plan, which outlines the key actions and the desired end state, can be found on the following page.

THE PROBLEM

RRR Australians are 40 per cent less likely to gain a higher-level tertiary education qualification and half as likely to gain a Bachelor level qualification by the time they are 35, compared to individuals from metropolitan areas.



THE AIM

Equal opportunity for every individual from RRR areas to access tertiary education regardless of personal circumstances and location.

CURRENT STATE	RECOMMENDATION	ACTIONS	OUTCOMES	TARGETS
There are fewer education options in RRR communities	Improve access to study options	Demand driven funding for bachelor level university places in RRR areas and additional funding for enabling and sub-bachelor places; explore development of a new tertiary education offering; expand and enhance the Regional Study Hubs program; improve internet access; make changes to recognition of prior learning; and improve access to high quality VET.	Improve education opportunities and outcomes for individuals in RRR areas	By 2030, halve the disparity between metropolitan and each regional and remote location category for Cert IV and above attainment rates for 25-34 year olds.
There is insufficient support for RRR individuals who want to participate in tertiary education	Improve financial support	Introduce a new tertiary education access payment; enable access to independent Youth Allowance (IYA) after one year of external study; reduce earnings requirement of Concessional Workforce criteria for IYA; expand Away from Base assistance and Fares Allowance support; and improve and promote online information on financial support.		
	Improve other student supports	Identify and disseminate information on best practice supports for RRR students; require institutional reporting on support services; encourage education providers to provide information on adulthood basics; and improve access to transport options.	Enable greater social and economic participation for all Australians	By 2030, halve the disparity between metropolitan and each regional and remote location category for attainment rates of higher education for 25-34 year olds.
Aspirations of RRR individuals are hampered by additional challenges and they are less likely to be prepared for tertiary education	Build aspiration, provide better career advice and strengthen RRR school	Deliver career advice through an independent regionally-based model; improve and promote portals providing career information; research how students access career advice; establish aspiration-raising initiatives; improve access to high-quality VET in Schools; examine best practice for RRR school student engagement and retention; and undertake further work to improve RRR schools, including support for, and supply of, RRR teachers, principals and school leaders.		
There is insufficient targeted support for equity groups	Enhance support for equity groups	Modify the HEPPP to improve its effectiveness in supporting RRR students; uncap funding for university places for Indigenous students from RRR areas; improve support for Indigenous students including through flexible delivery models; implement programs for students facing hardship; and cater for the specific support needs of equity groups.	Make Australia a richer nation socially and economically	By 2030, halve the disparity between metropolitan and each regional and remote location category in the rate of participation for Cert IV and above by working age Australians (15-64 years).
The contribution of RRR Australia is not being maximised	Develop regional communities	Enhance regional research capacity; continue to explore strategies to attract domestic and international students to RRR areas; and establish a program to expand work integrated learning placements in RRR areas.		
Lack of a national focus and coordination for RRR education	Establish national mechanisms to support the Strategy	Establish an RRR Education Commissioner with broad remit in relation to RRR education matters; and develop a new geographical classification system that measures rurality and remoteness at a finer level for education and training purposes.		

Background and contextual information

In November 2018, the Minister for Education, the Hon Dan Tehan MP, announced that the Government would develop a National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy (the Strategy) focused on improving tertiary education outcomes for students from regional, rural and remote (RRR) areas. The Regional Education Expert Advisory Group (the Advisory Group) was established to advise the Government on how to improve educational opportunities and outcomes in RRR communities.

The development of the Strategy responds to and builds on Emeritus Professor John Halsey's *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*, specifically Recommendation 11 which proposed establishing "a national focus for regional, rural and remote education, training and research to enhance access, outcomes and opportunities in regional Australia."

The Terms of Reference directed the Advisory Group to:

- build on the work of the Halsey Review
- investigate the need for a Regional Education Commissioner
- identify strategies to raise the attainment rate of RRR students
- examine research on aspiration, access and success for regional students and the barriers to access to tertiary education in RRR Australia
- recommend a target for regional and remote education outcomes
- consider how to support regional education providers, regional economic development and efforts to attract people to the regions, and
- apply lessons learnt from relevant programs to increase attainment in RRR areas.

This Strategy responds to these Terms of Reference, drawing on issues and ideas raised in 79 public submissions, 42 responses to issues papers and 80 consultations with a wide range of stakeholders across the country. The Strategy's recommendations and actions represent the Advisory Group's views about the action required to address the disparity in tertiary education outcomes between metropolitan and RRR areas.

Appendices to this report include the Advisory Group's Terms of Reference, further information on the process for developing the Strategy and an overview of the literature on tertiary education aspiration, enablers and barriers.

Definitional and data issues

For the purposes of this Strategy, it should be noted that tertiary education covers all vocational education and training (VET) and higher education. In this report, "higher-level tertiary education" refers to Certificate IV and above qualifications. Analysis of available data indicates that the disparity between RRR and metropolitan students primarily exists in relation to higher-level tertiary education qualifications. For this reason, there is a particular focus in the Strategy's targets on reducing the disparity for Certificate IV and above level qualifications.

It is recognised, however, that Certificate III level courses are a strong foundation of the VET sector and that qualifications at this level are particularly important in RRR areas due to local employment options and industries. Currently, there are relatively high rates of participation and attainment in Certificate III courses by RRR students and the Advisory Group believes it is vital these outcomes are maintained. As a result, the participation and attainment rates of other levels of qualifications, including Certificate III, should be monitored in line with the Strategy.

For the purposes of this report, RRR is used as an umbrella term to characterise non-metropolitan areas across Australia. Where the terms “regional” or “remote” are used, they are referring to the specific classes of remoteness under the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS), as used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and other organisations to provide comparable statistics. The ASGS has five classes of remoteness based on relative access to services: major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote.

For statistical purposes in this report, the “remote” category generally includes “remote” and “very remote areas”, unless otherwise specified. While communities and individuals can identify themselves as “rural”, sometimes in association with particular rural industries, such as agriculture and mining, this term is not explicitly defined and does not correspond to any specific class of area within the ASGS framework.

In addition, in this report, the terms “major cities” and “metropolitan” have both been used, depending on context. Both refer to the same location as captured in the major cities category in ASGS. A map of these categories is provided at Appendix B.

The ASGS framework has not been specifically designed for use in relation to education and, as a result, the Advisory Group considers there are limitations that make it difficult to use for tertiary education purposes (discussed further in Part four of the report).

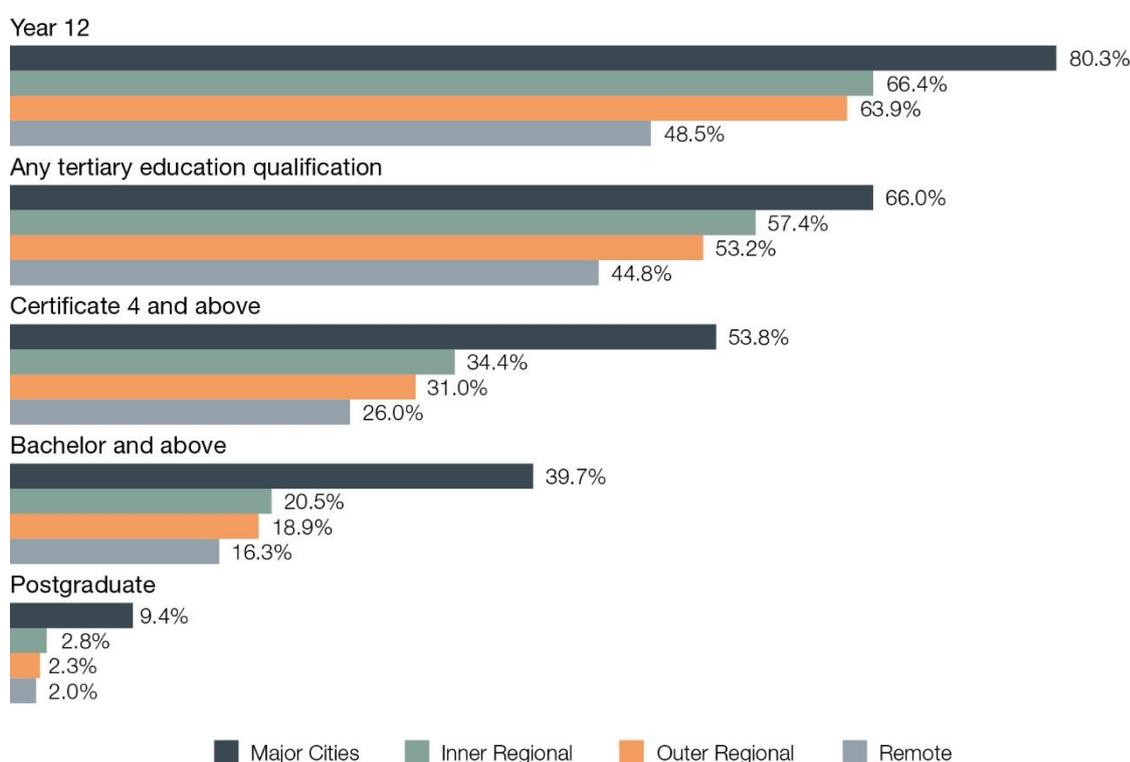
Finally, in considering the information and data contained in this Strategy, it should be noted that there are variations in the student data collected by the Australian Government for VET and higher education. The data collected is fit-for-purpose for each sector. In some areas, there is a lack of metrics that enable cross sectorial comparison. Thus, throughout this report, different metrics may be referred to for VET and higher education, and, in some instances, aggregated data from each sector may be presented.

Part one: Why Australia needs a National Strategy for RRR tertiary education

Current state

Compared to those living in metropolitan areas, Australians living in RRR areas have lower educational attainment rates in school, in Year 12 and in tertiary education. Individuals who grow up in RRR areas are around 40 per cent less likely to gain a higher-level tertiary education qualification and less than half as likely to gain a bachelor and above qualification by the time they are 35 years old, compared to individuals from metropolitan areas. This disparity between metropolitan and RRR areas is most pronounced in remote and very remote areas and at university level (see Figure 1).

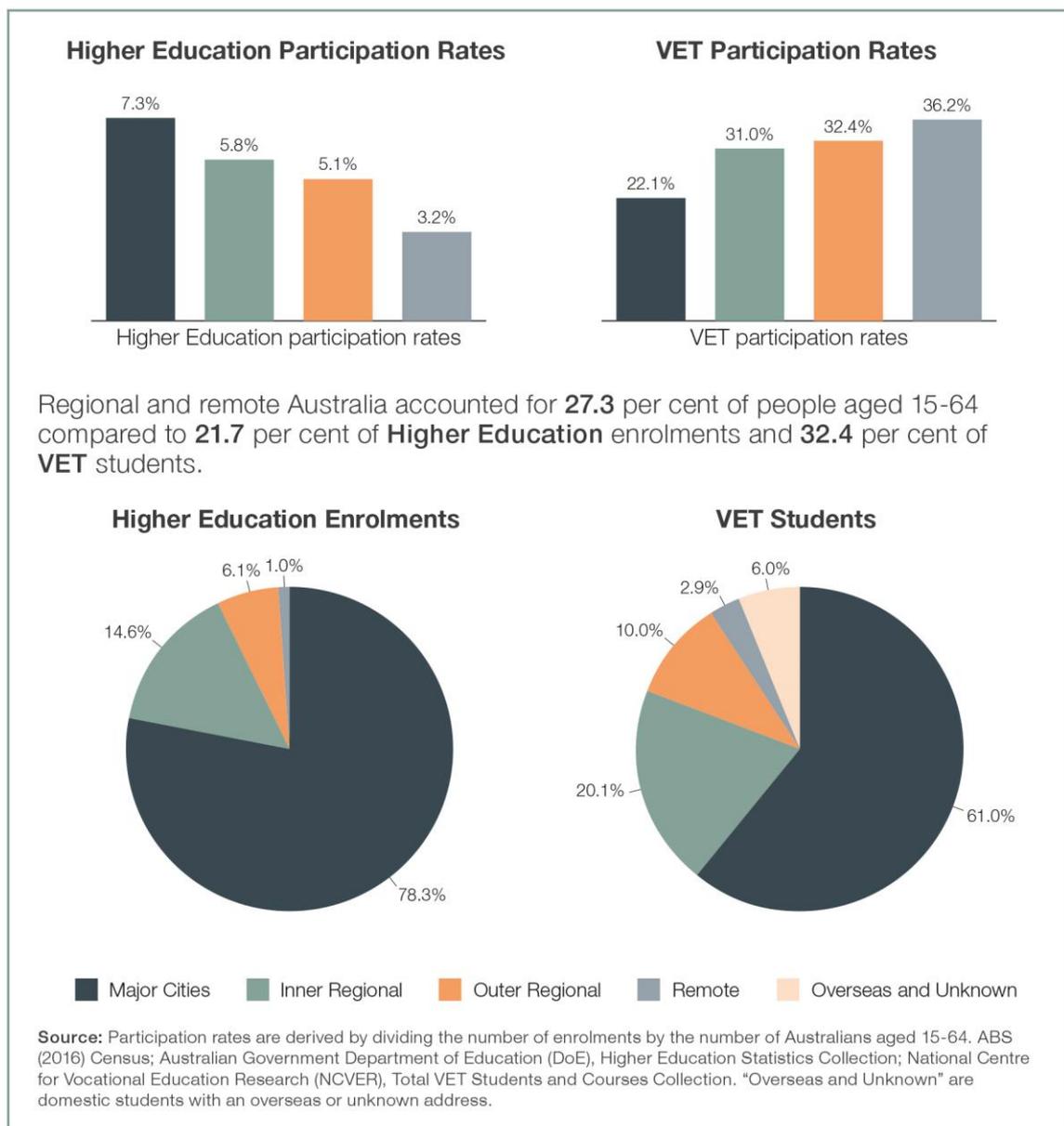
Figure 1. Education attainment rates, 2016



Source: Year 12 rates are for people aged 19. Tertiary qualifications are for people aged 25-34 years. Remote includes Remote and Very Remote Categories. Any tertiary education qualification includes VET in Schools. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2016) Census of Population and Housing.

Rates of participation in higher-level tertiary education (Certificate IV and above) are also lower in RRR areas compared to metropolitan areas. People living in RRR areas account for 27.3 per cent of people aged 15-64 years, but only 21.7 per cent of domestic higher education enrolments, 13.4 per cent of research training students and 9.8 per cent of PhD and other Higher Degree Research (HDR) completions. By contrast, VET participation is higher and increases with remoteness, as shown in Figure 2 below. The proportion of domestic VET students at all levels in RRR areas was 32.4 per cent in 2016. However, RRR VET provision tends to focus on lower level qualifications (Certificate I, II and III).

Figure 2. Tertiary education sector snapshot, 2016



The rates of participation and attainment in higher-level tertiary education have been increasing across Australia in recent years. However, the rate of increase has been faster in metropolitan areas than RRR areas, resulting in a widening of the disparity in attainment between metropolitan and RRR areas. Between 2006 and 2016, the rate of Certificate IV and above attainment for people aged between 25 and 34 years increased:¹

- in metropolitan areas by 12 percentage points (42 per cent to 54 per cent)
- in inner regional areas by 9 percentage points (25 per cent to 34 per cent)
- in outer regional areas by 8 percentage points (23 per cent to 31 per cent)
- in remote areas by 6 percentage points (20 per cent to 26 per cent).

¹ ABS (2008). Census of Population and Housing (2006 – 2016)

The characteristics of RRR students differ from those in metropolitan areas. For example, RRR higher education students are more likely to be studying part-time, studying off-campus, be female, mature age and studying health or education courses (Table 1). Tertiary education policies developed to benefit RRR students must consider the specific circumstances and needs of this cohort of students.

Table 1. Characteristics of tertiary participation in RRR areas, 2017

	Higher Education*		VET	
	Metropolitan	RRR	Metropolitan	RRR
Part-time study	18.8%	23.0%	89.5%	91.3%
Female	57.2%	63.6%	47.5%	45.4%
25 years and over	37.3%	42.1%	66.2%	67.0%
Online/external/remote study	17.7%	32.0%	15.0%	16.0%
Field of Education (highest percentage enrolments)	Society and culture (24.7%)	Health (23.5%)	Management and commerce (10.6%)	Engineering and related technologies (10.4%)

* Undergraduate students

Source: DoE, Higher Education Statistics Collection; NCVET, Total VET Students and Courses - TVA 2017, unpublished data.

A range of factors contribute to lower attainment and participation rates in RRR areas. In some cases, these reflect individual choices in response to different local employment opportunities. In general, however, students in RRR areas face additional challenges compared with metropolitan students. While many students have the desire and ability to successfully undertake higher-level tertiary study, various factors often deter or prevent them from doing so, including:

- there are fewer local study options, which means RRR students often need to relocate at considerable financial and social cost
- this lack of options, in turn, can affect students' aspirations and choices, sometimes from a very early age
- there are problems accessing high quality career advice in RRR areas, and
- access to reliable, high speed internet is a significant issue, particularly in rural and remote areas.

These challenges can be compounded for RRR students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, Indigenous students, students from very remote areas and those with a disability. Indigenous students, particularly from remote and very remote communities and where English is their second language, face significant additional challenges and have much poorer educational outcomes. While VET participation rates for Indigenous RRR students are comparable with the broader population, participation rates in higher education by Indigenous RRR students are less than half the participation rate of the broader population (Table 6).

Compared to their metropolitan peers, RRR students are:

- **Less likely to complete secondary schooling:** 80.3 per cent of students in metropolitan areas complete Year 12 or equivalent by the age of 19, falling to 63.9 per cent in inner regional areas and 40.3 per cent in very remote regions.²
- **Less likely to apply for higher education:** Young people from RRR areas who do complete schooling are far less likely to go onto higher education. Even when controlling for differences in

² ABS (2016). Census of Population and Housing. Year 12 or equivalent rates are for people aged 19.

ATAR scores, regional students are less likely to attend university than those from metropolitan areas.³

- **Less likely to accept their university offer:** While university applicants from regional areas are more likely to receive an offer when they apply, they are less likely to accept it (70 per cent compared to 77 per cent for metropolitan students).⁴
- **More likely to defer university offers:** RRR students are twice as likely to defer their university offer.
- **Less likely to complete tertiary education:** The completion rate for domestic, bachelor-level university students six years after commencing in 2012, is 65.5 per cent for students from metropolitan areas, compared to 61.4 per cent for inner regional, 58.5 per cent for outer regional, and 48.7 per cent for remote areas.⁵ Similarly, projected VET completion rates are lower for students in RRR areas.⁶

Those RRR students who do complete tertiary study tend to have better employment outcomes than their metropolitan counterparts (see Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 2. Employment outcomes of recent graduates (undergraduate level) by remoteness, 2018

Regional classification	Employed full-time (%)	Overall employed (%)	Median full-time salary (\$)
Metropolitan	71.8	86.5	60,200
Regional/remote	76.7	89.3	62,000
Total	72.9	87.0	61,000

Source: Employment outcomes are as a proportion of those available for each employment type. Overall employed includes people employed on a full-time, part-time or casual basis. Location based on student's first address at the time of enrolment. DoE (2018) Graduate Outcomes Survey.

Table 3. Employment outcomes for VET (2017 graduates surveyed in 2018)

Student remoteness region	Overall employed (%)	Median full-time salary (\$)
Major cities	75.6	56,400
Inner and outer regional	80.4	55,000
Remote and very remote	87.2	64,900

Source: NCVET, 2017, Australian VET statistics: VET student outcomes 2017.

³ Cardak, B., Brett, M., Bowden, M., Vecci, 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, p. v.

⁴ Australian Government Department of Education and Training (DET) (2018) Undergraduate applications, offers and acceptances, DET, Canberra, p. 34.

⁵ DoE (2018) Higher Education Students Statistics Collection, Australian Government, Canberra.

⁶ For Certificate I and above VET programs commenced in 2016, the projected completion rates were 41.7 per cent for inner regional, 41.1 per cent for outer regional, 37.6 per cent for remote and 32.4 per cent for very remote, compared to 47.8 per cent in major cities. NCVET, Total VET Students and Courses Collection.

Imperative for change

Given the much lower education participation, attainment and completion rates, there is a strong case for further action to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for RRR Australians. It is recognised that individuals will make different educational and career choices. This may be based on personal preferences or influenced by local options and opportunities. The future, however, is likely to involve significant change and digital disruption and a likely need for the population across the board to have higher-level skills and educational attainment. This will, in turn, provide the best opportunities for individuals, communities and the country to prosper in a changing environment.

Education accrues substantial benefits to the individual, as well as society as a whole.⁷ Investment in education therefore needs to be prioritised by both individuals and governments. As well as productivity gains from human capital accumulation, the education sector contributes nearly \$90 billion to gross domestic product (GDP)⁸ and employs well over one million workers.⁹

Benefits to the individual

From a student perspective, higher-levels of tertiary education can bring many benefits. Education provides individuals with greater freedom in choosing a career and exposes them to different ideas, people and opportunities. Individuals with higher-level tertiary qualifications also have better employment and earnings outcomes and are more likely to be active participants in the economy and society.¹⁰ In addition, higher levels of education are associated with better life expectancy and health outcomes.¹¹ Moreover, research shows that even those who commence and then drop out of a bachelor degree are better off – both in terms of finances and health outcomes – than those who never undertake higher education.¹² It is estimated that the premium on lifetime income for a person with a bachelor degree is up to 50 per cent higher, and for a diploma or advanced diploma is up to 27 per cent higher, compared to those whose highest level qualification is Year 12 or below.¹³ Similarly, the rate of unemployment for those with a Certificate III qualification or above is 3.9 per cent, compared to 7.9 per cent for those without.¹⁴

Increasing attainment of higher-level tertiary qualifications will provide RRR individuals with the knowledge and skills they need to compete for – or create – the jobs of the future, thus enabling them to successfully participate in an increasingly dynamic and complex world. Industry and workplaces are changing, not only in major cities but also in regional economies. Workers will need information and communication technology (ICT) and critical thinking skills in order to successfully engage in the workforce and maximise productivity in most industries, including traditional regional industries, such as agriculture, fishing, forestry and mining. Workers with higher-level skills and qualifications are increasingly in higher demand than those without, with young people without a tertiary education much more likely to experience underemployment, unemployment or lower rates of pay.¹⁵

⁷ Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, Human capital and productivity literature review, March 2013. Available at: <https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/human-capital-and-productivity-literature-review-march-2013.pdf>

⁸ ABS, Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product, December 2018, Table 45

⁹ ABS, Labour Force Australia – Detailed Quarterly, Feb 2019, Table 04.

¹⁰ ABS (2017) Education Qualifications in Australia – 2016 Census Data Summary, Australian Government, Canberra.

¹¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018) Chapter 5.1 Socioeconomic groups in Australia's Health 2018, Australian Government, Canberra, pp. 1-3.

¹² Luckman, M., & Harvey, A. (2019). The financial and educational outcomes of Bachelor degree non-completers. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 41(1), 3-17.

¹³ Sinning, M., How much is it worth? New estimates of private returns to university education in Australia, 2014.

¹⁴ ABS, Survey of Education and Work [Cat. No. 6227.0], 2018.

¹⁵ OECD Employment Outlook 2019, The future of work. How does Australia Compare?

Furthermore, tertiary education has strong intergenerational benefits. The educational attainment of parents is closely correlated with improved health and educational outcomes for their children.¹⁶ Parents' education also affects their child's lifetime earnings. A one year increase in parents' schooling increases their child's lifetime earnings by 1.2 per cent on average.¹⁷ Thus, increasing attainment rates for RRR people now, will not only have a positive effect on the individuals themselves, but will also have a positive flow-on effect for their children into the future.

Benefits to communities and society

Reducing disparity in educational outcomes is also necessary to create opportunities for greater social and economic participation for people living in RRR Australia. Increased educational attainment across RRR communities will lead to increased productivity and further strengthen industries, economies and communities. Enhancing RRR industries and communities will also help to attract more students and professionals to the regions. Families will have greater confidence in relocating to, or remaining in, RRR locations if they know their children will have equal opportunities to undertake tertiary education. This will ensure regions remain vibrant and, in turn, contribute to decentralising the economy and easing pressure on metropolitan areas.

A skilled population is more agile and thus able to respond more effectively to challenges and opportunities facing their region. These can include unexpected climatic events, such as drought, changes in employment opportunities and the emergence of new industries. An important element of this is enabling individuals to upskill and reskill to equip them with the right tools to adapt to change. Improving educational opportunities in RRR areas will ensure both individuals and communities are able to participate in, and benefit from, these expected developments.

Addressing the disparity in educational outcomes is essential in supporting an equitable and cohesive society. From an equity perspective, students should have the opportunity to access high quality education and training and reach their potential, irrespective of where they live. Supporting equal opportunity in education is likely to have an increasingly important role in maintaining social cohesion by ensuring that wealth and prosperity are spread through all parts of Australia.

Benefits to the nation

Improving economic and social circumstances for RRR individuals and communities will see benefits flow through to the nation as a whole. Maximising the talents and skills of all individuals, regardless of where they live, will increase the overall productivity of the nation, as well as foster greater aspiration in young people, leading to a richer nation both socially and economically.

Currently, rural industries make a significant contribution to the economy; for example, agriculture was responsible for more than a quarter of total growth in GDP in 2016-17.¹⁸ Increasing educational attainment in RRR areas will provide the highly skilled and flexible workers necessary to increase productivity and maximise the economic benefits of regional industry.

The Gonski Institute undertook modelling which estimated the forgone economic benefit presented by the gap between metropolitan and RRR primary and secondary schooling outcomes, using

¹⁶ Currie, J., & Moretti, E. (2003). Mother's education and the intergenerational transmission of human capital: Evidence from college openings. *The Quarterly journal of economics*, 118(4), 1495-1532.

¹⁷ Lee, S.Y., Roys, N. & Seshadri, A. (2015). The causal effect of parents' education on children's earnings. Available at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/fedc/bbb22d2029b99d85646c5b415baf75f06624.pdf>

¹⁸ Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (2017) *Agricultural Commodities – September Quarter 2017*, Australian Government, Canberra, p. 9.

NAPLAN results for all year levels tested in 2017. The modelling estimated that the forgone GDP of this gap was around \$56 billion in today's dollars.¹⁹

Based on internal projections of tertiary attainment rates of Certificate IV and above, the Department of Education (DoE) estimates that halving the metropolitan and RRR attainment rate gap by 2030 would increase GDP by around 0.6 per cent by 2050. In today's dollars, that would be around \$11 billion, however, in 2050 terms, when the full projected impact of halving the gap is likely to be felt, this would be an estimated \$25 billion.

Investing in the future

In the modern global economy, international competitiveness is critical to maintaining and improving standards of living for individuals, communities and the nation. Australia's productivity and outputs must be constantly improving to maintain global competitiveness. Improved education and training outcomes will play a critical part in achieving this.

Investing in educational equality for RRR students and communities is nation building in the same way as investing in infrastructure. It strengthens and builds skills in individuals and communities, which, in turn, brings opportunities to build broader economic and social capacity. Constant investment in human capital is required to maximise the value of resources. This is especially true in RRR economies where the production of agricultural and mining commodities plays a key role.

The jobs of the future, impacted by technology, demographic shifts and globalisation, require new skills and more highly skilled individuals. Total employment is projected to increase by 7.1 per cent, over the next five years to May 2023. Employment at skill level 1 (bachelor degree or higher) is expected to increase by 10 per cent, over the same period.²⁰ Investments to overcome the disparity in educational outcomes between metropolitan and RRR areas will 'future proof' Australia and provide the foundation for national success.

Given the vast disparity in outcomes and size of the population affected, there are great risks in not taking further action. 28.4 per cent of the population lives outside the major cities,²¹ with around one million students in RRR schools and approximately 100,000 students starting primary school each year. Currently, however, only a third of RRR students achieve a higher-level VET or university qualification by the time they are 35 years old.

In the highly competitive global economy and labour market of the future, there is a need to support all students to fulfil their potential. There will be significant costs to individuals and the nation as a whole if students are left behind. At the same time, the scale of the problem and the success achieved to date by numerous RRR individuals points to high potential returns, with even modest gains likely to lead to significant long-term individual, social and economic benefits. In 2014, for example, the *Australian Financial Review* reported that people from regional backgrounds are strongly represented in leadership positions in Australian business, with 38 per cent of Australian Chief Executive Officers of ASX 100 companies growing up in regional Australia.²²

¹⁹ Holden R. & Zhang, J. (2018) The Economic Impact of Improving Regional, Rural and Remote Education in Australia. Gonski Institute for Education, University of New South Wales, Sydney, pp. 4-5.

²⁰ The Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, Employment Outlook to May 2023, 2018.

²¹ ABS (2016) Census of Population and Housing.

²² Australian Financial Review (2014) Country kids are born CEOs, 11 September 2014 edition, Fairfax Media, Melbourne.

Part two: Issues and findings

The Advisory Group have identified a number of key issues and findings linked to RRR individuals' lower levels of tertiary education participation and attainment. These issues can be grouped into the following five key areas:

1. Access, opportunity and choice: There are fewer tertiary education options in RRR communities.
2. Student support: There is insufficient support for RRR individuals who want to participate in tertiary education.
3. Aspiration, career advice and schooling: The aspirations of RRR individuals are hampered by additional challenges and they are less likely to be prepared for tertiary education.
4. Equity groups: There is insufficient targeted support for underrepresented groups who experience multiple, compounding challenges, influencing their tertiary education aspirations, access and retention.
5. Regional development and nation building: While strong and vibrant regional communities support RRR individuals and provide significant benefits to the nation, their contribution is not currently being maximised.

These priority areas offer both challenges and opportunities in terms of policy reform.

1. Access, opportunity and choice: There are fewer tertiary education options in RRR communities

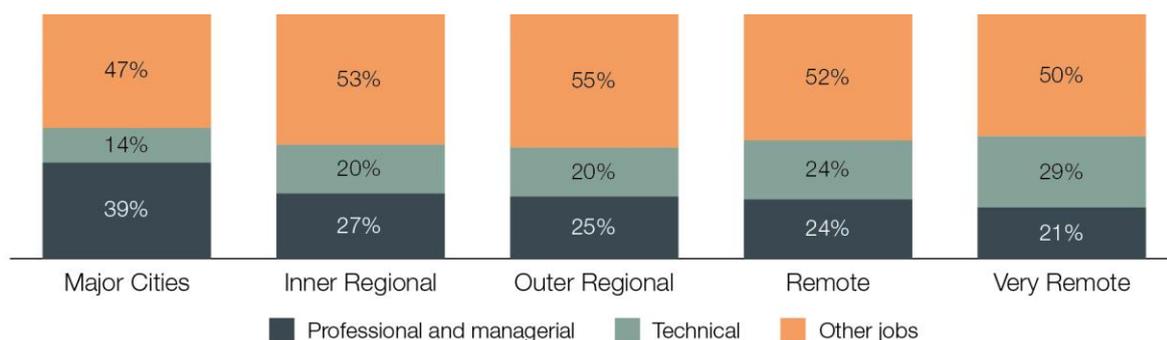
RRR students have less access to tertiary education options in their local community. RRR areas are often “thin markets” for education provision, particularly in outer regional and remote areas where a low population density can make it unsustainable for providers to operate or provide a large suite of academic programs. Stakeholders have consistently highlighted that the issue of “thin markets” has a significant impact on levels of educational participation and attainment.

Differences in tertiary participation and attainment levels in RRR areas can be partly attributed to individual choices made in response to different local employment opportunities. While there has been a general expansion in service industries across Australia,²³ there continue to be differences in labour market needs between metropolitan and RRR areas. As indicated in Figure 3, in RRR areas, especially in more remote areas, technical and trades jobs account for a higher proportion of the labour market than in cities, while the reverse is the case for professional and managerial positions.²⁴

²³ Speech by Philip Lowe, Governor, Reserve Bank of Australia “Regional Variation in a National Economy”, 11 April 2018, p. 12.

²⁴ Norton, A., Cherastidham, I., Mackey, W. & Lannan, F. (2019), Presentation to the Regional Education Expert Advisory Group. Grattan Institute, Melbourne.

Figure 3. Proportion of jobs for 25-34 year olds by remoteness, 2016



Source: Norton, A., Cherastidtham, I., Mackey, W. and Lannan, F. (2019), Presentation to the Regional Education Expert Advisory Group. Grattan Institute, Melbourne.

Despite different labour market needs, RRR individuals should have the opportunity to access all types of tertiary education. As shown in the map below (Figure 4), the vast majority of Australian education providers are currently clustered in metropolitan and, to a lesser extent, inner regional areas. Moreover, a review of tertiary education provision across 545 Australian Local Government Areas (LGAs) found that only two-fifths offered qualifications above the Certificate IV level.²⁵ There is also a limited choice of field of study in a large proportion of Australia, with half of Australian LGAs having fewer than five out of 12 Fields of Education available.²⁶ As a result, people living in those LGAs have less choice in the level and field of study that they can undertake.

Consequently, to access their desired course of study, people in RRR areas often have to relocate, travel significant distances or pursue other options, such as external study (this includes online and distance). While these options are the preference of some individuals, for others they are a necessity rather than a choice and come with their own challenges, such as poor internet access in many rural and remote areas and lack of academic and pastoral support leading to lower completion rates.²⁷

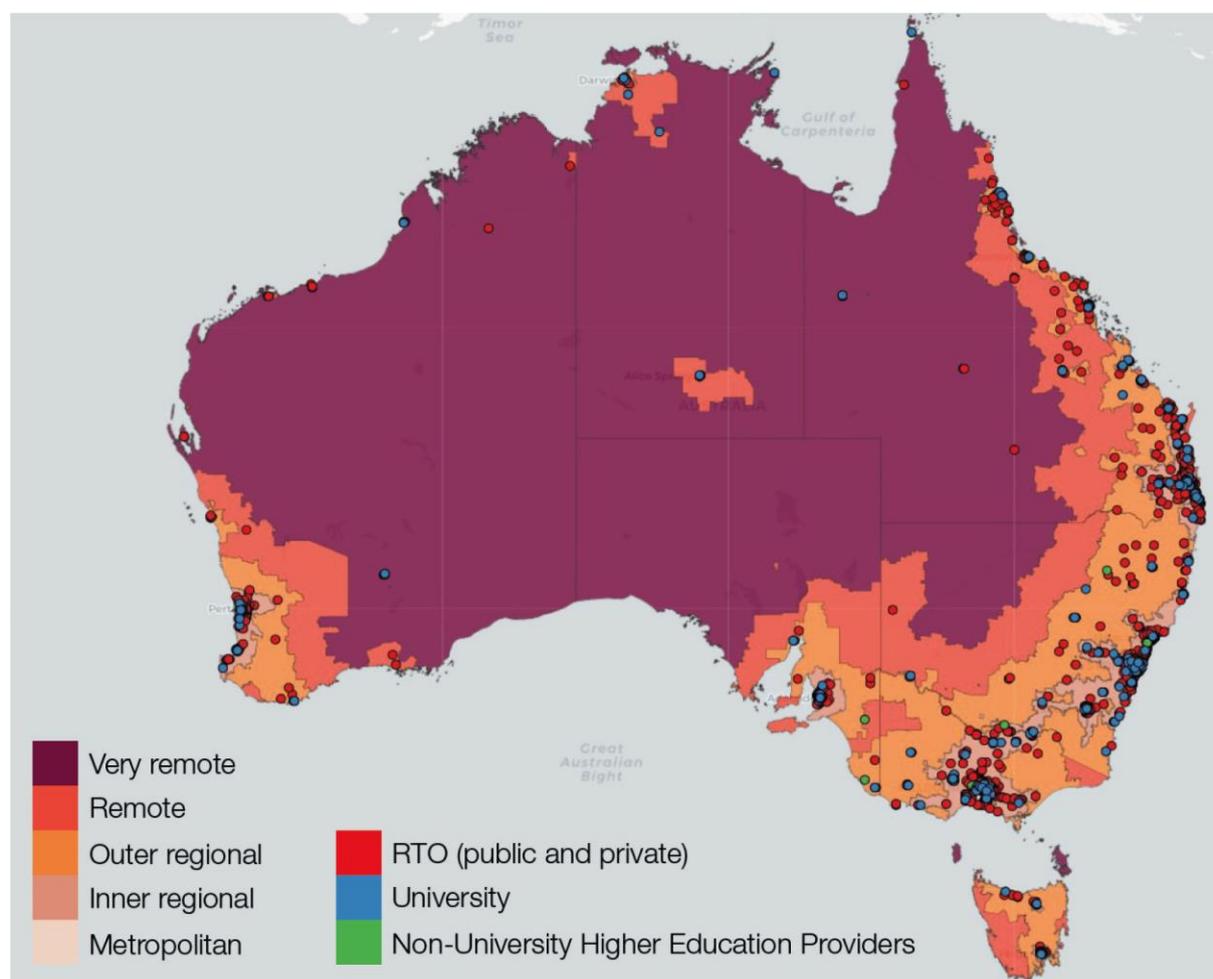
In addition, while the population is declining in some RRR areas, consultations suggest there is unmet demand for tertiary education in others. Regional university providers have indicated that they are constrained in their efforts to increase levels of higher education participation under the current capped system for Commonwealth funded university places. Although the Australian Government is expanding sub-bachelor places in RRR areas in response to the 2018 *Independent Review into Regional Rural and Remote Education* (the Halsey Review), regionally-based universities and those with regional campuses argued strongly that increased funding for university places is essential to raising participation and attainment rates in RRR communities.

²⁵ There are 10 levels in the AQF. AQF Levels 1-4 corresponds to a Certificates I-IV; Levels 5-6 to a Diploma, Advanced Diplomas and Associate Degree; Levels 7-10 to university qualifications from Bachelor degrees (Level 7) to Doctorates (Level 10). KPMG (2018) Assessment of university support services for regional and remote students on transition. Internal report for DoE. Canberra.

²⁶ The Twelve Fields of Education are: Natural and Physical Sciences; Information Technology; Engineering and Related Technologies; Architecture and Building; Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies; Health; Education; Management and Commerce; Society and Culture; Creative Arts; Food, Hospitality and Personal Services, and; Mixed Field Programs. KPMG (2018) Assessment of university support services for regional and remote students on transition. Internal report for DoE. Canberra.

²⁷ Cherastidtham, I., Norton, A., & Mackey, W. (2018) University attrition: what helps and what hinders university completion? Grattan Institute, Melbourne, p. 9.

Figure 4. Map of remoteness categories and current tertiary education providers*



* Based on address of main campus of registered training organisations (RTOs). As such, it is not a comprehensive picture of all locations where VET services are being provided.

Source: DoE (2019) Analysis conducted using National Map. <https://nationalmap.gov.au/>

The importance of VET in RRR areas

In contrast to higher education, access to VET is relatively high in RRR areas, with the value and importance of VET evident in overall VET participation rates in RRR areas, which are higher than in metropolitan areas.²⁸ VET providers deliver courses in outer regional and remote areas that are critical to meeting local needs and often play a leading role in the rebuilding and retraining of RRR communities that have experienced economic dislocation from automation and industry change.²⁹

While RRR students are more likely to have a VET qualification, there are limited opportunities for articulation and recognition of prior learning. This can create barriers to undertaking further study. Stakeholders from RRR areas expressed the difficulty of identifying where they can receive credit for prior learning, particularly when there are few education and training options in their community. There are also issues with inconsistent approaches to articulation, with each higher education provider defining their own policies around recognition of prior learning.

²⁸ In 2016, 22.1 per cent of 15 to 64 year olds living in cities were enrolled in VET, growing to 31.0 per cent in inner regional, 32.4 per cent in outer regional and 36.2 per cent in remote areas. NCVER, Total VET Students and Courses Collection. ABS (2016) Census – Counting Persons, Place of Usual Residence 2016 (TableBuilder).

²⁹ Victorian TAFE Association (2019) Submission to the Regional Education Expert Advisory Group, p.6.

A number of stakeholders raised concerns about recent cuts in publicly funded VET services, particularly in remote towns where VET is critical for engaging students and meeting local skills needs. Recent years have seen VET student numbers grow in major cities but decline overall in outer regional and remote areas (Table 4). While lower rates of population growth contributed to this trend, there was nevertheless a decrease in the number of students relative to population for all categories of regional and remote locations. Some responses pointed to challenges caused by different policies across states and territories. For example, Mark Dixon, the CEO of Wodonga TAFE, raised how state barriers and different policies support “anti-competitive behaviour and create artificial barriers to educational participation that are significant for students and industry.”

Table 4. Growth in total number of VET students (2015 to 2017)

	2015	2017	% change (growth)	% change in population
All Domestic Students*	3,854,815	4,049,275	5.0	3.3
Major Cities	2,363,215	2,509,555	6.2	4.0
Inner Regional <i>(proportion of total)</i>	790,640 <i>(20.5%)</i>	806,700 <i>(19.9%)</i>	2.0	2.2
Outer Regional <i>(proportion of total)</i>	408,290 <i>(10.6%)</i>	395,320 <i>(9.8%)</i>	-3.2	0.6
Remote <i>(proportion of total)</i>	119,385 <i>(3.1%)</i>	109,580 <i>(2.7%)</i>	- 8.2	-1.8

* All Domestic Students includes students with an overseas address (which fell from 18,875 in 2015 to 13,760 in 2017) and those whose remoteness is not known (which increased from 154,405 in 2015 to 214,360 in 2017).

Source: NCVET, Total VET Students and Courses Collection; ABS (2018) **Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2016-17** (cat. no.333218.0).

The importance of innovative educational models in RRR areas

A clear message coming out of consultations was the need for innovation in both course offerings and modes of delivery, including better integration of higher education and VET. Consultations suggested there would likely be demand in RRR areas for new, innovative course offerings that integrate or bridge the gap between VET and higher education courses, such as apprenticeship degrees and higher education qualifications focused more on practical learning and technical and professional skills development.

Regional Study Hubs are a recent innovation, designed to support students who wish to, or who have no alternative but to, stay in their community. The model is particularly important for mature age students, who often have family and work commitments, which prevent them from moving. Hubs are community facilities that provide support for students to study courses delivered externally by an Australian university. They provide physical infrastructure, as well as academic and pastoral support for students studying externally. The Commonwealth currently supports 16 community-owned Study Hubs at 23 sites across Australia, with a further five Hubs to be established. While the Hubs to date have focused on higher education, stakeholders have raised the potential to incorporate VET qualifications. The recent review of Australia’s VET System, undertaken by the Hon Steven Joyce (the Joyce Review), included a recommendation, which suggested that the program be expanded to support the participation of VET providers.³⁰

³⁰ Joyce, S (2019). *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia’s Vocational Education and Training System*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, p.81.

CASE STUDY

Regional Study Hubs – The Cooma Country Universities Centre.

The Country Universities Centre (CUC) is an affiliated network of not-for-profit, community owned and operated regional study centres in New South Wales (NSW). It was established in Cooma in 2013, funded through a joint venture between Snowy Hydro Ltd and the then Snowy Monaro Regional Council. Snowy Hydro gifted the centre to the Cooma community in 2014. A number of other CUCs have subsequently opened in RRR areas in NSW. Since 2013, CUC Snowy Monaro (Cooma) has supported over 220 students studying 92 different degrees at 33 universities, CUC Far West has registered 80 students and CUC Goulburn has registered 60 students. Each CUC facility offers computer terminals, high speed internet, video conferencing, printers, scanners and a textbook library. The centres employ staff to assist students with general educational, administrative and technical queries. There are also general academic and study skills workshops taught by postgraduate qualified local instructors.

To understand the success of the two most prominent hubs, the Advisory Group visited the Geraldton Universities Centre and the Cooma Country Universities Centre. The key lesson from the visits was that the effectiveness of Hubs is dependent on strong local leadership and ongoing local engagement and participation, which facilitate flexibility to cater to the local labour market and community need.

KEY FINDING 1: There is limited scope to raise participation and attainment rates within the current capped system for allocation of Commonwealth funded university places.

KEY FINDING 2: There is potential to improve the range of study options available to students by expanding access to Regional Study Hubs and developing new higher education offerings that bridge the gap between VET and university.

KEY FINDING 3: Access to 21st century internet is crucial to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for students, particularly in rural and remote locations where issues with affordable access and reliability are frequently experienced.

KEY FINDING 4: There are issues with articulation and recognition of prior learning between VET and higher education, which disproportionately affect RRR students.

KEY FINDING 5: VET plays an important role in meeting the needs of RRR areas, but there are issues with declining levels of service provision in some areas and inconsistent regulations between jurisdictions that need to be addressed.

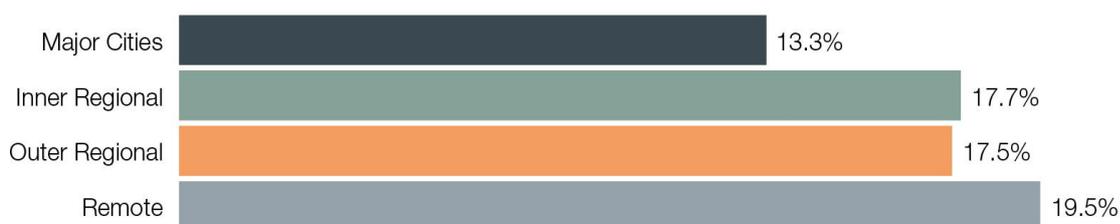
2. Student support: There is insufficient support for RRR individuals who want to participate in tertiary education

RRR students face additional challenges in successfully transitioning into post-secondary education and completing their studies and, as a result, often need additional support. This is particularly the

case for RRR higher education students who relocate to undertake their studies, with significant financial imposts and social dislocation. In addition, many RRR students tend to have characteristics associated with higher risk of non-completion, such as external study, mature age and part time enrolment.

As indicated in Figure 5, RRR students are more likely than metropolitan students to drop out of their university degree.

Figure 5. Attrition rate of domestic bachelor commencing students, 2017



Source: Location based on student’s first address at time of enrolment. DoE, Higher Education Statistics Collection.

Completion rates follow a broadly similar pattern. The completion rate for domestic bachelor-level university students six years after commencing in 2012, is 65.5 per cent for students from metropolitan areas, compared to 61.4 per cent for inner regional, 58.5 per cent for outer regional, and 48.7 per cent for remote areas.³¹ Similarly, projected VET completion rates are lower for students in regional and remote areas. For Certificate I and above VET programs commenced in 2016, the projected completion rates were 41.7 per cent for inner regional, 41.1 per cent for outer regional, 37.6 per cent for remote and 32.4 per cent for very remote, compared to 47.8 per cent in major cities.³² Completion rates for higher education and VET are not directly comparable, due to the use of different approaches for the calculations, reflecting the differences in duration and structure of courses.

Improvements to financial support, as well as the student support services offered by tertiary institutions, would assist in ensuring RRR students are well supported in their transition into tertiary education, as well as throughout their tertiary study.

³¹ DoE (2018) Higher Education Students Statistics Collection, Australian Government, Canberra.

³² NCVET (2018), Total VET Students and Courses Collection.

Financial Support

RRR students are twice as likely as metropolitan students to move away for higher education.³³ Nearly 60 per cent of RRR students relocate to metropolitan areas to study, with a further 12 per cent moving to another RRR location.³⁴ Moving can as much as double the cost of undertaking a degree,³⁵ with figures of \$25,000 to \$30,000 per annum consistently cited by RRR parents as the cost they need to meet to support their child.

“As a parent of a high performing student considering his future after high school, I can tell you that the major turn off to attend uni [sic] is the cost involved. As we live 4.5 hours away he would have to relocate, find accommodation, pay living expenses, pay for books etc. and also have fees to consider. We don't earn a lot and as such the costs involved really worry him...There needs to be more information and help... to allay the HUGE stress of affordability.”

Ms Jodi Knight – Submission

The costs of relocating means RRR students are more likely to delay entering university. Whereas 78 per cent of Year 12 metropolitan students with an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) of more than 60 transition straight to university, only 55 per cent of regional students do so.³⁶

RRR students often defer their study to earn money to support their studies and/or to qualify for independent Youth Allowance.³⁷ A survey of RRR students on the ATAR track found that around half of senior students expected to take a gap year, while only a third plan to go straight to university. For Year 12 students who completed the survey, the most common reason for taking a gap year was “the need to work to save money to go to university”.³⁸ Research by the Grattan Institute shows the best predictors of successful completion of education is the age individuals begin tertiary education and the mode of study – full time or part-time.³⁹ RRR students who take a gap year and hence delay the start of their tertiary studies are, on average, less likely to complete tertiary education.

The added financial stress of relocating can also contribute to RRR students considering an early departure from their tertiary studies. For example, 30.8 per cent of RRR students cite financial difficulties as the reason for considering early departure, compared to 21.6 per cent of metropolitan students.⁴⁰ This can be a result of RRR students being more likely to work part-time to support

³³ In 2014, 57 per cent of regional students relocated for university studies compared to 27 per cent of metropolitan students. Baik, C., Naylor, R. & Arkoudis, S. (2015). The first year experience in Australian universities: Findings from two decades. 1994-2014, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, p. 80.

³⁴ Norton, A., Cherastidtham, I., Mackey, W. and Lannan, F. (2019), Presentation to the Regional Education Expert Advisory Group. Grattan Institute, Melbourne.

³⁵ Godden, N. (2007) Regional young people and youth allowance: Access to tertiary education. Centre for Rural Social Research, Wagga Wagga, cited in Cardak, B., Brett, M., Bowden, M., Vecci, J., Barry, P., Bahtsevanoglou, J. & 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, p. 6.

³⁶ Quin, R., Stone, C., & Trinidad, S. (2017). Low Rates of Transition to University for High Achieving Students in Regional NSW. Report for NSW Department of Education. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education: Curtin University, Perth, p. 45.

³⁷ 17.7% of RRR students defer their university offers, compared to 8.1% for metropolitan areas. DET (2018) Undergraduate applications, offers and acceptances, p. 25.

³⁸ Quin, R., Stone, C., & Trinidad, S. (2017), pp. 31-2.

³⁹ Cherastidtham, I., Norton, A. & Mackey, W. (2018) University attrition: what helps and what hinders university completion? Grattan Institute, Melbourne, pp. 40-1.

⁴⁰ QILT (2019), '2018 Student Experience Survey: National Report', https://www.qilt.edu.au/docs/default-source/ses/ses2018/2018-ses-national-report75e58791b1e86477b58fff0006709da.pdf?sfvrsn=d733e33c_4

themselves, which can prevent them from participating in co-curricular activities and put more pressure and strain on their studies.

While RRR students who remain in their local communities do not face relocation costs, they can face their own unique social and financial pressures. For example, they can face significant costs in terms of travelling to participate in intensive units and practicum components for their courses.⁴¹

The higher costs of supporting regional students to undertake tertiary study are recognised by the existing Youth Allowance system, which provides up to \$12,000 extra per year to support RRR students living away from home, compared to their city counterparts who live at home. It is estimated that around half of the 73,669 full-time higher education students aged under 22 from RRR areas receive some form of Youth Allowance, with around half of these students receiving the maximum rate.

The Government also provides Fares Allowance to eligible RRR students who have to move away from home to study. This allowance enables RRR students who have relocated for tertiary education to travel to and from their place of study at the beginning and end of the academic year. The Halsey Review identified several areas where Fares Allowance policy could be improved. For example, it does not provide any assistance for families to help students settle into their new accommodation at the start of study. Nor does it assist prospective students to visit potential tertiary education institutions or undertake testing required for entry into a specific course.

For Indigenous tertiary education students, financial support initiatives include ABSTUDY, which provides financial assistance for Indigenous students or apprentices, and the Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP), which provides supplementary funding to universities to offer scholarships, tutorial assistance, mentoring, study skills and other support services. ABSTUDY recipients are also eligible to apply for Away from Base assistance, which provides funding to support students who study by distance to attend compulsory, face-to-face components of their course, for example, professional placements.

In response to the Halsey Review, the Australian Government has taken recent action in the area of income support to make it easier for RRR students to become independent for Youth Allowance purposes. On 1 January 2019, the Government introduced changes to the Concessional Workforce Independence criteria, which increased the parental cut-off from \$150,000 to \$160,000 for regional students, with the cut-off increasing by \$10,000 for each additional child in the family. While it is too early to determine the impact of these changes, it is expected these reforms will benefit an additional 2300 RRR students.

Despite the recent changes, stakeholder feedback indicates that the financial cost of tertiary education remains a significant issue and deterrent for RRR students. One explanation could be that students do not fully understand what financial support they could access. There are currently more than 3000 scholarships available to Australian students studying VET and higher education, administered through various sources, such as education providers, charities, private entities and governments.⁴² A number of submissions noted that young people in RRR areas often do not know, or cannot decipher, what financial support is available to them. These observations are supported by

⁴¹ Pollard, L. (2018), 'Remote student university success', National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education and the University of Western Australia, p.42.

⁴² <https://www.gooduniversitiesguide.com.au/scholarships>

a survey of RRR students in NSW, which found that students are often “ignorant of the Centrelink rules about qualifying for independence.”⁴³

Another explanation could be that the current arrangements are not delivering the intended outcome of improving support for RRR students. Stakeholder feedback captures a wide range of reasons why this might be the case, including the timing of payments, the rate of payments, parental income cut-offs and tapering rates, the criteria to become independent and how payments are targeted.

Other forms of support

Emotional and social challenges can be significant for tertiary students, and particularly so for RRR students. RRR students who relocate are often separated from their traditional social and support networks, which can have a negative impact on their intrinsic sense of belonging. Health and stress is by far the most common reason RRR students consider withdrawing from university (50.5 per cent of RRR students, compared to 44.6 per cent of metropolitan students).⁴⁴

“RRR students are particularly vulnerable and need additional support to maintain good mental health, due to a number of factors including the stress of moving to the city to study, absence of family and previously built support networks, and financial strain. Most Australian universities are falling short of student needs when it comes to providing suitable mental health services. When done correctly, these services can increase retention rates and completion times.”

Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations - Submission

For Indigenous RRR students, relocating can involve additional challenges associated with moving off Country. Indigenous students may also be required to return home more regularly in order to participate in important cultural activities.⁴⁵

RRR higher education students who study in their home communities face different challenges. As noted above, students at regional universities are more likely to be mature age and studying part-time,⁴⁶ which means they are often juggling competing priorities, including work commitments and caring responsibilities. This may limit the time they are able to dedicate to their studies and, as a result, inhibit their ability to finish their degree. They are also more likely to be female, Indigenous and from a low SES background, which can mean they require additional support services, such as child care.⁴⁷ In addition, for students in outer regional and remote areas, transportation to attend classes can be an issue, with limited options available for students who do not have access to a car.

RRR higher education students are also more likely to study externally (32.0 per cent compared to 17.7 per cent in metropolitan areas).⁴⁸ While external learning is, in many ways, enhancing access in RRR areas, it has its own set of issues. For example, unreliable internet access and lack of face-to-face support can also have an impact on learning experience and chances of success.

⁴³ Quin, R., Stone, C., & Trinidad, S. (2017), p. 32

⁴⁴ QILT (2019), '2018 Student Experience Survey: National Report', https://www.qilt.edu.au/docs/default-source/ses/ses2018/2018-ses-national-report75e58791b1e86477b58fff0006709da.pdf?sfvrsn=d733e33c_4

⁴⁵ Behrendt, L., Larkin, S., Griew, R., and Kelly, P. (2012). Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: Final report. Canberra: Australian Government.

⁴⁶ DoE (2018) Higher Education Students Statistics Collection.

⁴⁷ DoE (2018) Higher Education Students Statistics Collection.

⁴⁸ DoE (2018) Higher Education Students Statistics Collection.

“Many students studying independently in RRR areas, such as through online courses, drop out of their courses for a variety of reasons; they may suffer from lack of mentoring/assistance to keep on track with their studies or to surmount hurdles they may encounter, such as with their course assessments, with IT, or in their personal lives. The recent Regional Study Hubs Program has sought to address this to some extent, but this could be further expanded with additional hubs and services that take a more personalised approach to tracking student progression and wellbeing to aid retention.”

Charles Darwin University – Submission

Consultations highlighted the important role of student support services, particularly in “on-boarding” relocating students who are isolated from their social networks, with research showing that students are most likely to withdraw from study in their first year.⁴⁹

Many positive examples of student support services provided at universities, including mentoring programs and targeted orientation sessions, were raised by stakeholders. In addition, many institutions have implemented cultural safety programs, which provide an opportunity for staff and students to learn, recognise and respect the cultural identities of others, and safely meet their needs, expectations and rights. Improving the consistency of these services across all tertiary education providers will have a positive impact on RRR student outcomes.

RRR VET students are more likely to be studying locally or at a regional institution, which are often supportive and responsive to RRR student needs. VET providers also employ specific strategies to engage and support students from RRR areas, including those with additional literacy and numeracy learning needs. A number of stakeholders raised that addressing low levels of Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) is a major part of VET delivery in RRR areas. In some instances this is related to English being a second language for the student, which can impact on tertiary education participation and success.⁵⁰

Analysis conducted by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) in 2018 identified 13 regions where participation and completion rates for VET were notably high.⁵¹ It showed that these regions used a combination of course and learner-based strategies to improve outcomes.⁵² Strategies used by training providers in high performing regions include:

- using community member programs and engaging in community partnerships
- co-locating education and training with other community services
- delivering programs in community settings
- tailoring programs specifically for learners with low skills, and
- building relationships with local employers to help learners gain work experience.

⁴⁹ Nelson, et al. (2017) Understanding the Completion Patterns of Equity Students in Regional Universities <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/completion-patterns-of-equity-students-in-regional-universities>

⁵⁰ Batchelor Institute (2019) Submission to the Regional Education Expert Advisory Group, pp.2-3.

⁵¹ NCVER (2018), Improving participation and success in VET for disadvantaged learners. Available at: <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/improving-participation-and-success-in-vet-for-disadvantaged-learners>

⁵² NCVER (2018), Improving participation and success in VET for disadvantaged learners.

The Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) also plays a role in supporting public universities to implement strategies to improve attainment and retention outcomes for students, targeted at those from low SES backgrounds, including students from RRR areas. Further discussion about the HEPPP is provided in the next section on equity groups.

While there are many examples where tertiary institutions, often drawing on government funding, have put in place targeted and successful support services to assist RRR students, available service offerings vary considerably across institutions. More could be done to increase transparency and accountability, particularly in the higher education sector where the provision of support services to university students is a core requirement of the higher education standards framework. There are also opportunities for institutions to increase their effort in supporting students in smaller and diverse community settings, including through Study Hubs and delivery of outreach support on Country⁵³ to remote Indigenous communities.

KEY FINDING 6: The costs associated with relocating for tertiary study can deter RRR students and create additional pressures for RRR students and their families, leading to higher rates of RRR students who defer their studies or drop out in their first year.

KEY FINDING 7: Transport costs associated with tertiary education can be a major issue for students who relocate to study and for those who live in RRR areas.

KEY FINDING 8: RRR students often experience difficulty obtaining clear and accessible information about financial support.

KEY FINDING 9: There are a variety of successful support programs that higher education and VET institutions run to assist RRR students throughout their studies; however, offerings are ad hoc and vary considerably between education providers.

KEY FINDING 10: RRR school leavers are more likely to relocate for study and live independently, away from their family and other support networks.

⁵³ For Aboriginal Australians connection to community and traditional lands and sea (known as Country) is profound—being on Country, being from Country, being of Country and caring for Country.

3. Aspiration, career advice and schooling: Aspirations of RRR individuals are hampered by additional challenges and they are less likely to be prepared for tertiary education

Recent Australian research shows that young people have high aspiration, irrespective of their personal circumstances (see Appendix A, Section 2). However, students in RRR areas struggle to maintain and broaden the scope of their aspiration through school and into higher education.⁵⁴ This is linked to a range of factors, including personal choice, the views and expectations of family, perceptions of local employment opportunities, early childhood education and school experiences and concerns about cost.

“Some young people living in rural Australia make an early decision that there is a pleasant and rewarding life to be lived in the part of Australia they love, and employment may be available for which a university qualification is neither necessary nor seen as helpful. The decision not to pursue higher education may be made with no regrets and may not be perceived by them as a personal loss or a dream unfulfilled. Equally, there are other young people who may hold ambitions to attend university but are hindered by a perceived obstacle.”⁵⁵

Early childhood and schools

The first five years of life are critical to brain development and impact on future education and employment outcomes. Access to quality early childhood education and care and preschool services is important for all families, however, access and quality can be poorer with increased distance from metropolitan areas. Data from the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) shows that services in remote and very remote Australia are less likely to meet the National Quality Standards.⁵⁶ Currently, RRR students are more likely to start school developmentally vulnerable than metropolitan students (Table 5).⁵⁷

Table 5. Percentage of children developmentally vulnerable by remoteness, 2018

Geolocation	Percentage of children developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains				Percentage of children developmentally vulnerable in two or more domains			
	2009	2012	2015	2018	2009	2012	2015	2018
Major Cities	22.4	21.1	21.0	20.8	11.0	10.1	10.2	10.2
Inner Regional	23.9	22.5	22.5	22.3	12.4	11.2	11.8	11.9
Outer Regional	26.9	24.9	25.2	24.6	14.0	13.1	13.2	13.5
Remote/Very Remote	38.3	33.2	35.3	34.1	23.3	19.0	22.0	20.9

Source: Australian Early Development Census (2018). <https://www.aedc.gov.au/>

⁵⁴ Vernon, L., Watson, S. J., & Taggart, A. (2018). University aspirational pathways for metropolitan and regional students: Implications for supporting school-university outreach partnerships. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 28(1).

⁵⁵ James, R. (2001). Participation disadvantage in Australian higher education: An analysis of some effects of geographical location and socioeconomic status, *Higher Education*, 42(4), p. 471.

⁵⁶ ACECQA (2018) National Quality Framework Snapshot Q2.

⁵⁷ <https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/2018-aedc-national-report>

While some positive gains are made during school,⁵⁸ the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results show that the average results in RRR areas are poorer than in metropolitan areas, in all areas tested and across year levels (Figure 6 and Figure 7). This translates to lower rates of Year 12 attainment. By age 19, 80.3 per cent of people in metropolitan areas have attained Year 12 (or equivalent) compared to 66.4 per cent in inner regional areas, reducing to 40.3 per cent for very remote areas. This educational disadvantage for RRR students contributes to them being less likely to aspire to career options involving higher-level tertiary study by the end of school.

Figure 6. NAPLAN - Average score in Reading by year level and remoteness, 2017

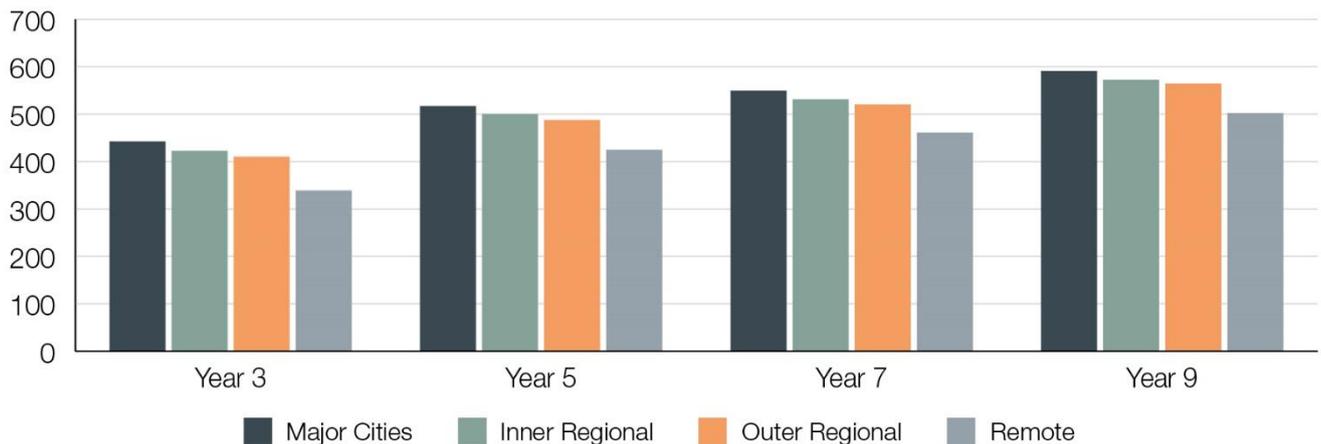
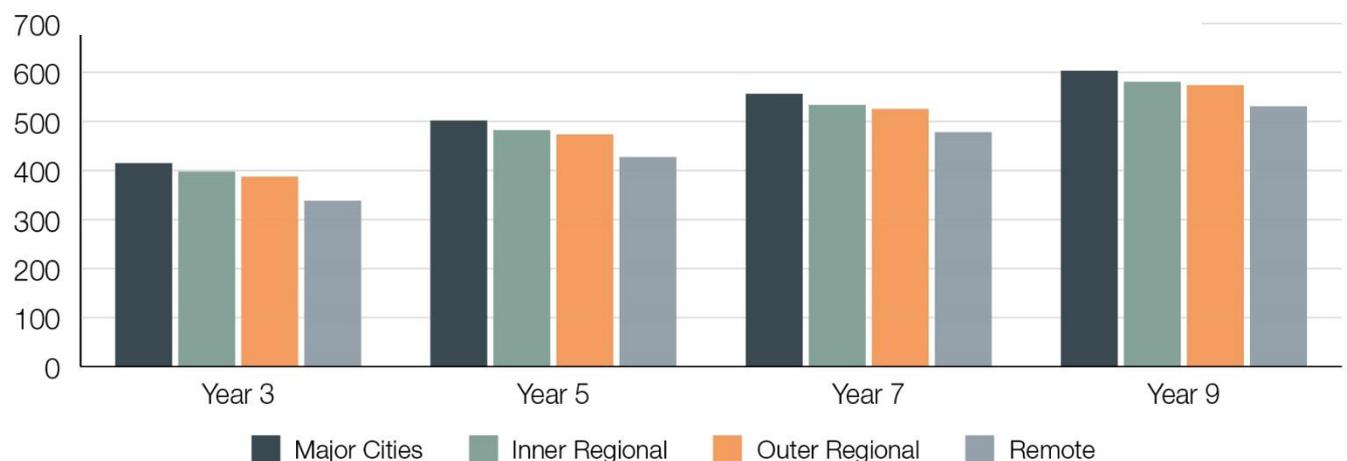


Figure 7. NAPLAN - Average score in Numeracy by year level and remoteness, 2017



A number of reports over recent years have highlighted the challenges RRR schools face in attracting and retaining the highest quality teachers, and issues with support available for teachers, principals and school leaders. The *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* led by Mr David Gonski AC⁵⁹ and the Halsey Review⁶⁰ have led to a number of initiatives being implemented across the education system, including some with a specific RRR focus.

⁵⁸ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2017, NAPLAN Achievement in reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy: National Report for 2017, ACARA Sydney.

⁵⁹ Gonski, D. et al.. (2018), Review to Achieve Excellence in Australian Schools, <https://www.education.gov.au/review-achieve-educational-excellence-australian-schools>

⁶⁰ <https://www.education.gov.au/independent-review-regional-rural-and-remote-education>

In response to the Halsey Review, the Australian Government tasked the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) to undertake research into best practice approaches to teacher and school leader training, professional development and support for RRR settings. In the 2019-20 Budget, the Government also announced a \$15 million investment for Teach for Australia to train high achieving teachers to become school leaders in RRR or disadvantaged schools. The Advisory Group supports these initiatives and other work being done to enhance teacher quality and equitable distribution of high performing teachers. The Advisory Group also supports the creation of an environment that encourages experienced teachers to go and teach in an RRR school.

“All my children were educated in our local regional school from R-12, but it has become increasingly difficult for our school to retain students as they are unable to provide a range of subject choices to the students therefore they go away to metropolitan schools to access the subjects they need. This has the flow on effect of decreasing the school numbers, decreasing the funding the school receives, decreasing the available teachers and decreasing the subject choices.”

Mrs Kerrie Robinson – Submission

Distance and isolation also create complexities for school leaders. Opportunities for formal and informal professional development are more limited in RRR areas and often require a significant investment in time and money. Better “on-boarding” of new principals, including support, mentoring, training and professional development, would assist in ensuring they are well prepared. Gonski’s review found that “[a]spirational school principals require clear pathways leading to the role and comprehensive training and preparation to a quality standard before their appointment.”⁶¹ Feedback from stakeholders to the Advisory Group also emphasised the importance of professional development and mentoring for school principals, prior to commencing work in RRR areas, to mitigate the negative impact on professional growth that can come from isolation from their peers. Specifically, identifying and using retired principals and teachers with real experience in RRR areas, as mentors for new RRR principals and teachers, should be explored.

Career advice and other aspiration building initiatives

The link between career advice and aspiration is clear.⁶² Relevant and supportive advice is critical to creating and maintaining aspiration in students, as well as building greater awareness of career possibilities. Aspiration and career advice are key issues related to tertiary participation and outcomes for RRR students. While challenges around access to career advice and information are 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, employers and career options.

Almost 30 per cent (23 of 79) of public submissions discussed the need for improvements in the quality and availability of career information and advice. Many of these submissions suggested that school resources are often insufficient to support dedicated career advisor positions in schools. As a result, teachers undertake this role, sometimes on a part-time basis, with little in the way of support.

⁶¹ DET (2018) Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools, Australian Government, Canberra, p. xvi.

⁶² Zacharias, N., Mitchell, G., Raciti, M., Koshy, P., Li, I., Costello, D., and Trinidad, S. (2018). Widening Regional and Remote Participation: Interrogating the Impact of Outreach Programs Across Queensland. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Perth: Curtin University.

It was also raised that career advice needs to be provided earlier, and that school-based career advice is simply not available to mature age students and potential students seeking information about returning to study or changing careers.

“Over 50 per cent of university students in regional areas are over 25. It is difficult for this cohort to access advice around pathways to enter higher education and which degree may be the most suitable for accessing employment in their region.”

Country Universities Centre - Submission

Regionally-based career advice models are used in places such as Finland and Denmark where regional career advisors are based out of town halls and municipal buildings and have expertise specific to that region, as well as national policies. Evidence suggests that this regional approach has advantages, with data showing that Finland and Denmark have greater proportions of students who have accessed face-to-face careers advice by age 15⁶³ and Finland being ranked by *The Economist* as providing the best environment to prepare students for life after school.⁶⁴

Many submissions also raised that there is no well known, simple and comprehensive online information resource to help students and families navigate different career information and advice. Existing online resources, such as the *Job Outlook* site, provide high quality information to students on careers and growth industries. However, these tools are not always widely known, are limited in the detail they can provide and are not a substitute for speaking to a career advice professional, particularly one with local knowledge and understanding of the issues facing RRR students.

Another method of broadening aspiration in school students is to provide access to mentors and ambassadors with recent, similar experience.⁶⁵ Using peers as a way of disseminating information can have a direct impact on the student’s understanding of what is involved, as well as demonstrate the possibilities available to them should they choose to undertake further study.

“Building aspiration is an essential step in widening the education and career prospects of regional, rural and remote schoolchildren – ‘you can’t be what you can’t see’”

Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Macquarie University - Submission

As recommended by the Joyce Review, the Australian Government is establishing a National Careers Institute and appointing a National Careers Ambassador to improve career advice to young Australians and workers transitioning careers.⁶⁶ The provision of effective career information and advice nevertheless continues to be a complex challenge, in part due to the different levels of government involved. Further discussion or work with states and territories is needed to determine the best way forward and to ensure the work of the Careers Institute and Ambassador contributes to improving the relevance of the service to people living in RRR areas.

⁶³ Mann, A., Huddleston, P. and Kashfipakdel, E. (eds.) (2019), *Essays on Employer Engagement in Education*, London, Routledge.

⁶⁴ *The Economist – Worldwide Education for the Future Index* (2018), <http://educatingforthefuture.economist.com/EIUYidanPrizeEducatingFortheFuture2018WP.pdf>

⁶⁵ Country Education Partnership, written Submission 2019

⁶⁶ Joyce, S (2019). *Strengthening Skills*, p.86.

VET in Schools

RRR areas traditionally have much higher rates of VET attainment than higher education attainment. Certificate-level VET attainment, up to and including Certificate III, is often above that of metropolitan areas. There are several regions where a strong culture of VET achievement is linked to positive local labour market outcomes. For example, the heavy machinery and diesel mechanic courses in Albany, Western Australia have waiting lists due to the strong employment outcomes of graduates.⁶⁷

VET programs delivered in schools can provide an engaging and valuable pathway to tertiary education and employment for many students. VET in Schools (VETiS) can help broaden a student's understanding of the choices and options available and creates a link between education and future employment. Access and quality, however, varies from school to school. The Joyce Review found that, while there are some excellent examples of VET delivered in schools, quality and outcomes vary in different states and territories. In addition, school students' VET certificates are often not valued by employers and do not provide a pathway to a job.⁶⁸

Issues related to VETiS were also raised in consultations and submissions. The Advisory Group heard from stakeholders that VETiS should - as a general rule - be delivered by registered training organisations (RTOs), as they have both technical and practical expertise. As a result, the Advisory Group came to the view that technical skills should not be taught by general teachers, who do not have sufficient experience in the specific field. This area would benefit from further research.

While some RRR individuals may make early decisions to undertake a particular educational or occupational path, steps should be taken to ensure these choices are well informed and not limited by a lack of access to educational opportunities. Creating an environment through early childhood and schooling that fosters aspiration, as well as providing more relevant career advice, will equip RRR students with the tools they need to identify the path that is right for them, and provide the flexibility many of them will need as they navigate through their education and into work.

KEY FINDING 11: Children in RRR areas are more likely to commence school developmentally vulnerable than those in metropolitan areas, and this relative disadvantage continues through school, with students less likely to finish Year 12.

KEY FINDING 12: There is a strong view among RRR tertiary education providers and communities that current mechanisms for delivering career advice, which are particularly important to build and maintain aspiration in RRR areas, are not working well.

KEY FINDING 13: High quality VET in Schools programs engage and provide pathways for many RRR students; however, delivery is often inconsistent in RRR areas.

KEY FINDING 14: Further effort is required to build on the work of Gonski and Halsey to improve teacher preparation and supply, as well as support for teachers and principals in RRR areas.

⁶⁷ Verbal consultation (January 2019), South West Regional TAFE, Western Australia.

⁶⁸ Joyce, S (2019). *Strengthening Skills*, p.91.

4. Equity groups: There is insufficient targeted support for underrepresented groups who experience multiple, compounding challenges

Students from RRR areas are a formally recognised equity group⁶⁹ with lower access to tertiary education. While improving equity should be a priority for all RRR Australia, it is also recognised that there are sub-populations who experience additional challenges. RRR students from low SES backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people with disability and those from remote and very remote areas are of particular interest. These groups experience multiple types of inequity, which combine to exacerbate the challenges of aspiring to, accessing and succeeding in tertiary education. Compared to those from major cities, the participation rates in higher education is lower for RRR students who are from low SES and Indigenous backgrounds (Table 6). Consequently, students from these backgrounds require additional focus from policymakers, as well as tailored support to help them thrive in tertiary education.

Table 6. Tertiary education participation by equity group, 2016

	Total population	Regional and Remote
Overall HE participation rates*	6.8%	5.3%
Indigenous HE participation rates	3.6%	2.6%
Low SES HE participation rates	3.3%	2.8%
Overall VET participation rates**	25.1%	30.8%
Indigenous VET participation rates	30.2%	29.2%
Low SES VET participation rates***	25.3%	27.2%

* HE Participation rates are derived by dividing the number of domestic student enrolments in 2016 by the number of people aged 15-64 years in location categories (based on first recorded address).

** VET Participation rates are derived broadly on a similar basis, but with a few differences: location is based on current address, NCVER estimates of student numbers are calculated using a deduplication algorithm (to adjust for students undertaking multiple training) and Indigenous student numbers are based on a three year average to adjust for potential volatility in this relatively small population.

*** Definitions for low SES in HE and VET data use slightly different SEIFA indexes and populations (HE data based on the bottom quartile, VET data based on the bottom quintile).

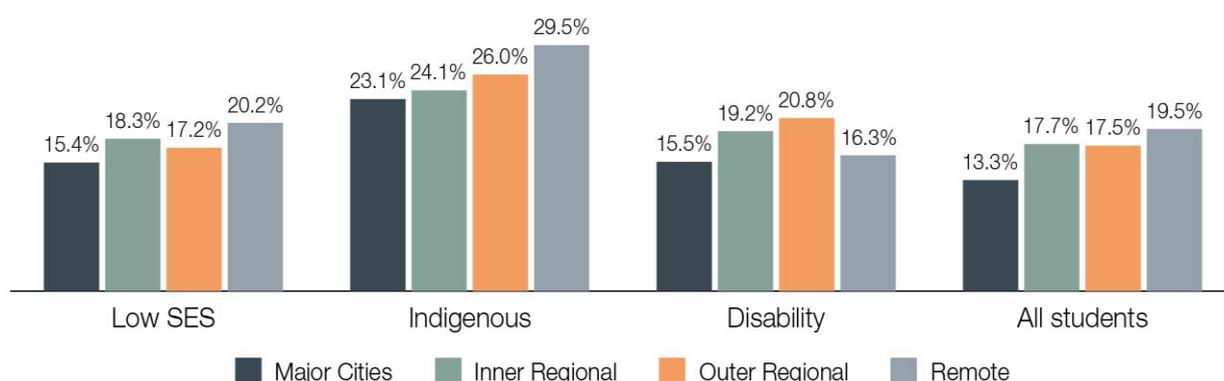
Source: ABS (2016) - Counting Persons, Place of Usual Residence (MB) and Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2016 – 3238.0.55.001; DoE Higher Education Statistics; NCVER Total VET Students and Courses Collection.

In higher education, there has been a concerted effort to increase the participation of underrepresented groups, resulting in a significant increase in enrolments.⁷⁰ While parity with the national population has yet to be achieved, the national enrolment trends are promising. Translating these increasing enrolments into better tertiary education outcomes is the next challenge as equity students, especially those from RRR areas, experience higher attrition rates due to ongoing inequities throughout their study (Figure 8).

⁶⁹ Dawkins, J. (1988). Higher Education: a policy statement. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service. Department of Employment Education and Training. (1990). A Fair Chance for All: National and Institutional Planning for Equity in Higher Education: A Discussion Paper. Canberra.

⁷⁰ Between 2011 and 2016, enrolment by students from low SES backgrounds increased 29.5 per cent, Indigenous Australians enrolments rose by 51.5 per cent and enrolment of people with disability increased by 51.3 per cent. Source: DET: Student Enrolment Time Series: Percentage increases in equity group enrolments, 2011-2016.

Figure 8. University attrition rates by equity group across remoteness levels, 2016



Source: DoE, Higher Education Statistics Collection.

RRR students from low SES backgrounds

Over 30 per cent of RRR students are from low SES backgrounds⁷¹ and often face hurdles such as balancing study, work and family commitments. The Advisory Group heard of the positive impact of HEPPP in RRR Australia. HEPPP aims to enhance aspirations among Australians from low SES backgrounds, both in metropolitan and RRR areas, and improve their higher education access, participation, success and outcomes. HEPPP has facilitated some 2679 programs, with over 310,000 students from identified equity groups and involving external partners, such as state and territory governments, VET providers, schools and community groups.⁷² HEPPP-funded programs occur across the whole student lifecycle, with 13 per cent of programs targeted at low SES people from RRR areas.⁷³ Consultations and submissions pointed to the need for longer funding cycles for RRR outreach and tailored programs. The recent HEPPP evaluation recommended three year funding cycles to address these issues, as well as to better enable the development of partnerships with schools, VET providers and other external organisations.⁷⁴

There is potential to enhance the role HEPPP plays in promoting better outcomes for RRR students. Stakeholders highlighted the benefits of collaboration for RRR community outreach, arguing that there should be a greater emphasis on targeted support for RRR students in HEPPP. There is a strong case for increasing the program's focus on RRR students across the full income spectrum. Figure 9 shows that attrition tends to be higher for RRR students at all income levels, except for high SES RRR students who have about the same level of attrition as low SES metropolitan students (15.4 per cent).

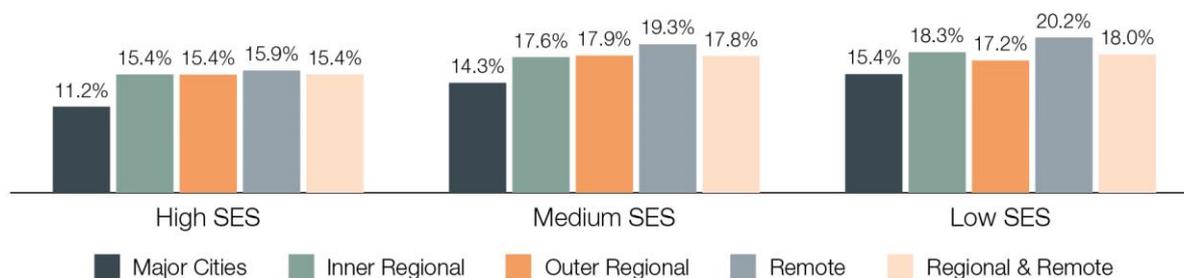
⁷¹ Pollard, L. (2018) Remote Student University Success—An Analysis of Policy and Practice. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Curtin University, Perth.

⁷² ACIL Allen Consulting (2017) Evaluation of the HEPPP: Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program, DET, Canberra.

⁷³ For these results, it is worth bearing in mind that overlap between equity groups makes disaggregating students into groups challenging.

⁷⁴ ACIL Allen Consulting (2017) Evaluation of the HEPPP: Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program, DET, Canberra.

Figure 9. University student attrition rates across income levels, 2016



Source: Location based on students' first enrolment address. DoE, Higher Education Statistics Collection.

The challenges facing RRR students impacts their participation, with attrition rates equal or higher across all SES classifications. More could be done within HEPPP to assist RRR students. Longer-term support would assist with the establishment of best practice, cost-effective and collaborative activities, as well as opportunities to develop innovative new approaches.

While there is no equivalent program for VET students, state and territory governments have implemented a range of initiatives aimed at meeting the needs of low SES students and other equity groups. Learnings from HEPPP may be valuable for state and territory governments to inform new or existing support programs to improve VET access and participation for equity groups, including RRR students.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples comprise 2.8 per cent of the Australian population, of which 62.6 per cent live in RRR areas.⁷⁵ Indigenous students are more likely to participate in VET (estimated at 3.4 per cent of all VET students)⁷⁶ than in higher education (1.8 per cent of all higher education students).⁷⁷ In 2017, 45.3 per cent of Indigenous higher education students came from RRR areas (first address at the commencement of study), with 43.7 per cent studying in RRR areas.⁷⁸

Indigenous students in remote and very remote areas are particularly vulnerable to attrition (Figure 8). “Thin markets” can have a significant impact on Indigenous students in remote and very remote communities where VET access and completion – as well as the pathways from VET to higher education – are problematic. Some stakeholders attributed poor VET access rates and completion outcomes in remote and very remote Indigenous communities to the lack of flexible, on Country⁷⁹ delivery of quality tertiary education. The Advisory Group heard of the preference for face-to-face⁸⁰ delivery of tertiary education on Country, using flexible modes of delivery that are co-designed and co-implemented with the local Indigenous community. For example, the Remote Area Teacher Education Program is a successful, multi-sector collaboration between James Cook University, TAFE

⁷⁵ ABS 2018 Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2016.

⁷⁶ NCVER, Total VET Students and Courses Collection.

⁷⁷ Koshy P. 2018 Equity student participation in Australian higher education: 2012-2017, NCSEHE, Perth: Curtin University.

⁷⁸ DoE Higher Education Statistics Collection. In 2017 there were 19,237 Indigenous university students of which 8706 had a RRR First Address and 8403 had a RRR permanent address postcode.

⁷⁹ For Aboriginal Australians connection to community and traditional lands and sea (known as Country) is profound—being on Country, being from Country, being of Country and caring for Country. Country is inextricably tied to the Aboriginal body, spirit and mind (Ford, 2010; Bunda, 2015). Country influences Aboriginal students (Bourke, Burden and Moore, 1996; Henderson-Yates et al., 2014) and is an important consideration within an Indigenous higher education policy landscape (Frawley, Larkin and Smith, 2017).

⁸⁰ NCVER 2017 enrolment data showed Indigenous VET students engaged in classroom-based delivery to a greater extent than electronic-based, employment based and other modes of delivery. See <https://va.ncver.edu.au/>.

Queensland and the Queensland Department of Education, which assists Indigenous students to become school teachers.

Improved outreach services, mentoring and support for distance students were identified as initiatives that could improve outcomes for all RRR Indigenous students and that would be particularly helpful for those in remote and very remote locations. As Indigenous higher education students have higher attrition rates in the first year, as well as in subsequent years of study, than their non-Indigenous peers,⁸¹ it is imperative that tailored academic support programs are designed for the entire student lifecycle.

Increasing Indigenous educational attainment is a national priority. The most recent data shows a decline in both university applications from, and offers being made to, Indigenous students.⁸² In 2018, the number of applications from Indigenous Australians decreased by 5.2 per cent from the previous year. Furthermore, compared with 2017, there was a 3.3 per cent decrease in offers made to Indigenous applicants in 2018 – the first fall since data was originally reported in 2010. Within current controls on funding for bachelor degrees, there is limited capacity for universities to improve participation rates for Indigenous Australians. Better opportunities for Indigenous students would help support the broader agenda of improving the quality of life of Indigenous Australians, to which education is central.

RRR students with disability

People with a disability account for a higher proportion of the overall population and the student population in RRR areas (Table 7).

Table 7. Proportion of population and tertiary students with disability, 2016

	Major Cities	Inner Regional	Outer Regional	Remote and Very Remote	Regional and Remote
Proportion of population with disability aged 15-64*	12.6%	18.5%	20.5%	6.8%	18.2%
Proportion of HE students^	5.9%	7.4%	6.1%	4.7%	6.9%
Proportion of VET students^	4.3%	5.7%	4.8%	3.7%	5.3%

* Persons with a disability as reported in ABS Cat. No. 4430.0. ^ Disability refers to whether student self-identifies as having a disability, impairment or long-term condition.

Source: NCVER, Total Students and Courses Collection; DoE, Higher Education Statistics Collection; ABS (2016) Census; ABS (2015) ABS Cat. No. 4430.0 Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015,

Initiatives to support students with disability, including those from RRR areas, include the:

- Higher Education Disability Support Program (DSP), which funds universities to improve access and participation in higher education for students with disability

⁸¹ Edwards, Daniel and McMillan, Julie, "Completing university in a growing sector: Is equity an issue?" (2015). https://research.acer.edu.au/higher_education/43.

⁸² DET (2018), Undergraduate Applications, Offers and Acceptances 2018.

- National Disability Coordination Officer Program (NDCO), which supports a network of regionally-based officers to assist people with disability to access and participate in tertiary education and subsequent employment, and
- Australian Apprenticeships Incentive Program, which includes a suite of incentives for equity groups, including Indigenous apprentices, apprentices with disability and apprentices working in RRR areas. Included in these incentives is the Disabled Australian Apprentice Wage Support (DAAWS), which is a wage subsidy available to employers who take on an eligible apprentice or trainee with disability.

Students with disability face a range of challenges, including issues related to learning spaces (physical and digital), a need for more inclusive educational environments, access to suitable accommodation if the student must move to a new location for study, and poor employment outcomes following completion.⁸³ As a result, there is an opportunity to supplement existing initiatives to support students with disability with more tailored programs.

Students from remote and very remote communities

People living in remote and very remote areas represent 2.1 per cent of Australia’s working age population and their rates of participation and attainment in higher-level tertiary education are lower than their metropolitan peers. For example, 39.7 per cent of people from metropolitan areas have a bachelor or higher qualification, compared to 16.3 per cent of people in remote areas (see Figure 1).

Remote and very remote areas include rural communities, which typically centre on agricultural and mining industries. Consultations and submissions noted many of the challenges faced by people in rural areas.

“Rural and remote students isolated from tertiary and training education due to location must be recognised as a distinct disadvantaged group so that assistance is provided to enhance access.”

The Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of Australia – Submission

Key challenges faced by those in rural communities include the distances to urban areas and services, sub-optimal internet access and the impact of hardships associated with extreme climatic events, such as drought, bushfire, floods and cyclones. Students in some outer regional areas face similar issues, including isolation, poor internet access and limited transport options, however these challenges are not always well reflected in the current geographical classification system.

Opportunities for these students to help their families and community during times of hardship by being able to take a break from their studies without adversely disrupting their progress need to be improved. Tertiary providers could make it more explicit that such RRR hardships are acceptable grounds for leave of absence from tertiary study. Where a student cannot complete a unit of study due to certain circumstances, there are provisions under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* that allow them to apply to have their tuition fees refunded and any associated student loan debt cancelled for that unit. Providers should not be penalised due to non-completion of such units.

⁸³ NCSEHE Focus 2017, Successful outcomes for students with disability in Australian higher education, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Curtin University: Perth.

KEY FINDING 15: While HEPPP plays an important role in improving outcomes for low SES students, including RRR students, its role in supporting RRR students could be enhanced.

KEY FINDING 16: There is limited scope within current university funding controls to increase participation in higher education by students from equity groups, including Indigenous students.

KEY FINDING 17: Flexible delivery options are needed to appropriately cater for students from RRR areas, including co-designed and co-implemented on Country delivery for Indigenous Australians in remote and very remote areas.

KEY FINDING 18: Hardships such as drought and other climatic events and Indigenous cultural practices and protocols may impact on an RRR students' study and retention.

KEY FINDING 19: RRR students from low SES backgrounds, Indigenous students and students with disability face multiple challenges and require tailored support.

5. Regional development: The contribution of RRR areas is not being maximised.

RRR communities make a substantial contribution to Australia's economy and broader social and cultural life. More than eight million people live outside the capital cities, including nearly one-third of Australia's workforce, producing 31 per cent of our national economic output.⁸⁴ Some reports have suggested that the total economic contribution of RRR Australia is almost as high as 40 per cent.⁸⁵ The success of Australia relies on the success of its regions. As a result, efforts to support regional development, including through education, should be viewed as an opportunity to invest in Australia's future.

In general, communities with a strong education sector are more likely to be growing.⁸⁶ A report by the Nous Group calculated that, in 2015, the six universities which comprise the Regional Universities Network contributed \$1.7 billion to real GDP in their regions. This contribution was made through employing both skilled and unskilled staff, productivity, spending, and research and innovation.⁸⁷ VET providers also strengthen local economies through developing a wide range of skills suited to local employment opportunities and needs. As a result, increasing numbers of education providers in RRR communities could result in significant economic benefits for Australia and its regions.

Local RRR industries also benefit from having thriving education providers in their communities. Education institutions support innovation and transfer of research and development to local employers, further boosting local economies. In addition, education providers help to attract talent

⁸⁴ ABS 2019, *Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2017-18*, March 2019 update (Cat. No. 3218). Refers to 2018; Employment: ABS 2019, *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed - Electronic Delivery, Jan 2019* (Cat. No. 6291.0.55.001).

⁸⁵ House of Representatives Select Committee on Regional Development and Decentralisation (2018) *Regions at the ready: investing in Australia's future - final report*, Canberra. p. xxv.

⁸⁶ House of Representatives Select Committee on Regional Development and Decentralisation (2018) *Regions at the ready: investing in Australia's future - final report*, Canberra. p. 67.

⁸⁷ Charles Sturt University (2009). *Submission to the Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities*. Bathurst.

and upskill local populations to meet the needs of employers. For example, it has been estimated that seven in ten graduates from regional universities go on to work in a regional area,⁸⁸ which suggests that expanding student numbers at regional universities is likely to have a positive impact on keeping skilled workers in the regions over the longer-term.

The value of publicly funded VET providers to RRR communities was highlighted in consultations and submissions. VET providers are adept at catering for the diverse needs of RRR industries and training people for technical and trade jobs that are more prevalent in RRR areas (Figure 3). Furthermore, VET providers help draw lower-skilled and marginalised individuals into education and training, building their confidence and skills and often setting them on the path to higher-level qualifications.

The presence of education providers can also have an impact on educational aspiration. One submission to the Advisory Group highlighted a study, which found that where a regional university has a physical presence, there is an increase in educational aspiration and overall participation in higher education in the regional areas surrounding the campus.⁸⁹ This may be due to the highly-skilled staff and students that education providers attract to RRR communities, which provide a wider range of role models for local students.

Research and development in RRR communities

Regionally-based tertiary education providers play a key role in supporting research and development activities tailored to the needs of their region. Across countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), universities are increasingly taking a leading role in developing their regions and facilitating economic transition through investment in research and skills development in key growth sectors.⁹⁰

“Funding regional research and development partnerships between local industry and tertiary providers will grow regional research profiles – building links nationally and internationally, strengthening the regional tertiary institutions and creating regional jobs.”

Loddon Mallee Regional Development Australia – Submission

Innovative Research Universities, in their report *Building Regional Research Systems Across Australia*, pointed to the cyclical correlation between knowledge-based economic growth and the attraction of more innovative industry. This has the potential to alter the balance of population growth within Australia to ease pressure on major capital cities.⁹¹ Strong or specialised research capabilities attract more domestic and international students to regional education providers as they can become known for being the best in their field. Many RRR universities and VET campuses also have unique local attributes and industries, making them ideal for new research initiatives.

Currently, research activity is largely concentrated in metropolitan areas. RRR areas account for around 28 per cent of the population but in 2017 accounted for only 13.4 per cent of research training students and 9.8 per cent of PhD and other HDR completions. Nevertheless, there are positive examples of specialised research and research training facilities in regional areas of Australia.

⁸⁸ Nous Group (2018) *The economic impact of the Regional Universities Network*. Report commissioned by the RUN, Canberra. p. 4.

⁸⁹ Charles Sturt University (2009). *Submission to the Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities*. Bathurst.

⁹⁰ OECD (2007) *Higher Education and Regions: Globally Competitive, Locally Engaged*. OECD, Paris.

⁹¹ Innovative Research Universities (2016) *Building Regional Research Systems across Australia*, Innovative Research Universities, Victoria.

CASE STUDY

Specialised research and training facility examples

The Batavia Coast Maritime Institute (BCMI) campus of Central Regional TAFE is an award-winning, state-of-the-art training, research and development facility located in Geraldton, Western Australia. BCMI specialises in the areas of aquaculture, marine and environmental science research and training. The BCMI attracts both domestic and international VET students to Geraldton with their strong focus on field-based training and real world, industry based projects and research.⁹²

The Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine (AITHM) is a research institute of James Cook University, based in the tropics of Queensland, known for its world-leading research and teaching. It is Australia's only tropical health and medical research institute.

Attracting and retaining students in RRR areas

There are a number of positive flow-on effects from growing the student base in RRR areas. More students means education providers can offer a wider range of courses and support services, further enhancing options for individuals in local areas. Individuals who study in RRR areas also stimulate their local economy and contribute culturally, including through their involvement in local sport and volunteer work.

The benefits are not just limited to students from RRR areas. Education providers with greater offerings create more options for students from metropolitan areas and overseas – enabling them to study their chosen course while experiencing the many lifestyle benefits that come with living in an RRR area. Only three per cent of Australia's international students currently study in regional areas, which suggests there is potential to enrich RRR communities by increasing international student numbers.⁹³ Initiatives that encourage and promote the benefits of studying in RRR areas for both domestic and international students and the removal of constraints have the potential to attract students to RRR areas.

International students not only contribute economically and academically to RRR education providers and communities, but also bring the benefits of cultural exchange. In March 2019, Expert Members of the Council for International Education, led by the Hon Phil Honeywood, provided advice to Government on Growing International Education in Regional Australia, the findings of which the Advisory Group supports. In March 2019, the Australian Government announced the Destination Australia Program, which will provide scholarships for both domestic and international students, at a Certificate IV to Doctoral level, to study in regional Australia. This program is designed to encourage study in areas outside Australia's major cities and attract both international and domestic students to regional areas. The Government also announced an extension to post-study work visas for international students who study and then live in a regional area.

⁹² Central Regional TAFE (2019) Batavia Coast Maritime Institute.

⁹³ Expert Members of the Council for International Education (2018) Consultation Paper: Growing International Education in Regional Australia, Department of Education and Training, Australian Government Canberra, p. 4.

Work-integrated learning (WIL)

Providing options for students to undertake WIL placements in RRR areas provides local opportunities to support RRR students, as well as the potential to attract other students to RRR areas, while meeting local industry needs by enhancing employability and skill outcomes.⁹⁴ It can also result in longer-term benefits to the RRR community if students remain or return to the region to work after graduation.

“Students who have had a successful rural work experience are more likely to return to work in rural areas.”

School of Education, University of Tasmania – Submission

In many areas, however, there are not enough work placements in RRR Australia to fulfil the needs of all students. Moreover, RRR students are sometimes unable to undertake WIL placements due to travel and accommodation costs when the opportunity is not located close by. Fostering stronger links between RRR employers and educational institutions could help to maximise WIL opportunities for students.

Providing improved opportunities in regional areas for all students, including supporting RRR students and attracting and retaining international and domestic students to RRR locations, are areas where ongoing effort will be required, including in monitoring the impact of recent initiatives.

KEY FINDING 20: Research and development by tertiary providers enhances long-term regional development and local industries.

KEY FINDING 21: Increasing student places in RRR communities will increase education access while also growing communities both economically and culturally.

KEY FINDING 22: International education enriches RRR communities, including by bringing economic benefits and valuable engagement opportunities.

KEY FINDING 23: The potential of RRR Australia could be further maximised by developing the research capacity of regional universities and supporting other opportunities to attract and retain students in RRR areas, including work integrated learning placements.

⁹⁴ Jackson, D (2013) ‘The contribution of work-integrated learning to undergraduate employability skill outcomes’, Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 99.

Part three: Plan for change

Vision/Aim

At the core of the Strategy is a vision of a tertiary education system that supports equal opportunity and access for students from RRR areas – in line with their metropolitan counterparts. This vision needs to allow for the fact that students will make different choices based on their different aspirations, which will be influenced by where they want to live and the employment opportunities in different areas. In practice, this may mean a different mix in the types of tertiary education students undertake across locations. Nevertheless, policy settings should be aimed at ensuring that in making these choices – for example, whether to stay in their community or relocate – RRR students and their families are not deterred by additional challenges they may face.

As discussed earlier in Part one (Imperative for change), addressing inequities in education will produce significant benefits to individuals, communities and also the nation as a whole. The vision is not about providing RRR students with additional entitlements, but rather addressing an inequity so that they also have the opportunity to participate in education and contribute to national prosperity. In line with this vision, the following overarching aim is proposed:

Support equal opportunity: Improve tertiary education access, participation and attainment to address current inequalities for people from regional, rural and remote communities; to support students and their aspirations and enhance their communities.

Objectives, targets and timing

This Strategy sets out the following as key objectives:

- increase the number of tertiary education options available for RRR Australians
- improve the support available to all prospective and current RRR students
- prepare RRR school students for success and raise educational aspirations
- improve the support for RRR students from equity groups, and
- improve educational opportunities in RRR areas to support regional development.

An initial ten year timeframe for the Strategy is proposed, from 2020 to 2030. By ten years, significant progress should be achieved in building greater aspiration for current cohorts of school students and working age people in RRR areas. Growth should also be evident in access to higher education and VET, translating to increased numbers of students completing their courses and achieving employment in their chosen fields.

In order to measure success in achieving the vision and overarching objectives of this Strategy, three main targets are proposed. These targets are focused on reducing the disparity between RRR and metropolitan students in relation to attainment and participation in higher-level tertiary education:

- By 2030, halve the disparity between metropolitan and each regional and remote location category for Certificate IV and above attainment rates for 25-34 year olds.
- By 2030, halve the disparity between metropolitan and each regional and remote location category for attainment rates of higher education for 25-34 year olds.
- By 2030, halve the disparity between metropolitan and each regional and remote location category in the rate of participation for Certificate IV and above by working age Australians (15-64 years).

A more detailed discussion about these targets and a range of other information/metrics that are proposed for monitoring can be found in Part four of the report, focused on implementation.

Priority areas for reform

Six areas have been identified as priorities for reform based on the issues and findings in Part two of the Strategy. Recommendations and proposed actions relating to each area are outlined below. In addition, there is a recommendation and actions related to the implementation of the Strategy, which incorporates and reflects the Advisory Group's view on the value and potential role of an RRR Education Commissioner.

The recommendations and actions outline the steps the Advisory Group believes need to be taken to achieve the vision, objectives and targets associated with the Strategy. Together, they will bring about improvements in tertiary education participation and outcomes for RRR Australians.

Access to study options

A central component of the Strategy is a recommendation and suite of actions to improve access to a range of tertiary education study options in RRR communities across Australia.

In order to increase university participation rates, some lifting of the current caps on funding for university places is necessary. The preferred approach would be to introduce demand-driven funding for all bachelor-level places at regional universities and campuses. This change would improve access and contribute to regional development.

In recommending uncapping funding for places in regional and remote areas, the Advisory Group is cognisant that this may lead to higher rates of attrition through increased participation of students requiring additional assistance who otherwise would not have commenced further study. This issue was raised by the Productivity Commission in their recent report on the demand-driven system.⁹⁵

The Advisory Group strongly believes that potential growth in attrition resulting from improved access for RRR students should not in itself be interpreted as a negative outcome, nor should tertiary providers be penalised in any performance metric for enrolling such students. Providers may be reluctant to enrol RRR students if they are of the view that it could damage their funding or reputation, thus placing further barriers to participation of RRR students. Research shows that even those who commence and drop out are better off in terms of financial and health outcomes, than those who never undertake higher education.⁹⁶ The Advisory Group believes that actions in the Strategy to improve RRR student support and "on-boarding" will help prevent any associated growth in attrition.

To complement action to increase the supply of university places at the Commonwealth level, the Advisory Group considers that state and territory governments, for their part, should fund additional VET places in RRR areas, particularly for employment-related training, for both new and existing employees. This would help meet the needs of rural industries. Given the recent decline in training places relative to population in these areas, as highlighted in Table 4 (p.21), there is a case for introducing demand-driven funding for such training, subject to there being sufficient demand to support economically viable course delivery in specific regions.

⁹⁵ Productivity Commission (2019). The Demand Driven System, A Mixed Report Card pg 23.

⁹⁶ Luckman, M., & Harvey, A. (2019). The financial and educational outcomes of Bachelor degree non-completers. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 41(1), 3-17.

The Advisory Group also considers that there is a need to provide additional funding for enabling and sub-bachelor courses at regional universities and campuses, which play a particularly important role in providing pathways to further study for RRR students. In addition, the Advisory Group considers participation in Regional Study Hubs should not be constrained by limits on funding for university places.

There is also potential to explore the development and implementation of new higher education offerings focused more on practical learning and technical and professional skills development. These could bridge the gap between current VET and higher education offerings and provide clearer employment pathways, which is likely to be attractive to RRR students.

In RRR areas that are currently under-serviced, Regional Study Hubs have an important role to play. Consultations suggest there is potential to explore a broader range of innovative models, built around community need and using existing infrastructure, such as libraries and other education institutions. Models could include “mini study hubs” in smaller RRR communities or limited-term study hubs, which could operate temporarily to meet pent-up demand. It is recommended that the Government explore such models as part of the further expansion of Hubs.

In rural and more remote areas, there is a need to further investigate how to provide faster, affordable and more reliable internet access, which is crucial to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for students. Facilitating access is not just about providing broadband access in more locations, but also about supporting students in remote areas to access sites that have the appropriate learning support and infrastructure, including through assistance with transport.

Finally, the strong role that VET plays in meeting the needs of RRR students and communities could be further supported by improving opportunities for articulation between VET and higher education, and through work with states and territories to improve student access to high quality VET programs.

Recommendation one:

Improve access to tertiary study options for students in RRR areas by:

- providing demand-driven funding for university places in regional areas
- exploring new higher education offerings focused on professional skills development
- expanding access to Regional Study Hubs
- addressing problems with student access to affordable, reliable, high speed internet services, and
- improving access to high quality VET programs in RRR areas.

Actions

1. Provide demand-driven funding for Commonwealth-supported bachelor-level university places, excluding medical, for domestic students studying at regional and remote campuses. To complement this reform, increase funding for enabling and sub-bachelor places at regional campuses, and for places used by students attending Regional Study Hubs.
2. Explore with the VET and higher education sector the development of a new type of higher education offering focused more on practical learning and technical and professional skills development.

3. Expand and enhance the Regional Study Hubs program using a broader range of models tailored to community needs, with sufficient program management and governance support to ensure their success.
4. Prioritise and accelerate work to ensure that all students in RRR areas can access internet services to an agreed benchmark standard. This work requires a detailed investigation into the internet speed, capacity and affordability requirements of RRR students and tertiary education providers and how to deliver access to reliable 21st century internet services that will meet these needs. The work would build on the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review.
5. Implement a more consistent, transparent and transferrable system of recognition of prior learning and credit transfer to support pathways for articulation between providers, informed by the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) review.
6. Work with state and territory governments to improve student access to high quality VET programs in RRR areas including:
 - asking jurisdictions to reduce the barriers preventing RTOs from providing publicly subsidised training places in multiple states and territories, to address gaps and improve choice in access for students from RRR areas
 - exploring strategies to better meet the needs of cross-border RRR populations
 - targeting expansion in access to qualifications highly relevant to the needs of RRR industries, and
 - requesting jurisdictions increase the availability of subsidised places for VET courses in RRR areas where there is demonstrated demand and associated employment outcomes.

Financial support

Improving financial support is critical to increasing access to tertiary education for RRR Australians and supporting their aspiration to undertake study. This is particularly the case for RRR students who need to relocate to undertake post-secondary education.

As well as encouraging greater participation, improved financial support will help increase the numbers of students from RRR areas successfully completing their studies. While there have been some significant improvements to financial support for RRR students over recent years, the costs associated with tertiary study still deter some students from study and create additional pressures for them and their families. This leads to higher rates of RRR students deferring their studies or dropping out in their first year.

Changes to income support arrangements could make a significant difference to encourage more students to successfully undertake higher-level tertiary education after finishing secondary school. Providing this support is not about providing welfare assistance, but rather removing a barrier that constrains the aspirations of students and prevents them from having the opportunity to successfully undertake higher-level tertiary education.

In an ideal world, all RRR students and families would have access to support through Youth Allowance or some other mechanism to meet the additional costs associated with relocation. This would provide greater fairness and equity and ensure students are not deterred from undertaking study by the additional costs they may incur because of where they live. The Advisory Group's preferred approach, if it were possible, would be to allow all students who relocate from an RRR area to automatically qualify as independent for Youth Allowance purposes. This would incorporate all tertiary qualifications that span at least one year. Students could also be provided with a one-off "relocation allowance" at the beginning of their course.

However, this would involve significant costs to the Budget, particularly if based on current regional and remote classifications. It is nevertheless important that the Government consider this type of

reform over the longer-term, depending on the progress achieved as a result of the recommendations and actions outlined in the Strategy. Development of an improved geographical classification system for education purposes may provide greater opportunity to more effectively target such initiatives in the future.

In the short-term, there are alternative steps that can be taken towards improving financial support. In particular, there is potential to introduce a new tertiary education access payment for school leavers who relocate for further education from an outer regional or remote area. This would encourage and assist students to access tertiary study immediately following school and may reduce the number of RRR students undertaking gap years, which research indicates contributes to lower RRR participation and attainment.⁹⁷

There is also the option to provide alternate pathways to independent Youth Allowance to support RRR students who initially study externally, including at a Regional Study Hub. These initiatives could be complemented by other changes to income support, including reducing the earnings requirements under the Concessional Workforce test for independent Youth Allowance.

The recent changes to the parental income cut-offs related to this test should also be reviewed – say in 12 months time – to consider whether further increases are required and ensure the changes are having the intended effect. For example, consideration could be given to increasing the parental income limit to the limit used for other payments, such as the Child Care Subsidy.

Measures to assist external learners and relocating students with costs associated with travel to education institutions and back to their communities, including to enable them to visit prospective tertiary campuses or undertake entry testing, could support RRR student aspiration and attainment. In addition, funds to support a family member to visit a relocating student in their first year would provide additional support and may help students complete their studies.

The Strategy also includes an action to improve and promote online access to financial support information for students, which is consistent and easily digestible, to address the issue of many students not being aware of what support is available or where and how this information can be accessed.

Recommendation two:

Improve access to financial support, to support greater fairness and more equal opportunity, by:

- introducing a new tertiary education access payment for students who relocate for study from an outer regional or remote area
- allowing greater flexibility in pathways to qualify for independent Youth Allowance
- providing greater assistance to students and families to meet costs associated with travel to and from their home communities, and
- promoting and improving the clarity of online information about available financial support.

⁹⁷ Cherastidtham, I. et al. (2018) University attrition: what helps and what hinders university completion? Grattan Institute, Melbourne, pp. 40-1.

Actions

7. Introduce a new tertiary education access payment of \$5000 available to all school leavers that relocate from an outer regional or remote location to undertake full-time, higher-level tertiary education. The course would need to be of at least a year duration and provided at an institution at least 90 minutes by public transport from their home.
8. Allow RRR learners who successfully undertake their first year of tertiary study externally, including at a Regional Study Hub, to access independent Youth Allowance or independent ABSTUDY Allowance if they relocate to continue their study in their second year. The course would need to be of at least a further year duration and provided at an institution at least 90 minutes by public transport from their home.
9. Reduce the earnings requirements under the Concessional Workforce test for independent Youth Allowance and review the recent changes to the parental means test cut-offs, to address any problems with uptake.
10. Improve support for RRR students who study externally, either at home or at a Regional Study Hub, by providing them with Away from Base assistance when they are required to travel to complete a part of their course.
11. Expand Fares Allowance to enable Year 12 students to visit prospective tertiary campuses, enable relocated students to return home during their mid-year break and their families to visit them during their first year of study.
12. Improve and promote online access to financial support information to provide students and families with clearer information on the support available for tertiary studies, by improving existing websites or creating a new portal that consolidates existing information.

Other student support

When RRR students do manage to go onto tertiary education, many struggle to stay in their course and successfully complete their studies. As a result, another important priority area for action is to expand on the range of successful support programs run by higher education and VET institutions, including through identifying and sharing best practice. Sharing best practice will help ensure there is a holistic range of support services available for students to help with “on-boarding” when they commence their study and throughout their course.

As well as financial difficulties and challenges associated with finding accommodation when students need to relocate, many students cite health and wellbeing as a reason they leave university before completion. Supporting RRR students’ health and wellbeing through improved and more targeted student support should lead to increased attainment.

It is also proposed that providers be required to undertake transparent reporting, and to facilitate public access to this information, to enable students to see the support services available and make an informed decision on the institution that would suit them best.

Finally, there is potential to improve transport options for students by asking states and territories to allow students to access local school bus services, to enable them to travel to their education provider more easily and increase their chances of completing their qualification.

Recommendation three:

Improve the quality and range of student support services for RRR students to address the challenges of transition and higher rates of attrition by:

- identifying and disseminating information on best practice student support services
- introducing new requirements for providers to publish transparent information on available service offerings, and
- working with state and territory governments to improve transport options for students.

Actions

13. Identify and disseminate information on a core suite of best practice interventions and offerings universities should provide to RRR students, including the following services:
 - pastoral care
 - specific RRR student orientation
 - mentoring/buddy programs
 - priority accommodation for RRR students
 - academic support, including academic concierge
 - regular contact with all RRR students via email, phone and SMS, especially those identified as at risk of dropping out
 - childcare support
 - employment assistance, and
 - cultural safety.
14. Require transparent reporting by institutions, to enable students to see the support services a particular tertiary institution has available.
15. Encourage providers to provide comprehensive information to RRR students on adulthood basics, including budgeting advice, legal and tenancy agreements, time management and health care, including by leveraging existing online platforms aimed at prospective and current tertiary students.
16. Improve transport options for RRR students by requesting state and territory governments to allow RRR students travelling to local VET programs, universities and Study Hubs to access school bus services.

Aspiration and preparing for success

The Strategy also recommends ongoing collaborative work by Commonwealth, state, and territory governments to enhance the role and positive impact of early childhood education, schools and career advice on tertiary education participation and attainment.

Improving career advice is a critical element. Career advice is often cited as a major factor in RRR students' decisions about their future education, training and job prospects; however, many RRR schools have no dedicated career advisor. Career advice needs to be independent, consistent and available to all individuals in RRR communities, whether they are in school, just finishing or looking for a change of career later in life.

Implementing a regionally-based career advice model would help to improve the relevance and availability of advice on education and career options for students of all ages, including people seeking to change careers or upskill and those looking to retrain after being made redundant due to changes in the local employment market.

Providing more relevant and better targeted online career resources for those in more remote locations is also critical to ensuring valuable information to assist education and career decisions is available to everyone, no matter where they live.

Action is also proposed to establish aspiration-raising initiatives targeted at students and families, such as ambassador and alumni programs. These initiatives will support RRR students to believe they are capable of achieving a tertiary education, which is particularly important as RRR students often have less exposure to the various pathways and potential outcomes of tertiary study.

Joint work by the Commonwealth and states and territories to improve access to high quality VET programs in RRR schools is required. Delivery of these programs is often inconsistent in RRR areas, which can influence the impact for individual students and the overall effectiveness of the initiative in engaging and providing pathways for RRR students. A first step in this area would be to map current programs and funding arrangements to identify and share best practice.

Finally, building on the work of the Gonski and Halsey reviews, the Strategy recommends further work to strengthen schools, including examining how to engage and retain students until Year 12, ensuring the relevance of the curriculum and support materials for RRR settings and improving the supply and support of teachers and principals in RRR areas. This includes improving professional development for RRR teachers and principals, increasing opportunities for professional experience in RRR schools and providing additional incentives for teachers to train and work in RRR areas, which may include provision of accommodation or accelerated promotion. In addition, streamlining teacher registration between jurisdictions would improve mobility of teachers wanting to take up opportunities in RRR settings.

Recommendation four:

Build aspiration, improve career advice and strengthen RRR schools to better prepare RRR students for success, by:

- implementing a regionally-based model for independent, professional career advice
- improving online career related information and advice
- establishing aspiration-raising initiatives covering both VET and higher education
- expanding access to high quality VET programs in RRR schools
- undertaking further work to improve RRR schools and Year 12 completion rates, and
- improving support available to teachers, principals and school leaders.

Actions

17. Implement a regionally-based model for independent career advice in RRR locations, to be developed in collaboration between the Commonwealth and states and territories. This should be delivered by professional career advisors with strong links to schools, tertiary education providers, industry, families and local communities and provide RRR students with information on all pathways and available support so they can make informed choices about the study options best suited to them.
18. Improve and promote online portals for providing career information and advice. This includes innovative models for providing virtual work experience, particularly for those in remote areas where access to face-to-face career advice and workplace learning is more difficult. This action should be complemented by research to understand how RRR students access career advice and information to ensure online resources meet their needs.

19. Establish aspiration-raising initiatives targeted at students and families such as an RRR ambassador program covering both VET and higher education and other initiatives to build local RRR alumni networks. This may be similar to, or build on, the Australian VET Alumni program, which incorporates the Australian Apprenticeships Ambassadors program.
20. Improve access to high quality VET programs in RRR schools, including mapping current programs and funding arrangements to identify and share good practice. This work would be progressed collaboratively by the Commonwealth and states and territories. It should give strong preference for models of delivery of VET courses by RTOs and school community partnerships that have been effective in improving local employment outcomes.
21. Examine best practice in RRR schools to engage and retain students until Year 12.
22. Building on the Halsey Review, undertake further collaborative work with jurisdictions to improve teacher support and supply in RRR areas, through:
 - supporting a focus on RRR education as part of the ongoing implementation of national reforms to initial teacher education
 - improving opportunities for high quality professional experience for initial teacher education students
 - providing additional incentives to train in RRR areas
 - flexibility for experienced teachers to move between jurisdictions, and
 - consideration of RRR content in the Australian curriculum.
23. Improve training, professional development, mentoring and other support for principals and school leaders in RRR areas, to ensure they are well prepared before and during their appointment and tenure.

Equity groups

A number of actions are proposed to address the additional challenges faced by specific equity groups, including Indigenous Australians, low SES students, students with disability and those from remote and very remote locations.

An important area for reform is the HEPP program, which could be improved by closer targeting of funding to longer-term, cost effective, evidence-based programs for RRR students. It is recommended that dedicated funding be quarantined for this purpose and targeted to activities, such as outreach programs, which build aspiration in low SES students and RRR students across the full income spectrum. A small amount of funding would also be set aside to pilot innovative approaches.

The issues associated with tertiary education participation by Indigenous Australians are complex and extend beyond the education portfolio. Nevertheless, a limited number of modest and practical measures have been identified. It is apparent that significant work is needed to find ways of improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the Advisory Group strongly supports Indigenous education as an ongoing policy focus.

Given the significant disparity in outcomes for RRR Indigenous students, particularly in more remote areas, improving Indigenous outcomes should be a high priority for any new HEPPP initiatives. More generally, institutions should be encouraged to do more to provide flexible delivery models and support on Country education provision, improve outreach services, mentoring and support to distance students, and provide tailored academic support for Indigenous students in their later years of study. Providing uncapped funding for Commonwealth-funded university places for Indigenous students from RRR areas would also further encourage Indigenous enrolments.

In general, tailored support for RRR students with disability, and other equity groups, should be designed into wider initiatives at the outset. Tertiary providers should also be encouraged to

implement programs that allow students to take a break from their studies for hardship or cultural reasons, thus improving overall retention.

Recommendation five:

Improve participation and outcomes for RRR students from equity groups including low SES students, Indigenous students, students with disability and remote students by:

- modifying the HEPPP to better target funding to cost effective RRR programs
- providing demand-driven funding for RRR Indigenous university students, and
- establishing tailored initiatives for equity groups and those experiencing hardship.

Actions

24. Modify the HEPPP to improve its effectiveness in supporting improved outcomes for RRR students:

- Allocate a dedicated component of HEPPP funding to provide longer-term support for cost effective, evidence-based programs for RRR students including programs delivered through regionally-based, collaborative, multi-university and cross-sectoral partnerships.
- Allocate a smaller component of funding to pilot new and innovative approaches for RRR students.
- Additional funding could be provided to support these changes.

25. Uncap funding for Commonwealth-supported places for Indigenous students from RRR areas.

26. Improve outcomes for Indigenous students from RRR areas through supporting flexible delivery models (on Country delivery) incorporating co-design and co-implementation, outreach services, mentoring and also providing support to distance students and tailored academic support for students in their later years of study.

27. Encourage tertiary providers to implement programs to support improved retention of students facing hardship due to drought and other climatic events, or needing to participate in Indigenous cultural practices and protocols by allowing them to take a break from their studies, similar to support available for elite athletes and defence reservists.

28. Ensure the specific support needs of equity groups, such as students with disability, are taken into account as part of any wider initiatives to improve the quality, availability and range of support provided by tertiary institutions.

Regional development

The success of Australia is dependent on its regions. Boosting the contribution made by RRR Australia will build the nation, increase productivity, and promote decentralisation. Strengthening the role of education providers in the regions is a critical part of this process.

The full range of actions canvassed in this chapter will contribute to this objective, including changes to increase the number of Commonwealth supported student places in regional universities. These actions will not only stimulate economic and cultural growth but also increase educational access more broadly.

Further actions are also proposed to enhance capacity in RRR tertiary education institutions, including through the establishment of a grants program aimed at enhancing research capacity and research partnerships, and dedicated work to explore opportunities to establish research infrastructure in RRR areas.

International education also enriches RRR communities, through both the goods and services purchased by international students and the engagement opportunities they bring. As a result, supporting ongoing work to attract international students to RRR areas will contribute to regional growth and prosperity.

Finally, work integrated learning (WIL) can play an important role in enhancing the skills and employability of students, as well as attract and retain students in RRR areas. Establishing a program to support VET and higher education students in both RRR and metropolitan areas to undertake WIL placements in RRR areas will enhance pathways for students, while strengthening RRR communities more generally.

Recommendation six:

Strengthen the role of tertiary education providers in regional development and grow Australia's regions by:

- increasing the research capacity of regional universities including identifying opportunities to establish research infrastructure
- continuing to explore strategies to attract domestic and international students, and
- increasing opportunities to undertake work integrated learning in RRR areas.

Actions

29. Further enhance regional research capacity by supporting regional university providers to improve their research capacity by:
 - implementing a new grants program to enhance research capacity in regional universities, including partnering with metropolitan universities, engagement with local employers and industries, and exploring opportunities to increase their role in providing national research infrastructure, and
 - identifying opportunities to establish national research infrastructure in RRR areas, including undertaking a comprehensive scoping study to underpin future national research infrastructure investments.
30. Continue to explore strategies to attract domestic and international students to RRR areas, building on recent initiatives.
31. Establish a program to support VET and university students in both RRR and metropolitan areas to undertake WIL placements in RRR areas, including internships, mentorships, practicums, research, teaching and tutoring placements.

Implementation

Implementation arrangements are discussed further in Part four of the report. To ensure the Strategy and its actions are effectively implemented, robust and cohesive governance, stakeholder engagement, evaluation and monitoring arrangements are necessary. These arrangements must capture the diverse needs of RRR Australia, and the different challenges faced by rural and remote communities, compared to regional communities.

As part of the Terms of Reference, the Advisory Group explored the value of establishing an RRR Education Commissioner. While stakeholders expressed a variety of views, the balance of opinion was clearly in support of establishing the role. The Advisory Group believes a Commissioner would be useful in coordinating effort, overseeing implementation and providing a national focus for RRR education, training and research.

Another critical area for action is the geographical classification of areas to support the monitoring of the Strategy and better targeting for future initiatives. The Advisory Group found that the current system used by the ABS does not take into account a number of issues related to tertiary education access, including proximity to education and training providers. As such, a new geographical classification system is necessary to both monitor access to tertiary education for RRR communities and inform the targeting of support.

Recommendation seven

Establish mechanisms to coordinate the implementation effort and support monitoring of the Strategy by:

- establishing a Regional, Rural and Remote Education Commissioner, with a broad remit in relation to RRR education matters, and
- developing an improved geographical classification tool for tertiary education purposes.

Actions

32. Establish a Commissioner for Regional, Rural and Remote Education to provide advice on a broad range of education issues and oversee the implementation of the Strategy, working with a wide range of relevant stakeholders and providing a national focus for RRR education, training and research.
33. The Australian Government Department of Education work with the ABS to develop a geographical classification system that measures rurality and remoteness at a finer level for education and training purposes.

Part four: Implementing the Strategy

The Plan for change in the section above outlines recommendations and actions the Australian Government could take to address the vast disparity in tertiary education outcomes in RRR areas, compared to metropolitan areas.

Recommendation seven focuses on the implementation of the Strategy. Its actions are aimed at supporting coordination of effort and providing a national focus for RRR education by introducing two new national mechanisms: (1) a Commissioner for RRR education; and (2) a new geographical classification system for education and training purposes. These two actions, as well as a wider discussion about stakeholder engagement, monitoring and evaluation related to the Strategy, are covered below.

RRR Education Commissioner

Effective implementation of the Strategy will require partnerships and efforts across governments, local communities, education providers and employers. In particular, strong community leadership will prove vital to the ongoing success of policy actions and programs. The Halsey Review highlighted the need for a “joined up effort” to achieve a sustained, national RRR education focus and suggested a dedicated Commissioner could drive, monitor and report on outcomes and progress. Having considered this proposal further and taking into account the full range of views expressed through the consultation and submission process, the Advisory Group recommends the establishment of a Commissioner for RRR Education.

It is proposed that the Commissioner would work with RRR communities, education providers, employers and across all levels of government to improve tertiary education access, participation and outcomes. The Commissioner would champion, coordinate effort and oversee the implementation and monitoring of the Strategy. The Commissioner would provide a national focus for RRR education, training and research and act at the forefront of government decision-making.

As well as overseeing the implementation of the Strategy, the Commissioner could have a broader remit in advising the Australian Government, through the Education Minister, on a range of education matters, spanning early childhood, schools and tertiary education.

The Commissioner would:

- report annually on progress with implementing the Strategy and tertiary education participation and outcomes in RRR areas
- provide advice on a broad range of RRR education policy issues, including barriers to access and participation in education and training
- be a champion for RRR education, keeping the issues at the forefront for government and the public and articulating their relevance to broader policy agendas
- work closely and engage strategically with peak RRR parent, student and community bodies and all tertiary education providers
- bring together education-related efforts across all levels of government, key stakeholders and communities
- work with Commonwealth and state and territory governments to grow opportunities for VET in RRR areas
- support information sharing between initiatives, including advocacy and sharing of emerging issues and best practice and developing community-led approaches
- provide advice on regional development issues by working with stakeholders to build partnerships and enhance the contribution of tertiary education to regional development

- advocate RRR investment and philanthropy as a means of developing national social cohesion, economic development and nation building
- facilitate information exchange and liaison between Regional Study Hubs; assist in the start-up phase of new Hubs and, as required, facilitate effective cooperation between Regional Study Hubs and their education partners, and
- monitor the development of research infrastructure in RRR Australia and at regionally-based universities.

The Commissioner would report to the Australian Government Education Minister. A five year term of appointment is suggested. Consideration could then be given to extending this timeframe, subject to the level of ongoing implementation activity, oversight required and the effectiveness of the role. Capacity should be established within the DoE to support the functions and directions of the Commissioner.

Stakeholder engagement and partnerships

Effective implementation of the Strategy will require partnerships and efforts across governments, local communities, education providers and employers.

- **The Commonwealth as well as all state and territory governments** have an interest in increasing the tertiary attainment of people in RRR areas and, as such, have a shared responsibility to act in support of these communities. This responsibility includes policy development and implementation, as well as monitoring outcomes and periodic evaluation.
- **Local communities** are the driving force of action in RRR areas and therefore play a key role in providing advice and leadership to government, as well as facilitating information sharing among community members. Community leadership ensures policy action and programs meet the specific needs of the individual communities they are trying to serve.
- **Universities, VET providers, schools and other education providers** also have an interest and responsibility to current and prospective students to assist them to reach their potential and contribute to the nation. Providers must work with governments, communities and employers to implement policy actions effectively and deliver strong education outcomes.
- Finally, **industry and other employers** have a key role to play in engaging with local communities and students to help build aspiration, providing career advice and offering practical training opportunities and employment pathways.

While there is an expectation that the Australian Government will provide national leadership, consultations with stakeholders have highlighted the need for a whole of government approach, with shared responsibility for implementation across multiple levels, sectors and jurisdictions. There will be a range of parties responsible for implementing different policies and actions to contribute towards meeting the targets identified in the Strategy. These will include the Australian Government as well as state and territory governments, education institutions, local governments and community organisations.

The Commissioner for RRR Education would play an important coordination role in bringing these stakeholders together and encouraging accountability for actions. This activity could include regular and ongoing consultations with key stakeholder groups and promoting linkages between these groups. The Commissioner could also collate the views and experience from higher education and VET providers on enrolments and retention of RRR students and disseminate relevant information on best practice.

Reporting, monitoring and evaluation

The Commissioner could take primary responsibility for coordinating the implementation and monitoring of the Strategy. The Commissioner could also be responsible for reporting to the Australian Government Education Minister and, where appropriate, other jurisdictions, on progress against targets and other metrics. The Commissioner would liaise with relevant parties to collate information and ensure all parties are included in discussions on progress and potential changes to recommendations. As a long-term and bipartisan appointment, the Commissioner could play a critical role in consistent and accurate reporting on the Strategy, independent of any changing governments.

Targets

While there is no simple overarching measure of equity in opportunity and access, attainment and participation rates provide a useful indicator of changes in education outcomes for communities and students over time. Higher-level tertiary education is where the disparity exists between RRR areas and metropolitan areas. This disparity progressively worsens with remoteness. Regional and remote areas have high rates of Certificate I, II and III attainment, relative to metropolitan areas, but this begins to flatten at the Certificate IV level and falls significantly for diploma and above qualifications:

- In 2016, 12.2 per cent of persons aged 25-34 in metropolitan areas had Certificate III as their highest qualification, compared with 22.8 per cent in inner regional areas, 22.1 per cent in outer regional areas and 18.6 per cent in remote areas.
- For Certificate IV, the rate was 3.8 per cent in metropolitan areas, compared to 5.4 per cent in inner regional areas, 4.6 per cent in outer regional areas and 3.6 per cent in remote areas.
- For diploma and advanced diploma, the rate was 10.3 per cent in metropolitan areas, compared to 8.5 per cent in inner regional areas, 7.5 per cent in outer regional areas and 6.1 per cent in remote areas.
- For bachelor degrees, the rate was 28.0 per cent in metropolitan areas, compared to 15.9 per cent in inner regional areas, 15.1 per cent in outer regional areas and 12.9 per cent in remote areas.

Analysis of historical census data since 2006 shows that the disparity in higher-level tertiary attainment rates has been persisting over time. As discussed in Part one of the report, while there has been a general increase in attainment rates across all areas including RRR areas, the gap has slightly widened due to attainment in metropolitan areas increasing at a higher rate.

While attainment rates provide a useful measure of educational outcomes for people living in different regions, reducing the gap in educational attainment will take a number of years as current students move through the education pipeline. Attainment rates are also clouded by movement of graduates in and out of regional and remote areas and therefore do not provide a timely and accurate measure of outcomes for school leavers and current cohorts of tertiary students. As a result, it will be important to also measure participation rates – that is, the proportion of the population undertaking tertiary education. Participation rates also provide for more frequent monitoring of outcomes than the five yearly census data and can thus provide an early indicator of improved access.

Over the longer-term, government policy should be aimed at achieving broad parity in higher-level tertiary attainment and participation rates across different locations, acknowledging that the mix is likely to continue to vary from area to area in line with labour market needs. Over the proposed

ten year horizon for the Strategy, a reasonable objective would be to halve the current disparity in attainment and participation, as reflected in the following proposed targets.⁹⁸

Target one: By 2030, halve the disparity between metropolitan and each regional and remote location category for Certificate IV and above attainment rates for 25-34 year olds.

%	Baseline (2016) rate (Metropolitan = 53.8%)	Current differential in percentage points	Target differential by 2030
Inner regional	34.4	19.4	9.7
Outer regional	31.0	22.8	11.4
Remote	26.0	27.6	13.8

Target two: By 2030, halve the disparity between metropolitan and each regional and remote location category for attainment rates of higher education for 25-34 year olds.

%	Baseline (2016) rate (Metropolitan = 39.7%)	Current differential in percentage points	Target differential by 2030
Inner regional	20.5	19.2	9.6
Outer regional	18.9	20.8	10.4
Remote	16.3	23.4	11.7

Target three: By 2030, halve the disparity between metropolitan and each regional and remote location category in the rate of participation for Certificate IV and above by working age Australians (15-64 years).

%	Baseline (2016) rate (Metropolitan = 13.1%)	Current differential in percentage points	Target differential by 2030
Inner regional	12.7	0.4	0.2
Outer regional	11.3	1.8	0.9
Remote	9.4	3.7	1.9

Certificate IV qualifications are included in Targets one and three in recognition of the important role they play in preparing individuals for more specialised roles and in providing a pathway for further learning, particularly for individuals with a Certificate III. Certificate IVs currently account for only a very small proportion of VET delivery. Further improvement in access to these qualifications would therefore complement the already high level of Certificate III provision in RRR areas.

Certificate III qualifications have not been included as a focus for the targets on the basis that access to these qualifications is already relatively high in RRR areas. Nevertheless, it is recognised that Certificate III qualifications play a vital role in the VET sector and labour market. They are particularly important in RRR areas due to local employment options and industries and the Advisory Group believes it is vital that the current high rates of Certificate III participation and attainment are maintained. As part of implementing the Strategy, it will be important to monitor the participation and attainment rates of other levels of qualification and, in particular, Certificate III.

⁹⁸ DoE analysis of the following source data: Attainment rates - 2016 Census of Population and Housing for age 25-34. Participation rates - NCVET, Total VET Students and Courses Collection; DoE Higher education statistics, ABS 2016 Census data. Participation rates are derived by dividing the number of enrolments by the number of people aged 15-64 years in location categories. VET participation rates for Certificate IV and above are based on program enrolments, which overstate participation by individuals as they may enrol in more than one program. Work is currently underway to improve this data.

Data sources and limitations

It is proposed to use the ABS Census of Population and Housing to underpin the metrics used for monitoring changes in attainment rates. While this data is only updated every five years, alternative sources of similar data, such as the annual ABS Survey of Education and Work (SEW), involve much smaller samples and are not considered reliable for monitoring changes in attainment levels for remote and very remote areas.

The 2016 Census data would provide the baseline information for the attainment rates initially, with the potential to review this information on release of the 2021 Census. An interim review of progress against these targets could be undertaken on release of the 2026 Census data, and a final assessment of progress undertaken on release of the 2031 Census, in mid-2032.

There are significant gaps in current available data. In particular, the paucity of data to monitor the movement of high school leavers into different levels of tertiary education is a major shortcoming. The introduction of the Unique Student Identifier (USI) from 2020 may open additional data opportunities in the future, but is not likely to yield any meaningful information until at least mid-2020.

To this end, it is proposed interim solutions be explored to track student activities post-high school, including using analysis of higher education data on students whose basis for admission is secondary school. The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) data may also be useful for this purpose, as it includes data on the proportion of school leavers going on to different types of tertiary education. However, this data is only available for a small sample of students, which can impact statistical accuracy for smaller cohorts, such as students in outer regional and remote areas.

Other additional data sources could be explored, drawing on additional analysis of existing data, or through establishing new datasets or collections. For example, states and territories have access to additional data on schools, VET and economic activity in regions, which could be collated and analysed to provide additional baseline data.

Other metrics and indicators

In addition, it is proposed that a range of measures and indicators be monitored for different locations and population sub-groupings (including equity groups), using a range of data sources such as:

- Attainment and participation through the Survey of Education and Work (SEW)
- Attainment and participation rates for all AQF levels, from Certificate I to postgraduate
- Proportion of school leavers commencing higher-level VET or higher education by age 19
- Attrition rates for higher education and completion rates for VET
- Graduate outcomes, including employment, earnings and satisfaction
- Other relevant Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) data including student satisfaction
- Trends in university offers and acceptance
- Trends in post-school intentions and actions, from LSAY data
- Australian early development census and NAPLAN results, and
- Numbers of international students in regional Australia.

In order to track progress using the targets and other statistics of interest, a database could be established that contains key trend data. This database could be used to produce a “dashboard” or “scorecard” reporting tool, including easily understood infographics to show trends over the life of

the Strategy, which could form part of the annual reporting undertaken by the RRR Education Commissioner.

In addition to the ongoing evaluation activities described above, a detailed evaluation of the success of the Strategy could be undertaken on release of data from the 2031 Census. This evaluation could examine issues of policy design, value for money, administrative processes and impacts on the target group, including:

- summary of progress against the three specific targets
- changes in other educational attainment and participation rates such as Year 12 and Certificate I, II and III qualifications
- tertiary course completion rates of RRR students compared to metropolitan students, and
- the role of education in regional economies.

Further development of geographical classification systems

To support the monitoring of the Strategy, further work is needed to improve the capacity to classify locations based on relative access to education services and tertiary education needs. As touched upon earlier, the current geographical classification system used by the ABS is not designed specifically for use in relation to education and, as a result, there are shortcomings that make it insufficient for the purpose of targeting effort to under-serviced regions and monitoring the Strategy. For example, there are outer regional areas where students face similar isolation and poor access to services (including poor internet access) as students in remote areas. In particular, consultations have identified three major shortcomings when it comes to using this framework for education purposes:

- First, it does not sufficiently take into account a number of issues particularly important for access to education, such as proximity to education and training providers and time to get to services by public transport. There are several factors that could assist in underpinning a more accurate index of relative access to tertiary education.
- Second, the current five-point category structure (major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote) does not sufficiently capture the variation in circumstances and needs of different areas within the broader remoteness categories.
- Third, it does not take into account economic differences that can influence both demand and access to tertiary education. Many communities identify themselves as “rural”, sometimes in association with particular industries such as agriculture and mining. However, the term “rural” does not correspond to any specific location category within this framework. These “rural” locations are often classified as regional despite lower levels of access to services.

A geographical classification system that measures rurality and remoteness at a finer level for tertiary education purposes may be useful to support the monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy.

KEY FINDING 24: Establishment of an RRR Education Commissioner would assist in bringing together effort to implement the Strategy and achieve a sustained, national RRR education focus.

KEY FINDING 25: The current geographical classification system used by the ABS has a number of limitations which make it difficult to use for monitoring tertiary education outcomes and targeting support to communities most in need.

Conclusion

This report provides a strategic direction and plan to address the disparity in tertiary education outcomes that currently exists between individuals from RRR areas and those in metropolitan areas.

In making seven recommendations and the proposed associated actions, the Strategy aims to address the systemic issues that are preventing RRR individuals from having fair and equal access to Australia's high quality tertiary education system. These issues primarily exist in the areas of access to study options, financial support, student support (including tailored support for students from equity groups), career advice and aspiration, schooling and regional development.

While the Strategy has the potential to make a significant difference to the lives of prospective RRR students and their families, as well as increase the prosperity of the nation as a whole, it is vital to acknowledge the following:

- Individuals are diverse, and so are their aspirations. Consequently, decisions around tertiary education will be varied across locations – influenced by where someone may want to live or employment opportunities in different areas. What is important is not that everyone goes to university, but that policy settings ensure people in RRR communities have the same opportunities for tertiary education as those who live anywhere else in Australia.
- Joined-up Commonwealth, state/territory and local commitment and action are essential to drive and sustain change. In particular, strong community leadership will prove vital to the ongoing success of policy actions and programs at a local level.
- Significant work has already been undertaken to provide RRR students with greater choice and access in education, most recently in response to the Halsey Review and through the Australian Government Regional Education package announced in November 2018. New initiatives need to consider and build on this progress to ensure action taken results in effective outcomes for RRR Australia.

This Strategy provides a blueprint for greater equality and fairness in Australia's education landscape. The findings, recommendations and actions of this report (see summary below) point to a range of challenges and opportunities and provide a plan for achieving the stated vision and objectives.

Over the ten years from 2020 to 2030, working towards achieving the Strategy's targets, together with the support of an RRR Education Commissioner to bring initiatives and groups together and monitor progress, will drive what the Advisory Group believes is needed to bring about change. This change will create equal opportunity and improve RRR student participation and outcomes in tertiary education, improving the future prosperity of RRR Australia and our nation.

It is now up to relevant parties to put this plan into action.

Summary of findings, recommendations and actions

Findings	Recommendations	Actions
Access to study options		
<p>KEY FINDING 1: There is limited scope to raise participation and attainment rates within the current capped system for allocation of Commonwealth funded university places.</p> <p>KEY FINDING 2: There is potential to improve the range of study options available to students by expanding access to Regional Study Hubs and developing new higher education offerings that bridge the gap between VET and university.</p> <p>KEY FINDING 3: Access to 21st century internet is crucial to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for students, particularly in rural and remote locations where issues with affordable access and reliability are frequently experienced.</p> <p>KEY FINDING 4: There are issues with articulation and recognition of prior learning between VET and higher education, which disproportionately affect RRR students.</p> <p>KEY FINDING 5: VET plays an important role in meeting the needs of RRR areas, but there are issues with declining levels of service provision in some areas and inconsistent regulations between jurisdictions that need to be addressed.</p>	<p>Recommendation one</p> <p>Improve access to tertiary study options for students in RRR areas by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing demand-driven funding for university places in regional areas • exploring new higher education offerings focused on professional skills development • expanding access to Regional Study Hubs • addressing problems with student access to affordable, reliable, high speed internet services, and • improving access to high quality VET programs in RRR areas. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide demand-driven funding for Commonwealth supported bachelor-level university places, excluding medical, for domestic students studying at regional and remote campuses. To complement this reform, increase funding for enabling and sub-bachelor places at regional campuses, and for places used by students attending Regional Study Hubs. 2. Explore with the VET and higher education sector the development of a new type of higher education offering focused more on practical learning and technical and professional skills development. 3. Expand and enhance the Regional Study Hubs program using a broader range of models tailored to community needs, with sufficient program management and governance support to ensure their success. 4. Prioritise and accelerate work to ensure that all students in RRR areas can access internet services to an agreed benchmark standard. This work requires a detailed investigation into the internet speed, capacity and affordability requirements of RRR students and tertiary education providers and how to deliver access to reliable 21st century internet services that will meet these needs. The work would build on the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review. 5. Implement a more consistent, transparent and transferrable system of recognition of prior learning and credit transfer to support pathways for articulation between providers, informed by the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) review. 6. Work with state and territory governments to improve student access to high quality VET programs in RRR areas including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • asking jurisdictions to reduce the barriers preventing RTOs from providing publicly subsidised training places in multiple states and territories, to address gaps and improve choice in access for students from RRR areas • exploring strategies to better meet the needs of cross border RRR populations • targeting expansion in access to qualifications highly relevant to the needs of RRR industries, and • requesting jurisdictions increase the availability of subsidised places for VET courses in RRR areas where there is demonstrated demand and associated employment outcomes.

Findings	Recommendations	Actions
Financial support		
<p>KEY FINDING 6: The costs associated with relocating for tertiary study can deter RRR students and create additional pressures for RRR students and their families, leading to higher rates of RRR students who defer their studies or drop out in their first year.</p> <p>KEY FINDING 7: Transport costs associated with tertiary education can be a major issue for students who relocate to study and for those who live in RRR areas.</p> <p>KEY FINDING 8: RRR students often experience difficulty obtaining clear and accessible information about financial support</p>	<p>Recommendation two</p> <p>Improve access to financial support, to support greater fairness and more equal opportunity, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • introducing a new tertiary education access payment for students who relocate for study from an outer regional or remote area • allowing greater flexibility in pathways to qualify for independent Youth Allowance • providing greater assistance to students and families to meet costs associated with travel to and from their home communities, and • promoting and improving the clarity of online information about available financial support. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Introduce a new tertiary education access payment of \$5000 available to all school leavers that relocate from an outer regional or remote location to undertake full-time, higher-level tertiary education. The course would need to be of at least a year duration and provided at an institution at least 90 minutes by public transport from their home. 8. Allow RRR learners who successfully undertake their first year of tertiary study externally, including at a Regional Study Hub, to access independent Youth Allowance or independent ABSTUDY Allowance if they relocate to continue their study in their second year. The course would need to be of at least a further year duration and provided at an institution at least 90 minutes by public transport from their home. 9. Reduce the earnings requirements under the Concessional Workforce test for independent Youth Allowance and review the recent changes to the parental means test cut-offs, to address any problems with uptake. 10. Improve support for RRR students who study externally, either at home or at a Regional Study Hub, by providing them with Away from Base assistance when they are required to travel to complete a part of their course. 11. Expand Fares Allowance to enable Year 12 students to visit prospective tertiary campuses, enable relocated students to return home during their mid-year break and their families to visit them during their first year of study. 12. Improve and promote online access to financial support information to provide students and families with clearer information on the support available for tertiary studies, by improving existing websites or creating a new portal that consolidates existing information.

Findings	Recommendations	Actions
Other student support		
<p>KEY FINDING 9: There are a variety of successful support programs that higher education and VET institutions run to assist RRR students throughout their studies; however, offerings are ad hoc and vary considerably between education providers.</p> <p>KEY FINDING 10: RRR school leavers are more likely to relocate for study and live independently, away from their family and other support networks.</p>	<p>Recommendation three</p> <p>Improve the quality and range of student support services for RRR students to address the challenges of transition and higher rates of attrition by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying and disseminating information on best practice student support services • introducing new requirements for providers to publish transparent information on available service offerings, and • working with state and territory governments to improve transport options for students. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Identify and disseminate information on a core suite of best practice interventions and offerings universities should provide to RRR students, including the following services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pastoral care • specific RRR student orientation • mentoring/buddy programs • priority accommodation for RRR students • academic support, including academic concierge • regular contact with all RRR students via email, phone and SMS, especially those identified as at risk of dropping out • childcare support • employment assistance, and • cultural safety. 14. Require transparent reporting by institutions, to enable students to see the support services a particular tertiary institution has available. 15. Encourage providers to provide comprehensive information to RRR students on adulthood basics, including budgeting advice, legal and tenancy agreements, time management and health care, including by leveraging existing online platforms aimed at prospective and current tertiary students. 16. Improve transport options for RRR students by requesting state and territory governments to allow RRR students travelling to local VET programs, universities and Study Hubs to access school bus services.

Findings	Recommendations	Actions
Aspiration and preparing for success		
<p>KEY FINDING 11: Children in RRR areas are more likely to commence school developmentally vulnerable than those in metropolitan areas, and this relative disadvantage continues through school, with students less likely to finish Year 12.</p> <p>KEY FINDING 12: There is a strong view among RRR tertiary education providers and communities that current mechanisms for delivering career advice, which are particularly important to build and maintain aspiration in RRR areas, are not working well.</p> <p>KEY FINDING 13: High quality VET in Schools programs engage and provide pathways for many RRR students; however, delivery is often inconsistent in RRR areas.</p> <p>KEY FINDING 14: Further effort is required to build on the work of Gonski and Halsey to improve teacher preparation and supply, as well as support for teachers and principals in RRR areas.</p>	<p>Recommendation four</p> <p>Build aspiration, improve career advice and strengthen RRR schools to better prepare RRR students for success, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implementing a regionally-based model for independent, professional career advice • improving online career related information and advice • establishing aspiration-raising initiatives covering both VET and higher education • expanding access to high quality VET programs in RRR schools • undertaking further work to improve RRR schools and Year 12 completion rates, and • improving support available to teachers, principals and school leaders. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Implement a regionally-based model for independent career advice in RRR locations, to be developed in collaboration between the Commonwealth and states and territories. This should be delivered by professional career advisors with strong links to schools, tertiary education providers, industry, families and local communities and provide RRR students with information on all pathways and available support so they can make informed choices about the study options best suited to them. 18. Improve and promote online portals for providing career information and advice. This includes innovative models for providing virtual work experience, particularly for those in remote areas where access to face-to-face career advice and workplace learning is more difficult. This action should be complemented by research to understand how RRR students access career advice and information to ensure online resources meet their needs. 19. Establish aspiration-raising initiatives targeted at students and families such as an RRR ambassador program covering both VET and higher education and other initiatives to build local RRR alumni networks. This may be similar to, or build on, the Australian VET Alumni program, which incorporates the Australian Apprenticeships Ambassadors program. 20. Improve access to high quality VET programs in RRR schools, including mapping current programs and funding arrangements to identify and share good practice. This work would be progressed collaboratively by the Commonwealth and states and territories. It should give strong preference for models of delivery of VET courses by RTOs and school community partnerships that have been effective in improving local employment outcomes. 21. Examine best practice in RRR schools to engage and retain students until Year 12.

Findings	Recommendations	Actions
		<p>22. Building on the Halsey Review, undertake further collaborative work with jurisdictions to improve teacher support and supply in RRR areas, through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting a focus on RRR education as part of the ongoing implementation of national reforms to initial teacher education • improving opportunities for high quality professional experience for initial teacher education students • providing additional incentives to train in RRR areas • flexibility for experienced teachers to move between jurisdictions, and • consideration of RRR content in the Australian curriculum. <p>23. Improve training, professional development, mentoring and other support for principals and school leaders in RRR areas, to ensure they are well prepared before and during their appointment and tenure.</p>

Findings	Recommendations	Actions
Equity groups		
<p>KEY FINDING 15: While HEPPP plays an important role in improving outcomes for low SES students, including RRR students, its role in supporting RRR students could be enhanced.</p> <p>KEY FINDING 16: There is limited scope within current university funding controls to increase participation in higher education by students from equity groups, including Indigenous students.</p> <p>KEY FINDING 17: Flexible delivery options are needed to appropriately cater for students from RRR areas, including co-designed and co-implemented on Country delivery for Indigenous Australians in remote and very remote areas.</p> <p>KEY FINDING 18: Hardships such as drought and other climatic events and Indigenous cultural practices and protocols may impact on an RRR students' study and retention.</p> <p>KEY FINDING 19: RRR students from low SES backgrounds, Indigenous students and students with disability face multiple challenges and require tailored support.</p>	<p>Recommendation five</p> <p>Improve participation and outcomes for RRR students from equity groups including low SES students, Indigenous students, students with disability and remote students by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • modifying the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) to better target funding to cost effective RRR programs • providing demand-driven funding for RRR Indigenous university students, and • establishing tailored initiatives for equity groups and those experiencing hardship. 	<p>24. Modify the HEPPP to improve its effectiveness in supporting improved outcomes for RRR students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate a dedicated component of HEPPP funding to provide longer-term support for cost effective, evidence-based programs for RRR students including programs delivered through regionally-based, collaborative, multi-university and cross-sectoral partnerships. • Allocate a smaller component of funding to pilot new and innovative approaches for RRR students. • Additional funding could be provided to support these changes. <p>25. Uncap funding for Commonwealth-supported places for Indigenous students from RRR areas.</p> <p>26. Improve outcomes for Indigenous students from RRR areas through supporting flexible delivery models (on Country delivery) incorporating co-design and co-implementation, outreach services, mentoring and also providing support to distance students and tailored academic support for students in their later years of study.</p> <p>27. Encourage tertiary providers to implement programs to support improved retention of students facing hardship due to drought and other climatic events, or needing to participate in Indigenous cultural practices and protocols by allowing them to take a break from their studies, similar to support available for elite athletes and defence reservists.</p> <p>28. Ensure the specific support needs of equity groups, such as students with disability, are taken into account as part of any wider initiatives to improve the quality, availability and range of support provided by tertiary institutions.</p>

Findings	Recommendations	Actions
Regional development		
<p>KEY FINDING 20: Research and development by tertiary providers enhances long-term regional development and local industries.</p> <p>KEY FINDING 21: Increasing student places in RRR communities will increase education access while also growing communities both economically and culturally.</p> <p>KEY FINDING 22: International education enriches RRR communities, including by bringing economic benefits and valuable engagement opportunities.</p> <p>KEY FINDING 23: The potential of RRR Australia could be further maximised by developing the research capacity of regional universities and supporting other opportunities to attract and retain students in RRR areas, including work integrated learning placements.</p>	<p>Recommendation six Strengthen the role of tertiary education providers in regional development and grow Australia’s regions by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing the research capacity of regional universities including identifying opportunities to establish research infrastructure • continuing to explore strategies to attract domestic and international students, and • increasing opportunities to undertake work-integrated learning (WIL) in RRR areas. 	<p>29. Further enhance regional research capacity by supporting regional university providers to improve their research capacity by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implementing a new grants program to enhance research capacity in regional universities, including partnering with metropolitan universities, engagement with local employers and industries, and exploring opportunities to increase their role in providing national research infrastructure, and • identifying opportunities to establish national research infrastructure in RRR areas, including undertaking a comprehensive scoping study to underpin future national research infrastructure investments. <p>30. Continue to explore strategies to attract domestic and international students to RRR areas, building on recent initiatives.</p> <p>31. Establish a program to support VET and university students in both RRR and metropolitan areas to undertake WIL placements in RRR areas, including internships, mentorships, practicums, research, teaching and tutoring placements.</p>

Findings	Recommendations	Actions
Implementation		
<p>KEY FINDING 24: Establishment of an RRR Education Commissioner would assist in bringing together effort to implement the Strategy and achieve a sustained, national RRR education focus.</p> <p>KEY FINDING 25: The current geographical classification system used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has a number of limitations which make it difficult to use for monitoring tertiary education outcomes and targeting support to communities most in need</p>	<p>Recommendation seven</p> <p>Establish mechanisms to coordinate the implementation effort and support monitoring of the Strategy by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishing a Regional, Rural and Remote Education Commissioner, with a broad remit in relation to RRR education matters, and • developing an improved geographical classification tool for tertiary education purposes. 	<p>32. Establish a Commissioner for Regional, Rural and Remote Education to provide advice on a broad range of education issues and oversee the implementation of the Strategy, working with a wide range of relevant stakeholders and providing a national focus for RRR education, training and research.</p> <p>33. The Australian Government Department of Education work with the ABS to develop a geographical classification system that measures rurality and remoteness at a finer level for education and training purposes.</p>

Appendix A – Overview of background literature

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a succinct synthesis of research relevant to this final report and Strategy, to contextualise and inform the recommendations and actions as well as further policy work to improve the participation and outcomes of RRR students in tertiary education.

This overview of background literature is organised as follows:

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The RRR-metropolitan educational divide: An international phenomenon and concern
- 1.2 The importance of place
- 1.3 RRR student diversity
- 1.4 21st century career construction and the increasing importance of career advice

2.0 Aspirations

- 2.1 Aspirations take many forms
- 2.2 The interplay between occupational and tertiary education aspirations

3.0 Tertiary education enablers and barriers

- 3.1 Change agents

4.0 Increasing equity groups tertiary education participation and outcomes

- 4.1 Benchmarking Australia's widening participation policies and practices
- 4.2 The Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP)

5.0 Key considerations

- 5.1 The Triple Helix Model: How can university-industry-government relationships address the metropolitan-RRR education divide?
- 5.2 How can the recognition of prior learning (RPL) be optimised to help RRR learners?
- 5.3 Should efforts be targeted or is a RRR whole-of-student-lifecycle approach needed?
- 5.4 Themes from recent Australian research projects

1.0 Background

1.1 The RRR-metropolitan educational divide: An international phenomenon and concern

The RRR-metropolitan educational divide is not unique to Australia – it is an international phenomenon.⁹⁹ Referred to by the OECD as the ‘urban advantage’,¹⁰⁰ the educational outcomes of RRR students at all levels of schooling, including tertiary education, has been a cause of Commonwealth concern for some time (e.g. the Bradley Review 2008,¹⁰¹ the Halsey Review 2018¹⁰²) as well as for state and territory governments (e.g. Victoria Parliament Rural and Regional Committee 2010;¹⁰³ Queensland Department of Education and Training 2017¹⁰⁴). More recently, Australia’s 2018 *National Review on the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals* reports that access to quality educational opportunities is particularly challenging in rural and remote areas and this has disproportionately impacted many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.¹⁰⁵

Access to tertiary education is a human right as detailed in the *UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989)*.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, among the recommendations made by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2000) National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education was that in Australia ‘all governments and education providers should adopt the five criteria of availability, accessibility, affordability, acceptability and adaptability’ in ‘funding, provision strategies, and evaluations programs’.¹⁰⁷

The reasons for the educational divide are numerous, multifaceted, place-dependent and not easily solved. For example, it has been known for some time that early school achievement influences tertiary education aspirations in Australia¹⁰⁸ and more recently that university outreach can encourage RRR youth whose future plans do not include tertiary study, to reconsider their aspirations.¹⁰⁹ The implications of the educational divide are far-reaching. As Andreas Schleicher, OECD Special Advisor on Education Policy highlighted, countries with exemplary education systems make knowledge and skill acquisition ‘everybody’s business, with governments, employers, and individuals all involved’ and that high quality career advice is essential for sound career choices.¹¹⁰

⁹⁹ Cooper, G., Strathdee, R., and Baglin, J. (2018). Examining geography as a predictor of students’ university intentions: a logistic regression analysis. *Rural Society*, 27(2), 83-93. United Nations (2015). 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal 4 ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’, Indicator 4.5.1. Available at:

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>.

¹⁰⁰ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (2013). What makes urban schools different? PISA in Focus, 28.

¹⁰¹ Bradley, D.N.P., Nugent, H., and Scales, B. (2008). Review of Australian Higher Education Final Report. Canberra: Australian Government.

¹⁰² Halsey, J. (2018). Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education: Final Report. Canberra: Australian Government.

¹⁰³ Victoria Parliament Rural and Regional Committee. (2010). Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria: Final Report. Melbourne: Government of Victoria.

¹⁰⁴ Queensland Department of Education and Training. (2017). Advancing Rural and Remote Education in Queensland State Schools: Consultation Report. Brisbane: Queensland Government.

¹⁰⁵ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. (2018). Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Canberra: Australian Government.

¹⁰⁶ United Nations. (2000). United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

¹⁰⁷ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. (2000). Recommendations: National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education. Sydney.

¹⁰⁸ Long, M., Carpenter, P., and Hayden, M. (1999). Participation in Education and Training, 1980-1994. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth. Research Report. Australian Council for Educational Research. Victoria.

¹⁰⁹ Kilpatrick, S., Katersky Barnes, R., Heath, J., Lovat, A., Kong, W. C., Flittner, N., and Avitaia, S. (2019). Disruptions and bridges in rural Australia: Higher education aspiration to expectation of participation. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 38(3), 550-564.

¹¹⁰ Schleicher A. (2014). A plan for education, OECD Forum. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/education/a-plan-for-education.htm>.

Australian tertiary education has diversified and expanded over the last decade. In addition to the benefits for individual students, ensuring equal and equitable educational opportunities and choices for RRR populations is essential for nation building contributing to ‘a fair, democratic, prosperous, and enterprising nation; reconciliation with Indigenous Australia; and cultural, civic and intellectual life’.¹¹¹

1.2 The importance of place

Terms like ‘RRR’ and ‘regional Australia’ are used as shorthand for a diverse array of communities shaped by their local employers and industries, population size and characteristics, geography, resources, history and proximity to larger cities.¹¹² Place plays an important role in people’s lives, not only as the geographical area where they live but also in terms of how they see themselves.¹¹³ People’s identity, sense of belonging and purpose in life is intertwined with the places from which they were born or live.¹¹⁴ Places shape who people are, how they view the world, and have a profound influence on who they want to be, what they want to do¹¹⁵ and their attitude and aspirations in relation to education and careers.¹¹⁶ Place-based factors such as labour markets, literacy and numeracy levels, and access to quality internet contribute to the education divide between areas requiring a ‘sustained and long-term commitment to change, development of local solutions that are targeted, tailored and agile, and integration of government services to support local solutions and effectively drive change’.¹¹⁷

There has been concern about access to tertiary education for RRR communities, particularly since the mid-20th century. The Martin Committee (1964)¹¹⁸ *Report on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia* discussed the growing demand for tertiary institutions in RRR areas. The *Commonwealth Schools Commission Report for the Triennium 1976-78* identified ‘country students’ as an educationally disadvantaged group with special needs and funding requirements. This evolved into the Disadvantaged Country Areas Program (1977) and later the Country Areas Program (1982), with assistance programs such as the Isolated Children Scheme (1973) and Loan Video Program (1982) to provide support and subsidies for children in RRR Australia.¹¹⁹

The 1987 *Schooling in Rural Australia Report*¹²⁰ examined the factors that influence school retention and completion rates of RRR students. The report also drew attention to the influence of parents and that local work opportunities are not always dependent on tertiary education qualifications, as well as the associated challenges of relocation, costs of living away from home and adjustment difficulties for those RRR students who choose tertiary education. Much has already been done to address these inequities over the years. However, many of the access concerns

¹¹¹ Zacharias N., and Brett, M. (2019). *The Best Chance for All: Student Equity 2030 – A Long-term Strategic Vision for Student Equity in Higher Education*, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Perth: Curtin University.

¹¹² See <http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/2015/09/foundations-of-regional-australia/>.

¹¹³ Relph, E. (1976). *Place and Placelessness*, London: Pion.

¹¹⁴ Proshansky, H., Fabian, A., and Kaminoff, R. (1983). Place identity: Physical world socialization of the self. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 3, 57-83.

¹¹⁵ Casey, E. (1997). *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

¹¹⁶ Kintrea, K., St Clair, R., and Houston, M. (2015). Shaped by place? Young people's aspirations in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 18(5), 666-684.

¹¹⁷ Vinson, T., Rawsthorne, M., Beavis, A., and Ericson, M. (2015). *Dropping Off the Edge 2015*. Jesuit Social Services / Catholic Social Services Australia. Available at <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/2015/07/21/report-dropping-edge-2015>.

¹¹⁸ Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia (1964). *Tertiary Education in Australia: Report of the Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia to the Australian Universities Commission*, 1, 270. Canberra.

¹¹⁹ Commonwealth Schools Commission (1987). *Schooling in Rural Australia*. Curriculum Development Centre. Canberra.

¹²⁰ Commonwealth Schools Commission (1987). *Schooling in Rural Australia*. Curriculum Development Centre. Canberra.

expressed in earlier times were echoed in the consultations and submissions. Thus, access remains a critical factor in participation in tertiary education by RRR Australians.

1.3 RRR student diversity

While RRR students may share some similar life and education experiences due to geographical factors, they vary in their attitudes towards tertiary education and the way they approach tertiary education.¹²¹ Recognising different RRR student types is important to developing programs and supports that accommodate their needs. RRR students vary in terms of their views about relocation in order to pursue tertiary study. Analysis of the literature reveals four scenarios:¹²² those that want to stay and can stay in their hometown ('the stayer'); those that want to leave but have to stay in their home town ('the reluctant stayer'); others who want to leave and can leave their hometown ('the leaver') or want to stay but have to leave their hometown ('the reluctant leaver').

In summary, the literature suggests:

- the RRR-metropolitan education divide is complex and an international phenomenon.
- place-based factors such as employment opportunities, education levels and access to services such as the internet, are highly influential in people's lives and tertiary education choices.
- access remains a critical factor in participation in tertiary education by RRR Australians.
- policy responses need to be flexible to accommodate RRR student diversity.

1.4 21st century career construction and the increasing importance of career advice

The literature outlines a number of models of how people decide upon and develop their careers and how these models have changed over time in response to labour market influences and technological advances. In the 21st century, the way careers are constructed has changed, with previously predictable pathways to chosen careers, such as via a university degree or a VET qualification, no longer a 'guarantee' of employment.¹²³ New occupations are always emerging for which new knowledge and skill sets are required.¹²⁴ Now career portfolios have replaced single careers and lifelong jobs, with an emphasis on acquiring transferable skill sets that are relevant across multiple occupations.¹²⁵ The emerging gig economy means that peoples working lives may comprise of more part-time, short-term and self-employment experiences and career mini-cycles.¹²⁶

Changing technology will result in broader changes to local RRR economies and work opportunities. Houghton's (2019)¹²⁷ report *The Future of Regional Jobs* suggested that the immediate task is to build RRR community awareness of future jobs and the skills required. The report also notes that

¹²¹ Russell-Bennett, R., Drennan, J. and Raciti, M. (2016). Social Marketing Strategy for Widening Tertiary Education Participation in Low SES Communities: Field Research. Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology.

¹²² For example: Quin, R., Stone, C., and Trinidad, S. (2017). Low Rates of Transition to University for High Achieving Students in Regional NSW. Report for NSW Department of Education. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Perth: Curtin University. Pollard, L. (2018). Remote Student University Success—An Analysis of Policy and Practice. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Perth: Curtin University. Harvey, A., Burnheim, C., Joschko, L., and Luckman, M. (2012). From Aspiration to Destination: Understanding the Decisions of University Applicants in Regional Victoria. Deakin: Australian Association for Research in Education.

¹²³ Savickas, M.L., Nota, L., Rossier, J., Dauwalder, J.P., Duarte, M.E., Guichard, J., ... van Vianen, A.E.M. (2009). Life designing: A paradigm for career construction in the 21st century. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 75(3), 239–250. Productivity Commission (2017). *Shifting the Dial 5 Year Productivity Review*. Canberra.

¹²⁴ Business Council of Australia (2017). *Future-Proof: Protecting Australians Through Education and Skills*. Melbourne.

¹²⁵ Savickas, M.L., Nota, L., Rossier, J., Dauwalder, J.P., Duarte, M.E., Guichard, J., ... van Vianen, A.E.M. (2009). Life designing: A paradigm for career construction in the 21st century. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 75(3), 239–250. Universities Australia (2018). Submission in response to 'future proof.' Deakin.

¹²⁶ The Foundation of Young Australians (2017). *The New Work Smarts: Thriving in the New Work Order*, Sydney. Savickas, M.L., Porfeli, E.J., Hilton, T.L., and Savickas, S. (2018). The Student Career Construction Inventory. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 106(June), 138–152.

¹²⁷ Houghton K. (2019). *The Future of Regional Jobs*. The Regional Australia Institute. Canberra.

with lower internet connectivity and technology readiness in remote areas, this may mean fewer jobs are vulnerable to automation. To assist with RRR communities, the Regional Australia Institute's Regional Job Automation Pack provides resources including a Job Vulnerability Data Tool with insights as to the impact of automation at the Local Government Area level.¹²⁸ There are also resources available to assist with understanding current employment trends in RRR Australia. The Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business Labour Market Information Portal provides insights into jobs with the Internet Vacancy Index (IVI)¹²⁹ increasingly used as a barometer of labour market activity. For 37 RRR communities, the IVI is linked to an interactive Regional Jobs Vacancy Map.¹³⁰

The decision to participate in tertiary study is typically driven in the first instance by the career being pursued, but the benefits of tertiary education extend beyond employment, to participating in society and contributing to the wider community.¹³¹ This seems to reflect a bigger shift away from human capital towards human capabilities to frame education outcomes.¹³² The notion of 'employability' is promoted to students and is a process that brings together career development principles with work integrated learning (WIL) principles and practices.¹³³ WIL provides work-related experiences, and through industry engagement, is an effective way to learn about a profession and to apply learning and skills in a real world, work context.¹³⁴ Australian universities tend to focus on WIL and undergraduate students in particular, place a high value on WIL.¹³⁵ There are barriers that inhibit students partaking in WIL experiences such as financial pressures during the WIL experience (e.g. not being able to work) and the availability and location of WIL in more rural areas can also lead to additional issues with accommodation, commuting distance and/or availability of public transport.¹³⁶

Some RRR students report feeling that they lacked reliable information about careers when at school, were left to their own devices to identify courses and research pathways to those courses and thus they felt vulnerable to making poor decisions about courses and careers.¹³⁷ The Career Industry Council of Australia is the national peak body for the career industry, with research showing that whilst parents are the primary influencers of their children's career planning, the second most important influencers are career practitioners.¹³⁸ However, as reported by Pollard (2019, p. 13) many RRR schools 'do not have dedicated and qualified career advisers or access to resources that support students to make informed decisions regarding their post-secondary education'. Similar findings were reported in Zacharias et al. (2018), who identified the need for career awareness and development activities that show school students a wider variety of options. University outreach

¹²⁸ See <http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/regional-job-automation-pack/>

¹²⁹ See <http://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/GainInsights/VacancyReport> .

¹³⁰ See <http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/regional-jobs-vacancy-map/> .

¹³¹ James, N.J. (2017). More than Merely Work-ready: Vocationalism versus Professionalism in Legal Education. *UNSW Law Journal*, 40(1), 186-210.

¹³² See Hoffmann, A.M., and Bory-Adams, A. (2005). The human capability approach and education for sustainable development: Making the abstract real. In 5th Conference on the Capability Approach, Paris.

¹³³ Smith, M., Bell, K., Bennett, D., and McAlpine, A. (2018). Employability in a Global Context: Evolving Policy and Practice in Employability, Work Integrated Learning, and Career Development Learning. Graduate Careers Australia. Wollongong.

¹³⁴ Higgs, J. (2019). Practice-based education: Education for practice employability. In *Education for Employability*, 1, 187-198. Brill Sense.

¹³⁵ Trede, F. (2012). Role of work-integrated learning in developing professionalism and professional identity. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 13(3), 159-167.

¹³⁶ R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd. (2018). Barriers to Work-integrated Learning Opportunities. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

¹³⁷ Zacharias, N., Mitchell, G., Raciti, M., Koshy, P., Li, I., Costello, D., and Trinidad, S. (2018). Widening Regional and Remote Participation: Interrogating the Impact of Outreach Programs Across Queensland. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Perth: Curtin University.

¹³⁸ Career Industry Council of Australia (2017). As key influencers, school career practitioners need more time to assist students make well-informed decisions, Media Release available at: <https://cica.org.au/wp-content/uploads/CICA-Media-Release-21-June-2017.pdf>

plays a critical role in broadening the career horizons for RRR students, with a number of widening participation (WP) programs tailored for Indigenous RRR students found to be successful.¹³⁹

Beyond the availability of career advice, inclusivity of the career advice, particularly with regards to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, is an important facet. The *Behrendt Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (2012)* noted instances where low expectations of academic achievement by career advisors and teachers corroded the confidence of Indigenous students resulting in them believing they were not 'good enough' for tertiary education. The 1985 *Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs* and the 1987 *Schooling in Rural Australia Report* noted the importance of the availability of positive, strengths-focused career advice for Indigenous students.

On Country delivery of career advice should be accessible. The importance of on Country delivery of education was outlined in 1987 *Return to Country: The Aboriginal Homelands Movement in Australia Report*.¹⁴⁰ Overall, the changing nature of career construction and future work not only amplifies the need for effective career advice but this advice can 'future proof' young people, including those from RRR areas and Indigenous Australians.

In summary, the literature suggests:

- changing technology will result in broader changes to local RRR economies and work opportunities.
- RRR students need to consider future work changes when planning their careers.
- career advice is more important than ever before, and new models of career advice are needed to better prepare all students including RRR students, and on Country career advice provided for Indigenous Australians.

2.0 Aspirations

2.1 Aspirations take many forms

The notion of aspiration features prominently in tertiary education, so much so that its meaning is often assumed and taken for granted.¹⁴¹ Aspiration, however, has many definitions and unravelling these can shed light on common criticisms and misinterpretations. In brief, goals guide behaviour, and aspiration is linked to the self-determination and pursuit of one's life goals.¹⁴² Aspirations are defined as the desire 'to achieve something in the future, with the implication that they will drive actions in the present'.¹⁴³ There is a significant body of literature dealing with the broad topic of aspirations and the different forms it can take, including wellbeing aspirations, personal development aspirations and wealth aspirations.¹⁴⁴ Relevant to this report, occupational aspirations

¹³⁹ Kinnane, S., Wilks, J., Wilson, K., Hughes, T., and Thomas, S. (2014). 'Can't be what you can't see': The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education. Final Report. Sydney: Office for Learning and Teaching.

¹⁴⁰ Blanchard, C.A. (1987). Return to Country: The Aboriginal Homelands Movement in Australia, Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

¹⁴¹ Cupitt, C., Costello, D., Raciti, M., and Eagle, L. (2016). Social Marketing Strategy for Low SES Communities: Position Paper. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Perth: Curtin University.

¹⁴² Deci, E., and Ryan, R. (2008). Self-determination theory: A macrotheory of human motivation, development and health. *Canadian Psychology*, 49(3), 182-185.

¹⁴³ Kintrea, K., St Clair, R., and Houston, M. (2015). Shaped by place? Young people's aspirations in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 18(5), 666-684.

¹⁴⁴ For example: Gemici, S., Bednarz, A., Karmel, T., and Lim, P. (2014). Factors Affecting the Educational and Occupational Aspirations of Young Australians. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Gore, J., Holmes, K., Smith, M., Southgate, E., and Albright, J. (2015). Socioeconomic status and the career aspirations of Australian school students: Testing enduring assumptions. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 42(2), 155-177.

refer to choosing a particular occupation and then working towards acquiring the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to gain employment in that field.¹⁴⁵

The literature tends to be vague about which types of aspiration are being referred to at a particular time. This has led to criticism and confusion.¹⁴⁶ Overall, aspirations of students should be phrased positively with terms such as ‘elevating aspirations’, ‘enabling aspirations’ or ‘realising aspirations’ most appropriate as they recognise that all people irrespective of age, gender, SES, Indigeneity, ability or location have aspirations, hopes and dreams for their future.¹⁴⁷

2.2 The interplay between occupational and tertiary education aspiration

The interplay between occupational aspirations and tertiary education aspirations is another important aspect. In most cases, occupational aspirations drive the need or desire for tertiary education.¹⁴⁸ Occupational aspirations are formed anywhere throughout compulsory schooling,¹⁴⁹ with primary school-aged students already considering their preferred occupations and educational pathways.¹⁵⁰ The suite of occupational choices a student considers is influenced by factors such as personal interests, academic performance, SES, the influence of significant others including parents, and attitudes towards school and employment prospects in their local area.¹⁵¹

There is an overwhelming number of occupations to choose from. However, not all students are aware of all the possibilities or the pathways to various careers.¹⁵² Career advice helps build greater awareness of job possibilities and is most helpful when people first develop a sense of their interests, abilities and occupations they might like to do and can then begin to explore what those jobs might be like.¹⁵³ It is during this time that students make judgements about whether a job is realistic, acceptable to others (such as their parents) and accessible.¹⁵⁴ People ultimately come up with a list of acceptable and accessible job options.¹⁵⁵ This list then influences the decision on whether or not to go to tertiary education. Overall, awareness of job possibilities underpins people’s ‘job list’, and this influences their aspirations for tertiary education.

¹⁴⁵ Haller, A.O., and Miller, I.W. (1967). *The Occupational Aspiration Scale: Theory, Structure and Correlates*. Department of Rural Sociology. Madison: The University of Wisconsin.

¹⁴⁶ Sellar, S., Gale, T., and Parker, S. (2011). Appreciating aspirations in Australian higher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 41(1), 37-52. Gale, T., and Parker, S. (2013). *Widening Participation in Australian Higher Education*. Leicester: CFE Consulting and Research.

¹⁴⁷ Sellar, S. (2013). Equity, markets and the politics of aspiration in Australian higher education. *Discourse*, 34(2), 245-58.

¹⁴⁸ Gemici, S., Bednarz, A., Karmel, T., and Lim, P. (2014). *The Factors Affecting the Educational and Occupational Aspirations of Young Australians*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

¹⁴⁹ Gore, J., Holmes, K., Smith, M., Fray, L., McElduff, P., Weaver, N., and Wallington, C. (2017). Unpacking the career aspirations of Australian school students: towards an evidence base for university equity initiatives in schools. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 36(7), 1383-1400.

¹⁵⁰ Archer, L., DeWitt, J., and Wong, B. (2013). Spheres of influence: What shapes young people’s aspirations at age 12/13 and what are the implications for education policy? *Journal of Education Policy*, 29, 58–85.

¹⁵¹ Gemici, S., Bednarz, A., Karmel, T., and Lim, P. (2014). *The Factors Affecting the Educational and Occupational Aspirations of Young Australians*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

¹⁵² James, R., Wyn, J., Baldwin, G., Hepworth, G., McInnis, C., and Stephanou, A. (1999). *Rural and Isolated School Students and Their Higher Education Choices: A Re-Examination of Student Location, Socioeconomic Background, and Educational Advantage and Disadvantage*. Commissioned Report. Canberra: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. Bradley, D., Noonan, P., Nugent, H., and Scales, B. (2008). *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

¹⁵³ Savickas, M.L. (2002). Career construction: A developmental theory of vocational behavior. In D. Brown (Eds.), *Career Choice and Development* (pp. 149–205) (4th ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Savickas, M. L., Porfeli, E. J., Hilton, T. L., & Savickas, S. (2018) The student career construction inventory. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 106, 138-152.

¹⁵⁴ Gottfredson, L.S. (1981). Circumscription and compromise: A developmental theory of occupational aspirations. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 28(6), 545-579.

¹⁵⁵ Gottfredson, L.S., (2002). Gottfredson’s theory of circumscription, compromise, and self-creation. *Career Choice and Development*, 4, 85-148.

The link between occupational aspirations and tertiary education participation and completion is not straightforward. Identified in the literature by Zacharias et al. (2018),¹⁵⁶ there is evidence that irrespective of SES, young people have high aspirations but there appears to be an inability for RRR or low SES students to sustain and act on these high aspirations over time. Therefore, it is critical that WP efforts occur on multiple occasions in schooling to help sustain and convert aspiration into ambitions (a desired professional identity)¹⁵⁷ and actions (e.g. tertiary participation, WIL).

In summary, the literature suggests:

- early or initial occupational aspirations are formed during schooling.
- greater awareness of job possibilities can change aspirations and increase tertiary education aspirations.
- efforts are needed to help RRR students maintain high aspirations and convert these to an expectation that they will go on to tertiary education and succeed.

3.0 Tertiary education enablers and barriers

Disparities in the educational attainment of RRR students relative to their metropolitan counterparts can be linked to several factors. Understanding both the enablers that drive the pursuit of tertiary education as well as the barriers that inhibit participation assists in being able to consider and identify options for improving participation.

Enablers that drive the pursuit of tertiary study by RRR students include:¹⁵⁸

- **Exposure to career possibilities and quality career advice** so the student is aware of several types of careers that may fit with their interests and passions.
- **Exposure to tertiary education** including what it is, its relationship to employment, and the immediate and long-term benefits, such as access to a wide range of professions and higher incomes over a working life.
- **Awareness of tertiary education choices** such as the qualifications needed, course options, entry requirements, alternative entry pathways, and modes of study available (e.g. part-time/full-time; external/face-to-face).
- **Career clarity** including having firm views of their preferred occupation/s, likely employment prospects and understanding of the essential or desirable educational qualifications for their preferred occupation/s.
- **Upskilling and reskilling** as part of a career transition for adult RRR students and lifelong learning.
- **Encouragement by significant others** including parents, teachers and other community members, particularly in instances where students are achieving high academic grades.
- **Personal beliefs** such as the belief that they can choose or determine their own occupation freely; or perceive that they can relocate or are not restricted in terms of where they choose to live.

¹⁵⁶ Zacharias, N., Mitchell, G., Raciti, M., Koshy, P., Li, I., Costello, D., and Trinidad, S. (2018). Widening Regional and Remote Participation: Interrogating the Impact of Outreach Programs Across Queensland. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Perth: Curtin University.

¹⁵⁷ Vernon, L., Watson, S. J., and Taggart, A. (2018). University aspirational pathways for metropolitan and regional students: Implications for supporting school-university outreach partnerships. Australian and International Journal of Rural Education, 28(1), 87-103.

¹⁵⁸ For example: Quin, R., Stone, C., and Trinidad, S. (2017). Low Rates of Transition to University for High Achieving Students in Regional NSW. Report for NSW Department of Education. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Perth: Curtin University. Zacharias, N., Mitchell, G., Raciti, M., Koshy, P., Li, I., Costello, D., and Trinidad, S. (2018). Widening Regional and Remote Participation: Interrogating the Impact of Outreach Programs Across Queensland. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Perth: Curtin University. Koshy, P., Dockery, A.M., and Seymour, R. (2019). Parental expectations for young people's participation in higher education in Australia. Studies in Higher Education, 44(2), 302-317.

- **Personal motivations** including to have a better life, to follow their dreams, to prove to themselves that they are capable, to be a good role model to the next generation, to learn knowledge and skills and use these to help others in their community.

Barriers may dissuade or inhibit RRR students' participation in tertiary education. In some cases, initial barriers have unintended, adverse effects. For example, an initial intention of taking a gap year after finishing secondary school is to save money for tertiary education costs, in actuality, is often not converted to tertiary study even some five years following the completion of schooling.¹⁵⁹

Barriers that influence tertiary participation by RRR students include:¹⁶⁰

- **Access and proximity to tertiary education** including geographic proximity to a campus may be problematic in terms of limited study options at nearby campuses, the willingness and ability to relocate (e.g. 'reluctant stayer', 'reluctant leaver'), accommodation, transportation, confidence in their ability to live independently, need or ability to work while studying, and social and cultural readjustment including homesickness, loneliness and the possible negative impacts of these on their success and persistence in tertiary study. With regards to accommodation, while a partnership between the Australian, state and territory governments and the National Rental Affordability Scheme was established in 2008 to enable universities to purpose build affordable accommodation, the private rental marketing is used by the vast majority (about 92%) of students.¹⁶¹
- **Financial costs** including tuition costs, housing, food and transport costs, textbooks, equipment and consumables costs necessary for successful completion. The Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) loans for student university contributions are also a key financial consideration with research concluding that HELP protects access for people from low SES backgrounds.¹⁶² Financial assistance for university students was first introduced in Australia in 1943 and today assistance with relocation and living costs is provided by the Australian Government predominantly via income-contingent Youth Allowance, Austudy and ABSTUDY¹⁶³ as well as the Relocation Scholarship.
- **Schooling and academic attainment** including comparatively lower Year 12 completion rates, lower grades including literacy and numeracy skills, fewer students opting for the ATAR/OP stream in senior high school, fewer subject offerings by schools in senior high school which limits tertiary opportunities and lower school engagement related to disadvantaged schools, high teacher turnover, greater likelihood of inexperienced teachers and a lack of specialised services such as counsellors or career guidance advisors.
- **Relevance** or need for tertiary education to work in a preferred occupation as typically there are fewer RRR employment opportunities that require higher-level VET or university qualifications and this may be reinforced as many in their community do not have, place value on or encourage the pursuit of tertiary education.

¹⁵⁹ Quin, R., Stone, C., and Trinidad, S. (2017). Low Rates of Transition to University for High Achieving Students in Regional NSW. Report for NSW Department of Education. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Perth: Curtin University.

¹⁶⁰ For example: Alloway, N., and Dalley-Trim, L. (2009). 'High and dry' in rural Australia: Obstacles to student aspirations and expectations. *Rural Society*, 19(1), 49–59. Cardak, B., Brett, M., Barry, P., McAllister, R., Bowden, M., Bahtsevanoglou, J., and Vecchi, J. (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, Perth: Curtin University. Joyce, S. (2019). Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System, Canberra: Australian Government.

¹⁶¹ Halsey, J. (2018). Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education: Final Report. Canberra: Australian Government.

¹⁶² Chapman, B., and Ryan, C. (2005). The access implications of income-contingent charges for higher education: Lessons from Australia. *Economics of Education Review*, 24(5), 491–512.

¹⁶³ Daniels, D. (2017). Student income support: A Chronology, Parliament of Australia. Available at: https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/5428620/upload_binary/5428620.pdf

- **Information** barriers include exposure to career possibilities comprised of timely, accurate and useful information for students and their families; awareness of tertiary education choices and benefits; and indecision about their preferred occupation/s. Either this means students do not engage with available information while at school, do not select the ATAR/OP stream for senior high school, or they do not take up VETIS opportunities as they are unsure of their career interests. Too much information, unreliable information or a maze of information from numerous stakeholders creates confusion in VET and higher education alike impacting students' ability to make well-informed decisions. Misalignment between job aspiration and educational intention (i.e. a student who wants to pursue a career that requires a university qualification but intends to go to TAFE) leaves many students either underqualified or overqualified.
- **Personal beliefs** including that they are not 'smart enough' for tertiary study, concerns they will not fit in, fear of failure, lack of confidence or self-esteem, are risk averse and perceive going to university as a very risky proposition and are focused on the present more than the future.

3.1 Change agents

While many enablers centre on student dispositions (e.g. personal beliefs and motivations) and contextual factors (e.g. exposure to quality career advice), an enabler may also be individuals that are often referred to as influencers or change agents.¹⁶⁴ Change agents are defined by their role in the change process with parents, teachers, career advisors and WP practitioners perhaps best described as 'change generators'. Their influence is strong at the beginning of the change process, converting an issue (e.g. what to do after secondary school) into a felt need (e.g. pursue tertiary education).¹⁶⁵

In the context of this final report and Strategy, there has been recent interest in the idea of establishing a Commissioner of Regional, Rural and Remote Education as a change agent. As recommended by Halsey (2018), the role could be similar to the National Rural Health Commissioner. Internationally there does not appear to be a role with a similar remit (the UK National Schools Commissioner and Regional Schools Commissioners only work with school leaders). Domestically there are national Commissioner roles such as the National Rural Health Commissioner¹⁶⁶ and the eSafety Commissioner, both appointed in 2017. At the state level, the Victorian Government's Cross Border Commissioner (appointed 2018), and the New South Wales Government Regional Commissioners (appointed 2018) work with multiple RRR stakeholders however their focus is on planning and development.

Overall, literature suggests that there is an opportunity for a Commissioner of Regional, Rural and Remote Education to be an enabler whose role centres on implementing change in a manner that complements other change agents (e.g. parents) in the process of bridging the RRR-metropolitan educational divide.

In summary, the literature suggests:

- key enablers that encourage RRR tertiary education participation include exposure to career possibilities and quality career advice, exposure to tertiary education, awareness of tertiary education choices, career clarity, upskilling and reskilling, encouragements by significant others, and personal beliefs and motivations.

¹⁶⁴ See Bridges, D. (2006). Adaptive preference, justice and identity in the context of widening participation in higher education. *Ethics and Education*, 1(1), 15-28. Russell-Bennett, R., Drennan, J., and Raciti, M. (2016). *Social Marketing Strategy for Widening Tertiary Education Participation in Low SES Communities: Field Research*. Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology.

¹⁶⁵ Ottaway, R.N. (1983). The change agent: A taxonomy in relation to the change process. *Human Relations*, 36(4), 361-392.

¹⁶⁶ See <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/National-Rural-Health-Commissioner>.

- core barriers that discourage RRR tertiary education participation include access and proximity to tertiary education, financial costs, schooling and academic attainment, relevance or need for tertiary education, information barriers and personal beliefs.

4.0 Increasing equity groups tertiary education participation and outcomes

The notion of increasing the participation of people from equity groups has been a perennial agenda for successive governments over many decades driven by the desire for a fairer society by promoting equal educational opportunities for all Australians.¹⁶⁷ Typically referred to today as WP it is anchored in the premise that education can transform lives and improve quality of life. Education institutions can help build better nations by addressing inequality that may result from race, poverty, geography and disability.¹⁶⁸ *A Fair Chance for All*¹⁶⁹ is Australia's formalised Australian framework for WP.¹⁷⁰ This report, the 'Bradley' Review of Australian Higher Education (2008)¹⁷¹ and the 'Behrendt' Review (2012)¹⁷² are three key touchstone reports that underpin current equity activity in the higher education sector.

A Fair Chance for All framed and influenced government policy in Australia prior to being adopted in the United Kingdom (UK).¹⁷³ In both countries, the WP agenda centred on three activities being the identification of barriers to participation, elevating and realising aspirations for higher education and increasing participation among identified equity groups.¹⁷⁴ Almost three decades later, the core equity groups defined by *A Fair Chance for All* remain relatively unchanged. The original six identified equity groups were people from low SES backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, Women in Non-Traditional Courses, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, people with disability and people from rural and isolated areas. The co-occurrence or overlapping of equity groups was noted from the outset by the then Government, who stated that the groups were never intended to be mutually exclusive and many people experienced multiple types of disadvantage. Importantly, the target of parity, being the proportional representation of the general population, was established in *A Fair Chance for All* and remains the key measure of success.¹⁷⁵

In summary, the literature suggests:

- the pursuit of equality and equity for people from RRR areas is a longstanding agenda of successive governments.

¹⁶⁷ Harvey, A., Cakitaki, B., and Brett, M. (2018). Principles for Equity in Higher Education Performance Funding, Report for the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education Research. Melbourne: Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research, La Trobe University.

¹⁶⁸ Dugarova, E., and Lavers, T. (2015). Social Inclusion and the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda 1. Paper prepared for the UNITAR's Briefing for UN Delegates on Post-2015 Development Agenda: Social Inclusion. Geneva. Available at <http://www.unrisd.org/unitar-social-inclusion>

¹⁶⁹ Department of Employment Education and Training. (1990). A Fair Chance for All: National and Institutional Planning for Equity in Higher Education: A Discussion Paper. Canberra. Available at <http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A2270> .

¹⁷⁰ Harvey, A., Burnheim, C., and Brett, M. (2016). Student Equity in Australian Higher Education. Singapore: Springer Science+ Business Media.

¹⁷¹ Bradley, D., N., P., Nugent, H., and Scales, B. (2008). Review of Australian Higher Education Final Report. Canberra: Australian Government DEEWR.

¹⁷² Behrendt, L., Larkin, S., Griew, R., and Kelly, P. (2012). Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: Final report. Canberra: Australian Government.

¹⁷³ Gale, T., and Parker, S. (2013). Widening Participation in Australian Higher Education: Report submitted to HEFCE and OFFA. Leicester, UK and Edge Hill University. Perth.

¹⁷⁴ Sellar, S., and Gale, T. (2016). Framing Student Equity in Higher Education: National and Global Policy Contexts of A Fair Chance for All. In Student Equity in Australian Higher Education (pp. 39–52). Singapore: Springer.

¹⁷⁵ Department of Education, Employment and Training. (1990). A Fair Chance for All: National and Institutional Planning for Equity in Higher Education. Canberra: Australian Government.

- there are currently six identified equity groups in the Australian tertiary education system, including people from RRR areas, that often co-occur and create a complex mix of challenges that discourage RRR tertiary education participation.
- the Strategy's long-term vision of equal opportunity and access for RRR students is compatible with the WP agenda.

4.1 Benchmarking Australia's widening participation policies and practices

A recent report by Salmi (2018),¹⁷⁶ assessed the nature and extent of WP policy commitments of 71 countries and concluded that Australia is a world leader, having formulated and implemented a comprehensive equity strategy. Australia is one of only six countries of the 71 reviewed to be considered 'advanced' with their WP commitment, along with England, Scotland, Ireland, New Zealand and Cuba.

Salmi (2018) highlights more countries that are now combining financial and non-monetary interventions to address the barriers faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Non-monetary interventions such as career guidance, recognition of prior learning and flexible pathways, outreach programs, retention programs and supports for students from equity groups who live in remote areas. Combined financial and non-monetary strategies are the most effective way to address inequality in tertiary education with this approach requiring ongoing collaboration between governments and institutions. From a global perspective, Salmi (2018b)¹⁷⁷ identified effective ways to overcome financial barriers including low or no tuition fees, need-based grants and income-contingent loans. Non-monetary interventions in addition to those previously mentioned include partnerships with schools, elevating aspirations of students from a young age and introducing preferential admission programs. Bridging programs are helpful for students from RRR areas as most of the challenges they experience in tertiary education result from an inadequate secondary education.

Salmi (2018) noted shared international challenges such as the need for (but lack of) student background data, sometimes due to ethical and privacy concerns.¹⁷⁸ Globally there is tension between excellence and inclusion resulting from the pursuit of higher rankings on international league tables. Internationally there have been concerns that this pursuit of rankings has the potential to crowd out the social equity dimension of university missions.¹⁷⁹

In summary, the literature suggests:

- Australia is a world leader in WP policy and has demonstrated commitment to increasing equity group participation.
- combining financial and non-monetary supports is international best practice.
- experiences related to data limitations and the tensions between institutional excellence and inclusion are shared.

¹⁷⁶ Salmi, J. (2018) All Around the World: Higher Education Equity Policies Across the Globe, Report for Lumina Foundation and World Access to Higher Education Day, Available at: <https://worldaccesshe.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/All-around-the-world-Higher-education-equity-policies-across-the-globe-.pdf>

¹⁷⁷ Salmi, J., and Sursock, A. (2018). Access and Completion for Underserved Students: International Perspectives. Washington: American Council on Education.

¹⁷⁸ Salmi, J., and Sursock, A. (2018). Access and Completion for Underserved Students: International Perspectives. Washington: American Council on Education.

¹⁷⁹ Vlk, A., and Stiburek, S. (2018). Study success at the clash point of excellence and social dimension. In Pricopie, R., Deca, L. and Adrian Curaj, Eds. (2018). European Higher Education Area: The Impact of Past and Future Policies. Cham: Springer.

4.2 The Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP)

The HEPPP was established in 2010 to address barriers to participation in higher education. The HEPPP aims to ensure that Australians from low SES backgrounds, including those in RRR areas, who have the ability to study at university have the opportunity to do so. A comprehensive review of programs resulted in the Equity Initiatives Framework (2016)¹⁸⁰ which mapped programs to the student lifecycle, noting key target groups (e.g. school students, teachers), common aims of programs and types of activities undertaken. The Framework also identified sector and institution principles and possible ways to evaluate program outcomes. Most WP interventions are aimed at secondary school students and those commencing tertiary education, and there are significant challenges associated with evaluating these interventions to guide future, cost-effective programs that are impactful.¹⁸¹ Establishing evidence of the mediating role of WP interventions remains elusive, despite significant efforts via HEPPP projects commissioned by the Department of Education (the department) to develop measures of the effectiveness of WP interventions and identify successful WP intervention characteristics.¹⁸²

Some aspects of HEPPP funded programs that are proven to work include:¹⁸³

- clearly defined project objectives (e.g. demystify university for school students in Years 5–9),
- collaboration across education sectors,
- continuity of efforts over several years to maximise program effects,
- a tailored approach which recognises differing needs of students, schools and communities,
- encouraging positive school cultures,
- enhancing student confidence, career aspirations, sense of achievement and belonging,
- alignment of the program with students' age and stage of life,
- parent engagement tailored to the parents' characteristics,
- 'people rich' programs that develop ongoing relationships and conversations,
- programs that target cohorts rather than individuals or the student population en masse,
- inclusive higher education programs, and
- evaluation that is stakeholder-centred, context-specific and iterative.

Abroad, the Higher Education Access Tracker (heat.ac.uk) service allows higher education providers to monitor and evaluate WP efforts via the provision of a shared, central online database, analysis and reporting functions. This service is a non-profit collaboration between higher education providers that commenced in 2013 and became self-sustaining in 2018, financed by subscribing

¹⁸⁰ Bennett, A., Naylor, R., Mellor, K., Brett, M., Gore, J., Harvey, A., and Whitty, G. (2015). *The Critical Interventions Framework Part 2: Equity Initiatives in Australian Higher Education: A Review of Evidence of Impact*. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education and Training.

¹⁸¹ Martin, B., McLean, G., Noonan, P., Tomaszewski, W., and Western, M., (2016). *Scoping the Widening Participation Longitudinal Study, Final Report for the Australian Government of Education and Training*. University of Queensland, Queensland. Burke, P. J., Hayton, A., and Stevenson, J. (2018). *Evaluating Equity and Widening Participation in Higher Education*. London: Trentham Books.

¹⁸² For example, Naylor, R., Baik, C., and James, R. (2013). *A Critical Interventions Framework for Advancing Equity in Australian Higher Education*. Canberra: Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education. Bennett, A., Naylor, R., Mellor, K., Brett, M., Gore, J., Harvey, A., and Whitty, G. (2015). *The Critical Interventions Framework Part 2: Equity Initiatives in Australian Higher Education: A Review of Evidence of Impact*. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education and Training. Martin, B., McLean, G., Noonan, P., Tomaszewski, W., and Western, M., (2016). *Scoping the Widening Participation Longitudinal Study, Final Report for the Australian Government of Education and Training*. Brisbane: University of Queensland.

¹⁸³ Gale, T., Hattam, R., Comber, B., Tranter, D., Bills, D., Sellar, S., and Parker, S. (2010). *Interventions Early in School as a Means to Improve Higher Education Outcomes for Disadvantaged Students*. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Perth: Curtin University. Edwards, D., Brown, J., Rothman, S., Richardson, S., Friedman, T., and Underwood, C. (2013). *Improving the Tertiary Education System, Participation and Results: Project Report*. Canberra: Australian Council for Educational Research. KPMG. (2015). *Evaluation of Bridges to Higher Education, Final Report Prepared for the Bridges to Higher Education Management Committee*. Available at www.bridges.nsw.edu.au. Bennett, A., Naylor, R., Mellor, K., Brett, M., Gore, J., Harvey, A., and Whitty, G. (2015). *The Critical Interventions Framework Part 2: Equity Initiatives in Australian Higher Education: A Review of Evidence of Impact*. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education and Training.

members. In the future, the department may consider a similar large-scale dedicated WP service, or perhaps the HEAT service may become available for Australian universities.

In summary, the literature suggests:

- there are key aspects that underpin successful HEP-PP-funded programs aimed at increasing tertiary participation including cross-sector collaborations, parent engagement, targeted and tailored programs for different groups and continuity of programs and relationships over several years.
- a large-scale dedicated online WP service that allows higher education providers to monitor and evaluate WP efforts may be considered by the department in the future.

5.0 Key considerations

5.1 The Triple Helix Model: How can university-industry-government relationships address the metropolitan-RRR education divide?

Consultations and feedback often referred to the need for linkages between education providers, local businesses and industries and governments. Similar sentiments have been reported in the literature. The NCSEHE report *Successful Outcomes for Regional and Remote Students in Australian Higher Education* notes the ‘misalignment between what universities have to offer and what regional jobs are available’ and that ‘qualifications alone do not create jobs - significant employment is created by networked local economic development policies and programs’.¹⁸⁴ Known in the broader literature as the Triple Helix Model, the notion of interactive university-industry-government relations to promote both national and local development is favoured by policymakers globally, particularly since the rise of the knowledge-based economies¹⁸⁵ and the era of technology-enabled future work.¹⁸⁶ The Triple Helix Model centres on a social contract between university-industry-government based on their overlapping roles and opportunity for synergies to emerge to bring about meaningful change.¹⁸⁷ The Triple Helix Model focuses on universities, however provides valuable insights for other education providers, such as VET providers and schools.

Community capacity building is a related concept that can guide sustainable social change and economic development at the community level, taking into account differences that exist in each local context.¹⁸⁸ Building a community’s capacity may take the form of building knowledge and skills among local residents for jobs in local industries or creating opportunities for locals with tertiary qualifications to start their own ‘start-up’ business in an RRR area. Indeed, business incubators and

¹⁸⁴ National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (2017) NCSEHE Focus—Successful Outcomes for Regional and Remote students in Australian Higher Education: Issues, Challenges, Opportunities and Recommendations from Research funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Available at <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Regional-feature-FINAL.pdf>.

¹⁸⁵ Etzkowitz, H., and Leydesdorff, L. (1997). Introduction to special issue on science policy dimensions of the Triple Helix of university-industry-government relations, *Editorial, Science and Public Policy*, 24(1), 2-5. Rodrigues, C., and Melo, A.I. (2013). The triple helix model as inspiration for local development policies: An experience-based perspective. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 37(5), 1675-1687.

¹⁸⁶ Liu, Y., and Huang, Q. (2018). University capability as a micro-foundation for the triple helix model: The case of China. *Technovation*, 76, 40-50.

¹⁸⁷ Leydesdorff, L. (2018). Synergy in knowledge-based innovation systems at national and regional levels: The triple-helix model and the fourth industrial revolution. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 4(2), 1-13.

accelerators, which are popular worldwide, exist at Australian universities¹⁸⁹ and are operational examples of the Triple Helix Model and effective community capacity building.

RRR employment and entrepreneurship opportunities can both support and drive participation in tertiary education. Women from RRR communities have much to gain. One-third of Australian women live in RRR areas and comprise around two-thirds of RRR university enrolments. Remote female students are older than their regional and metropolitan counterparts,¹⁹⁰ and as RRR women have lower rates of workforce participation, they are the focus of the Towards 2025 Australian Government Strategy to Boost Women's Workforce Participation.¹⁹¹ As noted in the Towards 2025 Strategy, women now make up almost a quarter of start-up founders (up from 16.1 per cent in 2014) and while women are concentrated in health care and social assistance industries (78 per cent women), these industries are projected to make the largest contributions to employment growth. Overall, the data suggest that expanding Regional Study Hubs to business incubators and accelerators that help speed up the growth of a 'start-up' businesses by providing services such as training, mentoring, networking and/or office space and equipment would create opportunities and generate benefits for RRR communities.

In summary, the literature suggests:

- university-industry-government synergies can promote local RRR community development and lead to increased tertiary education access, participation and outcomes.

5.2 How can the recognition of prior learning (RPL) be optimised to help RRR learners?

RPL is a complex issue.¹⁹² RPL was identified in consultations and feedback as a barrier to continued participation in tertiary education, particularly inhibiting the articulation from lower-level to higher-level VET qualifications and from VET to higher education. Often understood to be an essential element of lifelong learning, previously discussed trends in future work point to the growing importance of RPL.

Learning occurs in many contexts (e.g. work, volunteering or sporting and community activities) and takes various forms (e.g. formal, informal or non-formal) and is relevant to the outcomes of formal qualifications in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).¹⁹³ RPL recognises that people learn from experience and was introduced in 1992 in Australia originally for VET but has since expanded to all accredited education and training, including higher education.¹⁹⁴ RPL is formally identified by the AQF as a pathway for admission and/or credit into any qualification at any level and in doing so provides access to higher levels of education for a wider proportion of the population.¹⁹⁵ RPL

¹⁹⁰ Pollard, L. (2018). Remote Student University Success—An Analysis of Policy and Practice. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Perth: Curtin University.

¹⁹¹ See <https://womensworkforceparticipation.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/towards-2025-strategy.pdf>.

¹⁹² Garnett, J., and Cavaye, A. (2015). Recognition of prior learning: opportunities and challenges for higher education. *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, 7(1), 28-37. Brown, J. (2017). Exploring the transformative potential of recognition of prior informal learning for learners: A case study in Scotland. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 41(1), 60-78.

¹⁹³ Wheelahan, L., Miller, P., Newton, D., Dennis, N., Firth, J., Pascoe, S., and Veenker, P. (2003). Recognition of prior learning: policy and practice in Australia.

¹⁹⁴ Garnett, J., and Cavaye, A. (2015). Recognition of prior learning: opportunities and challenges for higher education. *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, 7(1), 28-37.

¹⁹⁵ Garnett, J., and Cavaye, A. (2015). Recognition of prior learning: opportunities and challenges for higher education. *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, 7(1), 28-37.

involves assessing an individual's relevant prior learning to determine the credit that may be used to reduce the amount of learning required to achieve a certain qualification.¹⁹⁶

RPL is undertaken by tertiary education providers with guidelines provided by the AQF (2012), noting that RPL is specific to the individual however can be used as a precedent for other RPL assessments. Abroad, RPL has also featured in European education policies since the mid-1980's undergoing several evolutions and iterations many of which have been in response to the Council of the European Union (2012)¹⁹⁷ recommendation that all countries in the European Union (EU) should have RPL procedures in place by 2018. The European Qualification Framework (EQF) was formalised in 2008 and maps the qualifications of different EU members to facilitate comparison of qualification between different nation systems, enhancing the mobility of students, workforce flexibility and the development of lifelong learning.¹⁹⁸ Like the AQF, the EQF focuses on learning outcomes and does not replace National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) but rather is a translation device. Furthermore, the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) assists with RPL by helping with the transfer, accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes across EU member countries.

Online RPL tools have emerged in Australia and abroad. In Australia, the Queensland Government's DIY Recognition of Prior Learning tool¹⁹⁹ helps people identify the knowledge and skills they have, then match these to qualifications for which they may receive credit and also provides guidance as to the evidence that can be provided to support RPL applications. An international online RPL tool is SkillsTools²⁰⁰ which was co-funded by the European Commission and is comprised of SkillsBank (facilitates RPL assessment across multiple stakeholders and is linked to matrices of learning outcomes), YOMTOOL (Youth on the Move TOOLkit) and SkillsTube (video capture and storage of practical performances of skills knowledge).

In summary, the literature suggests:

- there is an opportunity to develop national, online RPL tools to facilitate more objective, transparent and consistent assessments of informal and non-formal learning across VET and higher education providers that can be used as admission and/or credit towards a higher-level qualification by RRR students.

5.3 Should efforts be targeted or is an RRR whole-of-student-lifecycle approach needed?

The tertiary education student lifecycle spans four stages: pre-access, access, participation, attainment and transition out²⁰¹ which loosely aligns with the performance indicators for Australian universities (with the exception of pre-access) being access, success, satisfaction, retention, completion and employment. RRR students underperform on most performance indicators when

¹⁹⁶ Australian Qualifications Framework. (2012). Recognition of Prior Learning: An Explanation: <https://www.aqf.edu.au/sites/aqf/files/rpl-explanation.pdf>.

¹⁹⁷ Council of the European Union. (2012). Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Official Journal of the European Union, (2012/C 398/01). Available at <http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF>.

¹⁹⁸ European Commission. (2018). 10 years of the European Qualifications Framework. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/eqf_infographics_en.pdf.

¹⁹⁹ <http://skillomatic.theworklab.com.au/>

²⁰⁰ <https://skillstools.eu/>

²⁰¹ Bennett, A., Naylor, R., Mellor, K., Brett, M., Gore, J., Harvey, A., and Whitty, G. (2015). The Critical Interventions Framework Part 2: Equity Initiatives in Australian Higher Education: A Review of Evidence of Impact. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education and Training.

compared to the overall student average, with the exception to this trend being employment.²⁰² When coupled with lower access trends, this suggests that RRR students require support at all stages of the student lifecycle. Support in the pre-access stage should not be limited to the students themselves, but also include key influencers such as parents and caregivers.²⁰³ A range of supports were identified in a recent ACER report²⁰⁴ specific to RRR students transitioning into university. The four key areas for RRR supports were resourcing (e.g. accommodation assistance, emergency counselling, financial assistance), sense of belonging (e.g. orientation, mentoring, Indigenous perspectives), communication (e.g. proactive/specialised communications, availability of support services), and effectiveness (e.g. monitoring of usage of services, helpfulness of academic support, relevance of support offered). There are evidence-based models that can be used by tertiary providers to frame their support for RRR students.

Beyond tertiary education providers, research has also identified key RRR student characteristics, situational factors and institutional factors (school and university) that if addressed in the pre-access stage can improve educational attainment. Zacharias et al. (2018)²⁰⁵ examination of the RRR-metropolitan educational divide identified student characteristics including confidence, resilience and fear of the unknown as student qualities that were the key points of difference between RRR students and their metropolitan peers. Situational factors, such as proximity to a university, availability of role models, reliability of information and the promotion of non-university options over university pathways also contributed to the education divide. The lack of strategic integration of WP into schools, the turnover of WP staff in universities and schools were some institutional factors that could explain differences between RRR and metropolitan post-school education choices. Zacharias et al.'s (2018) framework has identified key differential factors, and these can become the focus of targeted and tailored pre-access supports. Thus, a whole RRR student lifecycle approach could be enacted in the immediate future as there currently exists a body of empirical evidence to direct and frame efforts.

In summary, the literature suggests:

- RRR students in tertiary education require supports at all four stages of the student lifecycle: pre-access, access, participation and completion and transition out.
- RRR supports should be designed as a whole-of-student-lifecycle program.

5.4 Themes from recent Australian research projects

A component of HEPPP is the National Priorities Pool (NPP) designed to inform more effective implementation of HEPPP by supporting projects that 'develop evidence, trial innovative ideas, build capacity and reform systems to maximise opportunity and outcomes for low SES people in higher education'.²⁰⁶ Established in 2014 and comprised of both commissioned projects and university

²⁰² Li, I., Mahuteau, S., Dockery, A., and Junankar, P.N. (2017). Equity in higher education and graduate labour market outcomes in Australia, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 39(6), 625-641. Harvey, A., Cakitaki, B., and Brett, M. (2018). Principles for Equity in Higher Education Performance Funding, Report for the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education Research. Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research, Melbourne: La Trobe University.

²⁰³ Russell-Bennett, R., Drennan, J., and Raciti, M. (2016). Social Marketing Strategy for Widening Tertiary Education Participation in Low SES Communities: Field Research. Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology. Koshy, P., Dockery, A. M., and Seymour, R. (2019). Parental expectations for young people's participation in higher education in Australia. *Studies in Higher Education*, 44(2), 302-317.

²⁰⁴ Matthews, D., Milgate, G., and Clarke, L., (2018). Assessment of University Support Services for Regional and Remote Students in Transition to University. Final Report for the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training, Adelaide: Australian Council for Educational Research.

²⁰⁵ Zacharias, N., Mitchell, G., Raciti, M., Koshy, P., Li, I., Costello, D., and Trinidad, S. (2018). Widening Regional and Remote Participation: Interrogating the Impact of Outreach Programs Across Queensland. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Perth: Curtin University.

²⁰⁶ See National Priorities Pool Investment Plan – 2016: <https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/national-priorities-pool-investment-plan-2016>.

proposed projects, there are a number of broad themes from this work, that are relevant to the Strategy which are summarised below.

In summary, the literature suggests:

- equitable education is essential for nation building.²⁰⁷
- remote students should be recognised as a distinct equity group (separate from regional students), and that internet access should be formally recognised as an equity issue.²⁰⁸
- social partners (such as schools, community groups and employers) and influencers (e.g. parents, Indigenous Elders) form important parts of the tertiary education ecosystem and need to be engaged.²⁰⁹
- the HEPPP funding model could be refined to prioritise low-SES RRR outreach with a multi-sector consortium-type model to potentially develop and deliver a RRR WP strategy.²¹⁰
- pre-service teachers could train in career development, and existing guides and resources could be promoted and funding pre-service teachers going to RRR areas could be modelled on existing programs used in medicine for other healthcare professionals.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Zacharias N., and Brett, M. (2019). *The Best Chance for All: Student Equity 2030 – A Long-term Strategic Vision for Student Equity in Higher Education*, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Perth: Curtin University.

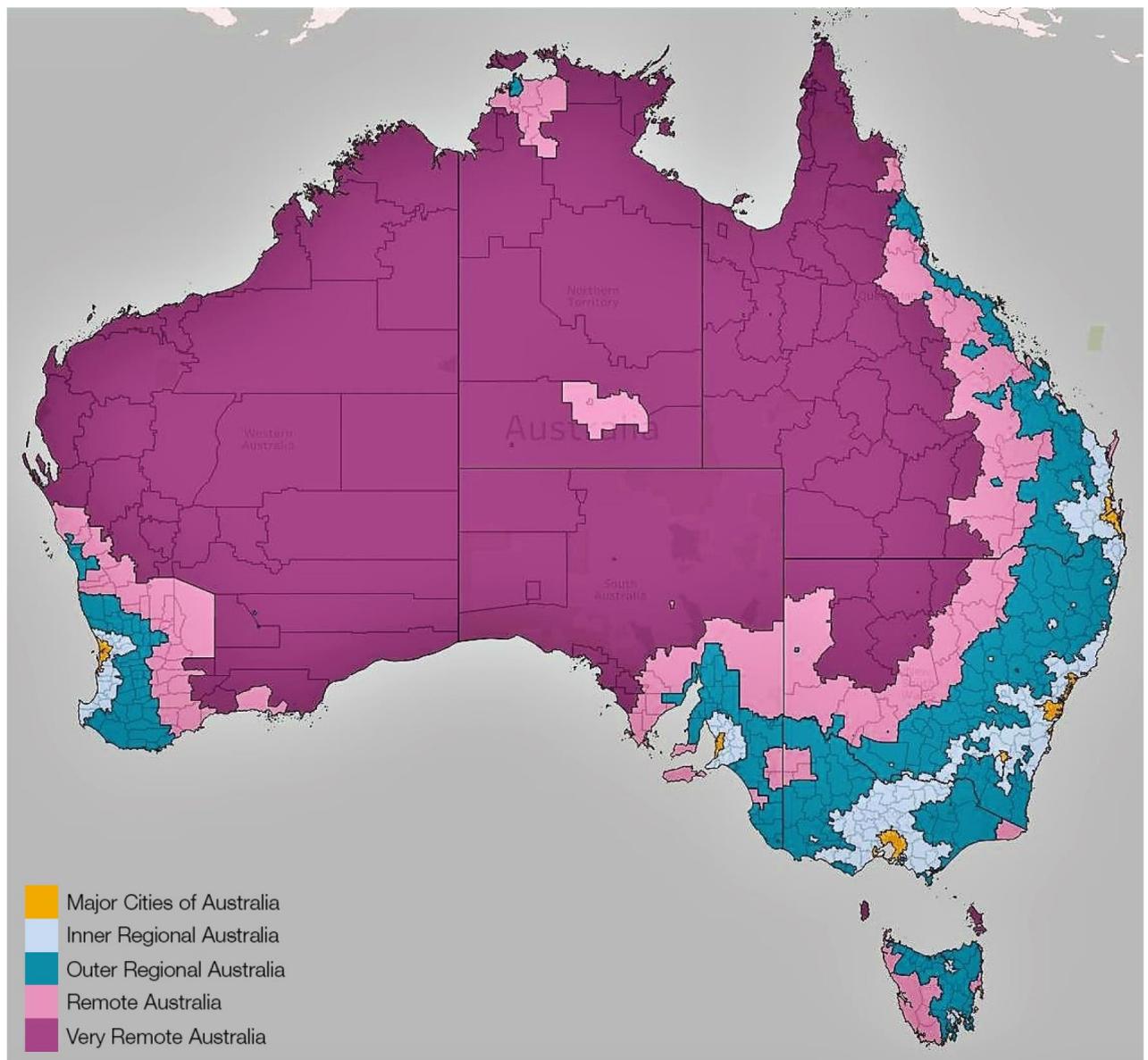
²⁰⁸ Pollard, L. (2018). *Remote Student University Success—An Analysis of Policy and Practice*. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Perth: Curtin University.

²⁰⁹ Zacharias, N., Mitchell, G., Raciti, M., Koshy, P., Li, I., Costello, D., and Trinidad, S. (2018). *Widening Regional and Remote Participation: Interrogating the Impact of Outreach Programs Across Queensland*. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Perth: Curtin University.

²¹⁰ Zacharias, N., Mitchell, G., Raciti, M., Koshy, P., Li, I., Costello, D., and Trinidad, S. (2018). *Widening Regional and Remote Participation: Interrogating the Impact of Outreach Programs Across Queensland*. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Perth: Curtin University.

²¹¹ Trinidad, S., Sharplin, E., Lock, G., Ledger, S., Broadley, T., Boyd, D., Terry, E., (2013). *Developing Strategies at the Pre-service Level to Address Critical Teacher Attraction and Retention Issues in Australian Rural, Regional and Remote Schools*, Final Report for the Office for Learning and Teaching, Australian Government. Available at https://ltr.edu.au/resources/CG10_1541_Trinidad_Report_2013.pdf.

Appendix B – Map with remoteness categories



Appendix C – Strategy development process

Review process

On 12 November 2018, the Minister for Education, the Hon Dan Tehan MP announced that as part of the Australian Government’s Regional Education Package, the Government would develop a National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy to drive increased participation in post-secondary education. This work builds on the Government’s response to the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* (the Halsey Review). Recommendation 11 of the review proposed that the Government ‘establish a national focus for regional, rural and remote education, training and research to enhance access, outcomes and opportunities in regional Australia’.

Regional Education Expert Advisory Group

To drive the development of the Strategy, the Minister established a Regional Education Expert Advisory Group to advise Government on the ongoing education and training needs of regional, rural and remote communities. The Terms of Reference for the Advisory Group are in Appendix D. The members of the Advisory Group are:

- The Hon Dr Denis Naphine, former Victorian Premier (Chair)
- Ms Caroline Graham, Chief Executive Officer, Regional Skills Training
- Emeritus Professor Peter Lee, former Vice Chancellor Southern Cross University
- Ms Meredith Wills, former Director, Geraldton Universities Centre.

Framing Paper and submissions

To inform the Strategy development process and submission, the Advisory Group released a Framing Paper on 20 December 2018 and sought submissions from interested parties by 1 February 2019. In total, 79 submissions were received from a diverse range of stakeholders in response to the issues set out in the Framing Paper. Those contributing to the process were asked to focus on practical steps the Government could take to improve tertiary education access and attainment for people in regional, rural and remote communities.

Table C 1. Number of submissions by group*

Role of person submitting (as included on submission template)	Number of submissions
University	20
Peak body/think tank	13
Educator	11
Academic	7
Government Agencies	6
Community Organisation	6
Parent/carer/guardian	2
Student/potential student	2
Training Provider	1
Employer	1
School	0
Other	10
Total	79

*Note: A number indicated they were from more than one stakeholder group. In this case, the group was selected based on the role that they were writing from the most. For example, if parent and educator were both selected, but the submission refers to their students, not their own children, 'educator' has been used.

Overview of issues raised

While the submissions received were wide-ranging and expressed a range of views, there were a number of key themes that emerged, consistent with those raised in consultations. Table C 2 shows the count of these from all the submissions analysed.

Table C 2. Count of key policy suggestions raised in submissions by theme

Theme	Submissions mentioning suggestions
Income support	33
Accommodation, relocation and transport	34
Career advice	23
Aspiration	34
Regional Study Hubs	20
Support for regional universities	24
HE funding and regulation	18
VET funding and regulation	9
HE/VET articulation and pathways	17
Internet access	13

Consultations

The Expert Advisory Group undertook extensive face-to-face consultations through January to March to develop a deeper understanding of the issues and challenges facing RRR communities. Details on the consultation meetings held are available at Appendix E.

Issues papers

A series of six issues papers containing possible further actions were released by the Advisory Group on 1 March 2019. These were developed using the feedback received through submissions and consultations. Comment was sought from interested parties by 15 March 2019. A total of 42 responses were received to the issues papers. All submissions have been analysed and the key statistics are below.

Table C 3. Number of responses by group

Role of person responding (as included on response template)	Number of submissions
University	16
Peak body/think tank	5
Educator	1
Government Agencies	13
Community Organisation	5
Parent/carer/guardian	1
Training Provider	1
Total	42

Overview of issues raised

Those responding to the issues papers were requested to identify which Issues papers were being discussed.

Table C 4. Count of Issues Papers discussed in responses

Issues Paper	Responses mentioning suggestions
1 Preparing Students for Success	29
2. Improving Access, Opportunity and Choice	39
3. Retention and Attainment	29
4. Enhancement and Enabling RRR Communities	28
5. RRR Students from Identified Equity Groups	27
6. RRR Strategy Targets, Implementation and Monitoring	25

Final Report

The written responses to the Framing Paper and the issues papers, along with the feedback compiled through the consultation process, have informed the development of this Strategy.

Appendix D – Terms of Reference

Scope

The National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy will build on the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* to:

- build aspiration towards further education
- support students in the transition from secondary to tertiary education (including relocation and career advice)
- increase access, completions and success for students at post-secondary education and training.

The Strategy will also consider how to build on initiatives that support regional education, including:

- supporting the performance of regional universities and vocational education providers
- enhancing the role of regional education providers in the economic development of regional centres, and
- attracting people to the regions.

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for the Expert Advisory Group are to:

- build on the work of the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* and investigate the need for a commissioner to oversee the implementation of the Strategy
- identify strategies and policies for the Australian Government to put in place to bring the attainment rate of regional, rural and remote students to parity with students from metropolitan areas
- examine the literature and research on aspiration, access and success for regional students and the barriers to access to tertiary education facing people in regional Australia
- leverage research undertaken on the provision of tertiary education in regional Australia and the support services provided to regional, rural and remote students at university
- consider the current policy options supported by the Government, including student income support as well as the opportunities presented by the Regional Study Hubs Program
- recommend how current and potential new approaches should be best combined as a coherent suite of policy responses to address issues particular to a region, to deliver improved higher education outcomes to students in regional, rural and remote Australia
- recommend a target for regional, rural and remote education outcomes.

The report will make priority recommendations, and put forward the Strategy for the Minister's approval.

Appendix E – List of consultations

Consultation meetings
AgForce Qld
Anderson, Clair - Aboriginal Higher Education Advisor, University of Tasmania
Australian Apprenticeships Northern Territory
Australian Council for Private Education and Training
Australian Industry Group
Australian Technology Network of Universities
Australia's Academic and Research Network
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education
Bendigo Kangan Institute
Career Industry Council of Australia
Central Regional TAFE (WA)
Charles Darwin University
Charles Sturt University
Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations
Country Education Foundation
Country Education Partnership
Country Universities Centre Snowy Monaro
Curtin University
Deakin University
Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia
Federation Training
Federation University Australia
Flinders University
Geraldton Universities Centre
Goulburn Ovens TAFE
Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation
Grattan Institute
Group of Eight
Halsey, John – The Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education
Honeywood, The Hon Phil – Council for International Education
Independent Higher Education Australia
Innovative Research Universities
Isolated Children's Parents' Association
Joyce, The Hon Steven – Review into the Australian VET system
Kulunga Aboriginal Research Development Unit
La Trobe University
Mid West Development Commission
Minerals Council of Australia
Murdoch University
National Broadband Network
National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education
National Centre for Vocational Education Research
National Disability Insurance Agency
National Union of Students
Noonan, Peter – Australian Qualifications Framework Review
Northern Territory Department of Education
North Midlands Industry Training Alliance
New South Wales Department of Education – Higher Education and Tertiary Policy Directorate

Consultation meetings
Open Universities Australia
Parker, Stephen
Ryan, The Hon Peter – Expert Panel for Strategic Regional Growth
Regional Australia Institute
Regional Development Australia
Regional Universities Network
Rural Industries Skills Training
Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia
South Regional TAFE (WA)
South West TAFE (VIC)
Southern Cross University
Sunraysia Institute of TAFE
TAFE Directors Australia
TAFE NSW
TAFE Qld
TAFE SA
Universities Australia
University of Melbourne
University of New England
University of Newcastle
University of Southern Queensland
University of the Sunshine Coast
University of Tasmania
University of Tasmania Student Union
University of Wollongong
Van Styn, Shane – Geraldton Mayor and Deputy Chair of Regional Capitals Australia
Velg Training
Victorian TAFE Association
Western Australia Aboriginal Education and Training Council
Wellings, Paul – Performance-Based Funding for the Commonwealth Grant Scheme
West Coast Heritage Regional Study Hub
Wodonga Institute of TAFE

Appendix F – List of public submissions and responses

Submissions and responses
Abingdon Advisory
Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia
Adult Learning Australia
Alphacrucis College
Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia
Australia's Academic and Research Network
Australian National University
Australian Technology Network of Universities
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education
Beacon Foundation
Bendigo Tech School, La Trobe University
Bolte, Keryn
Budge, Trevor
Candy, Glenn
Central Queensland University
Charles Darwin University
Charles Sturt University
Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations
Council of Private Higher Education
Country Education Foundation
Country Education Partnership
Country Universities Centre
Curtin University
Dunstan, Amity
E Learning Education Solutions
Ellis, Debra
Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia
Flinders University
Geraldton Universities Centre
Government of South Australia
Group of Eight
Halsey, John – The Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education
Hardwick-Franco, Kathryn
Heather, Robert
Impey, Charles
Independent Higher Education Australia
Innovative Research Universities
Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia
James Cook University
Kilpatrick, Sue
Knight, Jodi
La Trobe University
Macquarie University
Mainwaring, Alan
McGlew, Kaye
Mid West Development Commission

Submissions and responses

Mills, Terence
Minerals Council of Australia
National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education
National Tertiary Education Union
National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NE Tracks Local Learning Employment Network & North East Local Learning Employment Network
Open Universities Australia
Outdoor Education Group
Perkins, Darrell
Queensland Government
Queensland University of Technology
Queensland Widening Tertiary Participation Consortium
Regional Development Australia Fitzroy and Central West
Regional Development Australia Goldfields Esperance
Regional Development Australia Indian Ocean Territories
Regional Development Australia Loddon Mallee
Regional Development Australia Logan and Redlands
Regional Development Australia Mackay-Isaac-Whitsunday
Regional Development Australia Mid West and Gascoyne
Regional Development Australia Murraylands and Riverland
Regional Development Australia Orana
Regional Development Australia Tasmania
Regional Development Australia Wheatbelt
Regional Development Australia Whyalla and Eyre Peninsula
Regional Universities Network
Roberts, Philip
Robinson, Kerrie
Science and Technology Australia
Shaw, Tim
Shire of Carnamah
Shire of Dandaragan
Sweet, Lisa
Swinburne University
Taggart, Andrew
Teach for Australia
The Smith Family
Tishler, Cathy
Universities Australia
University of Melbourne
University of New England
University of Newcastle
University of Queensland
University of South Australia
University of Sydney
University of Tasmania, School of Education
University of the Sunshine Coast
University of Western Australia
University of Wollongong
Victorian TAFE Association
Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership
Wodonga Institute of TAFE

Appendix G – Glossary

Attainment refers to the highest level of an accredited tertiary education qualification achieved. The educational attainment a person has is the highest qualification listed on the Australian Qualifications Framework that they have received.

Attrition is a measure of the proportion of students leaving the higher education system after their first year.²¹² The reason a person drops out after their first year of study varies widely and could include homesickness, illness, change of mind, family commitments and more.

Career advice in this report refers to the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes to assist individuals to make informed decisions about their study and work options and enable effective participation in working life.²¹³

Completion describes the rate of students who finish the courses they have started. This differs from attainment in that completion could be any course no matter the level, whereas attainment is measuring the highest level of education completed.²¹⁴

Equality is ensuring individuals or groups of individuals have the same rights and responsibilities, are given the same opportunities and resources and are not treated less favourably on the basis of their specific characteristics, including race, gender, disability, religion, belief, sexual orientation and age.²¹⁵

Equity refers to the practices and ways of thinking that assist in working towards equality, including ensuring individuals or groups of individuals are given opportunities and resources that are proportional to their needs. Equity is distinct from equality in that it acknowledges that underrepresented groups may face different systemic barriers, and therefore may require additional support to overcome these barriers.

External study refers to students studying outside the physical campus, by distance or online.

Higher education is education delivered primarily through universities, as well as other approved higher education providers. Higher education leads to the award of a diploma, degree or doctorate qualification, delivered in accordance with the requirements of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency.

Higher-level VET qualifications are identified as certificate IVs, diplomas, advanced diplomas, vocational graduate certificates and vocational graduate diplomas.

²¹² Department of Education and Training 2019, "Attrition Rate". Available at <https://heimshelp.education.gov.au/resources/glossary/glossaryterm?title=Attrition%20Rate>

²¹³ Department of Education and Training 2019, "School to work transitions". Available at <https://www.education.gov.au/school-work-transitions>

²¹⁴ Kambhampati, S 2015, "Attainment, Completion, and the Trouble in Measuring Them Both", *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Available at <https://www.chronicle.com/blogs/data/2015/05/04/attainment-completion-and-the-trouble-in-measuring-them-both/>

²¹⁵ The University of Edinburgh 2016, "What are equality and diversity?" Available at <https://www.ed.ac.uk/equality-diversity/about/equality-diversity>

Low socioeconomic status a number of measures can be used in research and data analysis to estimate low, medium and high socioeconomic status. In higher education data, for example, the 2016 ABS Socioeconomic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Education and Occupation is used to identify postcodes nationally as low (bottom 25% of the population), medium (middle 50%) or high (top 25%) socioeconomic status (SES).

On-boarding refers to the process of orienting individuals in a new context in a manner that aids retention and/or performance in the role.

On Country recognises Indigenous Australians strong connection to their land. When Indigenous people use the English word 'Country' it is meant in a special way. For Indigenous people culture, nature and land are all linked. Indigenous communities have a cultural connection to the land, which is based on each community's distinct culture, traditions and laws. Country takes in everything within the landscape - landforms, waters, air, trees, rocks, plants, animals, foods, medicines, minerals, stories and special places. Community connections include cultural practices, knowledge, songs, stories and art, as well as all people: past, present and future.²¹⁶

Regional Study Hubs provide infrastructure such as study spaces, video conferencing, computing facilities and internet access, as well as academic and some pastoral support for higher education students studying in RRR Australia via distance education. They also provide support for other students studying in RRR locations, for example, VET students in the local area may also access the facilities.²¹⁷

Regional, rural and remote (RRR) areas is a composite of the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) remoteness structure and the Australian Bureau of Statistics Section of State (SOS) Structure. Terms “regional” or “remote” referring to specific classes of remoteness under the ASGS reflecting their relative access to services. “Rural” areas are typically associated with agricultural industries. The SOS Structure describes rural as any population not contained in an urban centre or locality. A composite approach is not uncommon. For example, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare use the term ‘rural and remote’ to describe all areas outside of major cities. In Australia, 28.4% (6.8 million) of the population reside in RRR areas.²¹⁸

Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are those training providers registered by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (or, in some cases, a state regulator) to deliver vocational education and training services. RTOs are recognised as providers of quality-assured and nationally recognised training and qualifications.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Brown, I, Willandra Lakes Traditional Tribal Groups Elders Council & NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (2019) “Aboriginal Culture”, Mungo National Park. Available at <http://www.visitmungo.com.au/aboriginal-country>

²¹⁷ Department of Education and Training (2018) “Minister for Education announces 16 Regional Study Hubs”. Available at <https://www.education.gov.au/news/minister-education-announces-16-regional-study-hubs>

²¹⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census

²¹⁹ Australian Government, Australian Skills Quality Authority.

Research infrastructure comprises the nationally significant assets, facilities and services to support leading-edge research and innovation. It is accessible to publicly and privately funded users across Australia, and internationally. Australia’s existing national research infrastructure system comprises a highly effective network of facilities and projects under the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS), landmark facilities, including the Australian Synchrotron and the Open-Pool Australian Lightwater (OPAL) Research Reactor operated by publicly funded research agencies (PFRA) and large-scale international collaborations such as the Square Kilometre Array (SKA).²²⁰

Retention rate is a measure of the proportion of students who continue their studies after their first year.²²¹ It is the opposite of the attrition rate.

RRR students include students from RRR locations as determined by the postcode of their permanent home residence at the time of enrolment (first address) as well as the postcode of their permanent home residence during their current year of study (current address).²²²

RRR tertiary institutions refer to VET/TAFE and university providers including Regional Study Hubs who have a permanent, physical presence (e.g. campus) in a regional, rural and/or remote area. It is acknowledged that many tertiary institutions also have a digital presence in RRR locations via the internet, however for the purposes of this Strategy, reference to RRR tertiary institutions centres on those with physical facilities.

Student refers to both young people and adults who are potential or current participants in tertiary education.

Technical and Further Education (TAFE) providers are state and territory government-funded VET providers.

Tertiary education refers to education and training delivered through Australia’s VET system or its higher education system, which includes universities.

Vocational education and training (VET) provides skills and knowledge for work through a national system of registered training organisations, provided by a network of industry, public and private training providers that work together to provide nationally consistent training.

²²⁰ Australian Government 2016 National Research Infrastructure Roadmap. Available at https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/ed16-0269_national_research_infrastructure_roadmap_report_internals_acc.pdf

²²¹ Department of Education and Training (2019) “Retention rate”. Available at <https://heimshelp.education.gov.au/resources/glossary/glossaryterm?title=Retention%20Rate>

²²² Cardak, B., Brett, M., Bowden, M., Vecci, J., Barry, P., Bahtsevanoglou, J., & Mcallister, R. (2017).