Working for business.
Working for Australia

Submission to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education

September 2017

Australian
Chamber of Commerce
and Industry

Australian
Chamber of Commerce
and Industry

WORKING FOR BUSINESS.
WORKING FOR AUSTRALIA
Telephone 02 6270 8000
Email info@acci.asn.au
Website www.acci.asn.au

CANBERRA OFFICE
Commerce House
Level 3, 24 Brisbane Avenue
Barton ACT 2600 PO BOX 6005
Kingston ACT 2604

MELBOURNE OFFICE
Level 2, 150 Collins Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
PO BOX 18008
Collins Street East
Melbourne VIC 8003

SYDNEY OFFICE
Level 15, 140 Arthur Street
North Sydney NSW 2060
Locked Bag 938
North Sydney NSW 2059

ABN 85 008 391 795

Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Table of Contents

Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

1 Introduction

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Australian Chamber) welcomes this opportunity to comment on an issue of concern to its members. The current disparity in students' results and outcomes, seemingly in part determined by geographic location, is something that needs to be addressed because the consequences of this disparity extends far beyond the individual student. A graduating student's successful transition from school to work or further education is a critical objective in order to minimise the economic and societal cost of youth unemployment and negative social and health outcomes for the individual. For regional, rural and remote students poor educational outcomes often have flow on effects to friends and families – which in the case of small rural towns could involve the entire community.

Too often the debate around regional students and their educational disadvantage focuses on the affordability concerns regional students face to attend an urban-based university. While this is a serious issue, it exposes an underlying perception that for students to succeed they must leave the bush. This belittles regional Australia. Instead, what we should be focusing on is ensuring that regional schools and regional institutions of further education (either higher education or vocational education) are able to adequately prepare graduates, and that regional businesses have the ability to grow and take on these graduates as employees. In this way, although not every student will want to stay in their home town, their expertise valued by regional communities and becomes part of the economic growth potential of the regions if they do decide to stay.

Although this submission will address the two specific terms of reference of the Review, namely the gaps in education achievement and successful transitions, the Chamber's comments will discuss more broadly the issues concerning regional, rural and remote education within a regional economic and social context. In relation to transitions, policy recommendations have been made by the Australian Chamber in its recent submission on School to Work Transitions[1]. Despite not having a specific rural focus, these positions remain relevant and are valid to address not only the disparities between regional, rural and remote students and their metropolitan counterparts, but transition issues facing students as a whole regardless of location.

[1] Australian Chamber, Submission to the House Committee on Employment Education and Training: *Inquiry into School to Work Transition*, July 2017

Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

2 Formal education discrepancies

There has long been a substantial difference in outcomes for students depending on their geographical location, yet it has been only recently that this gap has been a major topic of conversation. This may in part be attributed to the introduction of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in 2008 as it clearly demonstrated the difference between regional and metropolitan schools.

Through comparing results with schools in similar situations (i.e. socio-economic status and geographic location), NAPLAN is able to demonstrate that on average, results for regional, rural and remote schools are lower than results seen in metropolitan schools. In its report on the 2016 NAPLAN results, the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Assessment Authority (ACARA) stated:

> *'the highest percentage of students achieving at our above the national minimum standard attend schools in the major cities and the lowest percentage attend schools in very remote geolocations'*[2].

It is not just NAPLAN showing this discrepancy, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) also notes the difference. The Tables 1 and 2, which have been adapted from those in the discussion paper, show a clear contrast in assessment results[3]:

Table 1: Proficiency levels in reading literacy by geographic location

Geographic location	Low level performers (%)	Middle level performers (%)	High level performers (%)	Students at or above the National Proficient Standard (%)
Metropolitan	16	72	12	64
Provincial	34	69	7	51
Remote	28	66	6	44

Table 2: Proficiency levels in mathematical literacy by geographic location

Geographic location	Low level performers (%)	Middle level performers (%)	High level performers (%)	Students at or above the National Proficient Standard (%)
Metropolitan	19	68	13	64
Provincial	29	64	7	51
Remote	33	62	5	44

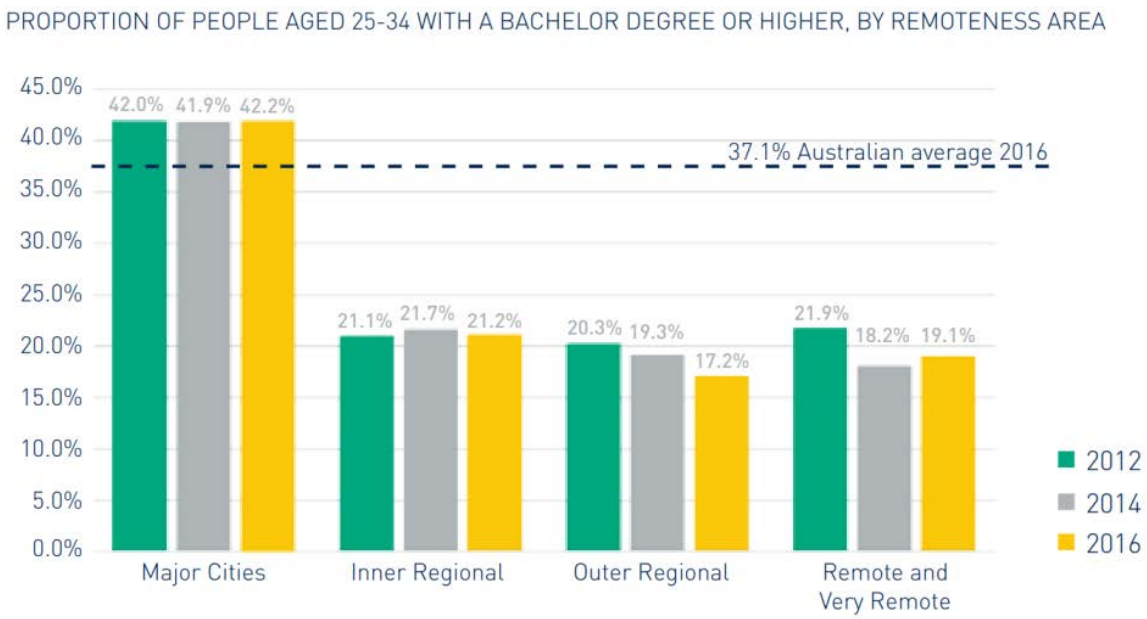
[2] ACARA (2016), *National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy. Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy: National Report for 2016,* p64

[3] Halsey (2016), *The Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education – Discussion Paper,* p17

This stark contrast in results based on geographical locations does not end when schooling finishes, but has flow on effects, including for those regional students hoping to continue on to further education.

2.1 Transition from school to higher education

Universities Australia (UA) released statistics in its 2017 Data Snapshot showing that while the number of regional students attending tertiary institutions has risen by 45% since 2008[4] , it is still the case that there is a much higher proportion of metropolitan residents having obtained a bachelor's degree or higher than their regional counterparts. UA included the following graph to highlight this discrepancy[5]:



The large financial burden faced by regional students when they transition to higher education is often cited as a reason for this discrepancy between regional and metropolitan students. Aside from the fees of higher education, for which the HECS and HELP system does assist, choices for a regional student to attend from a home base are likely to be limited or even non-existent. This is particularly the case for those wishing to study specialist degrees such as medicine.

While there are financial assistance programs in place through the Department of Human Services to help students meet these costs, often the eligibility criteria can prohibit certain regional, rural and remote students from accessing these programs. Recent legislative changes have to some extent addressed these concerns by allowing for exemptions for regional students to classify them as independent from their parents, despite not necessarily meeting the income requirements[6]. This classification is important as if they were classified

[4] Universities Australia (2017), *Data Snapshot 2017,* p15
[5] Universities Australia (2017), *Data Snapshot 2017,* p23
[6] Department of Human Services, 'Youth Allowance', https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/youth-allowance

as a dependant, the student's assistance would be impacted by the income and assets of their parents. For farming families in particular, the net worth of their 'non-current' assets may be of high financial value, however due to the nature and realities of farming this net worth does not often equate to available finance ('current' assets).

However, costs are not the only prohibitive factor in regional, rural and remote students accessing universities. As already discussed, these students typically have lower marks than those from metropolitan areas, affecting their eligibility for the higher education courses they wish to study. To counter this, some universities already have in place 'bonus points' for regional students applying to study at their institutions- topping up the Australian Tertiary Academic Rank (ATAR) a student has received. For example, the University of Wollongong provides an additional three points onto a prospective student's ATAR if the student has attended an eligible school, which are determined by postcode[7].

This approach has merit as a short term or even band-aid fix to the discrepancy, but it is preferable that the problem is addressed at its source by increasing the effort while the student is at school. Our call for minimum standards in school for literacy and numeracy across all states and territories reflects this approach. The Chamber also supports the Federal Government's recent changes to school funding arrangements, ensuring a more needs-based approach is taken (of great benefit to regional, rural and remote schools in particular), and of the yet-to-be-concluded review of the school education chaired by David Gonski AC.

3 Transition from school to work

The Australian Chamber provided a detailed submission in July 2017 to the House of Representatives' Standing Committee on Education and Employment's inquiry into school to work transitions. While this did not specifically focus on regional, rural and remote students, the Chamber's submission contains relevant information for this review and its content has been included as appropriate.

The first question to ask when considering school to work transitions should be 'what does a successful transition look like?' It may generally be considered that a successful transition would be one where the school leaver has enrolled in full-time study or employed in full-time work the following year. However, a job that is near full-time in hours, or a purposeful "gap year" of travel and enjoyment does not sit within this view of a successful transition. In its analysis of the *Youth Transitions Evidence Base*[8], Deloitte Access Economics, using the *Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth* (LSAY) as a base, defines a good transition as one where the school leaver has "three or four of the four annual surveys since leaving school have been fully engaged in either full-time work, full-time study at or above Certificate III level or a combination of part-time work and part-time study at or above Certificate III level."(p i).

[7] University of Wollongong (2017), 'Local and Regional Bonus', http://www.uow.edu.au/future/pointstouow/UOW057803
[8] Deloitte Access Economics (2012), *Youth Transitions Evidence Base, 2006 evidence updated in 2012, prepared for DEEWR.*

From the same analysis, a poor transition from school is when an individual "over three or four of the four surveys since leaving school are unemployed, not in the labour force, or have only part-time work (where they have been seeking additional work or additional hours), or some combination of these three." (p ii).

These definitions provide a useful basis for comments relating to this inquiry (although it is debateable that Certificate III is the appropriate benchmark)[9].

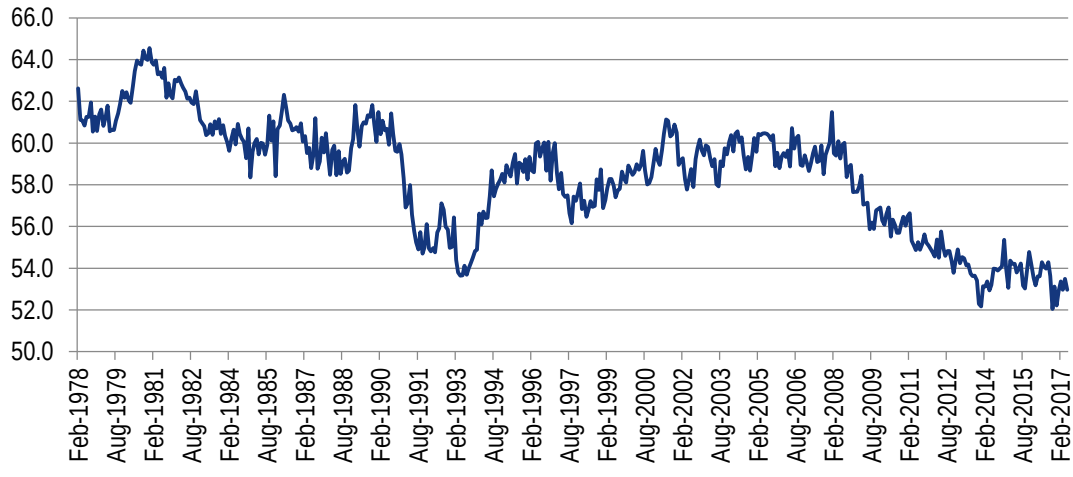
3.1 Big shifts have occurred

The difficulties experienced by young people in transitioning from school to work have been building over some decades. In a 1998 report[10], the Dusseldorp Skills Forum highlighted the profound changes that had occurred since the 1970s, from a time when most young people left school aged 15 or 16 and "very quickly got a job", to a world that has become more complex. This shift in education retention has coincided with a reduction in opportunities across industries for entry level unskilled work and the rise in expectation of employers who need employees to be highly productive as soon as possible in order to compete domestically and globally.

The successful goal of encouraging teenagers to complete at least Year 12 education has brought many benefits to long term career, economic and social outcomes. However, the change has also seen not only the dramatic reduction of teenagers in full-time employment (which is an obvious outcome of people staying at school longer), but also has coincided with an increase in teenagers who are not in the labour force at all.

This decline in engagement of teenagers in work can also be illustrated by Figure 2 which graphically illustrates the decline in the participation rate.

Figure 1: Participation rate 15-19yo 1978 to 2017

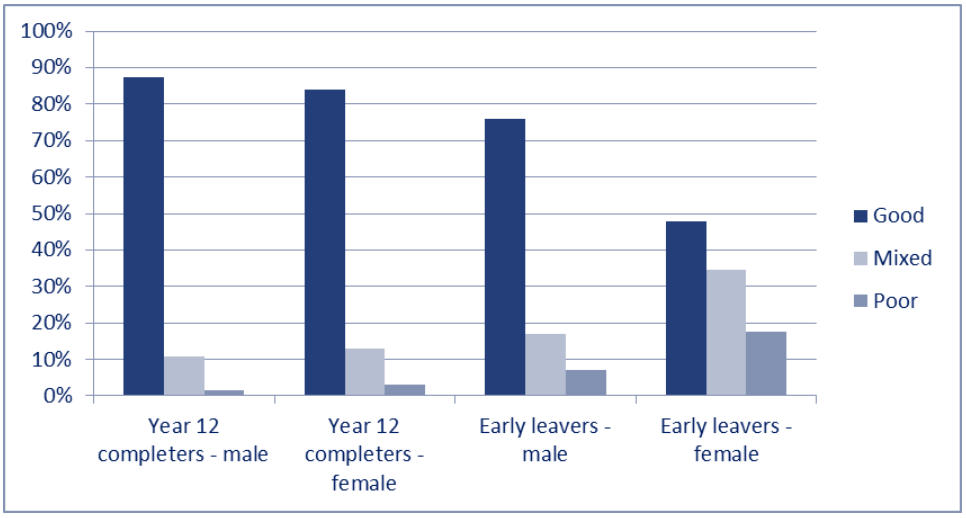


[9] Many semi-skilled jobs in high volume industries such as retail and hospitality are well served by a Certificate II, and the loss of funding support for Certificate II traineeships has been disappointing – see apprenticeships commentary.
[10] Dusseldorp Skills Forum (1998) *Australia's Youth: reality and risk*, Dusseldorp skills forum, March 1998

The consequence is that many young people do not develop valuable skills that arise from work until they are adults (over 18), by which time the cost of their employment is at, or close to, adult rates where they are competing against job seekers with much more experience. This lack of work experience has hindered successful transitions from education to work and has made it even more imperative that the education system, as well as the community (through active participation in clubs, sport and volunteerism), provide opportunities for young people to understand and acquire the skills and attributes required in the workplace.

This analysis does not, however, lead to a conclusion that leaving school earlier than Year 12 is the remedy, as the evidence clearly shows the reverse to be true. As figure 2[11] shows, the outcomes particularly for females who have left school early are much weaker than for Year 12 school leavers:

Figure 2: Transitional Outcomes for students – completers v early school leavers



Although it would be likely that many of the reasons that led to early school leaving would impede successful transitions, the overwhelming evidence about long term career outcomes, as well as the career and study options that the completion of Year 12 provides, is sufficient to continue to strive for strong Year 12 completion rates. The OECD in its 2016 analysis of youth employment in Australia emphasised that lower education attainment (below Year 12) is the most important driver of NEET status (Neither in Employment nor Education and Training).[12] This is of particular relevance to regional, rural and remote areas where, as highlighted in the discussion paper, the percentage of students from these areas completing Year 12 is remarkably lower than those from the city: 78 per cent of metropolitan students complete Year 12, as opposed to 43 per cent of students from remote areas[13].

In summary, although increased participation in education until Year 12 is critically important, it comes with a decline in early engagement with work for many young Australians which

[11] Deloitte Access Economics, op cit. page 26
[12] OECD (2016) *Investing in Youth: Australia,* OECD Publishing, Paris.
[13] Mitchell Institute (2015), *Educational Opportunity in Australia Fact Sheet 6,* Mitchell Institute, Melbourne

needs to be accommodated in other ways. There is no better preparation for work than other work, so policy responses need to identify the best mechanisms of delivering to school students who have not worked a strong understanding of the skills and attributes that employers require, and sufficient vocational learning and work experience to achieve a successful transition, whether that transition to work is directly from school or via further study.

4 Career Skills and an Informed Market

The Australian Chamber has been a strong advocate over the last few years in support of putting career development back on the national policy agenda. All students need to know their options. For a student from a regional, rural or remote area, the ability to make an informed decision about their future career prospects is vital because, among other considerations, a decision on whether or not to leave their local community is a momentous one.

4.1 Online careers information

There is a need for better coordination of online career information, especially in rural areas where face-to-face services can be non-existent and impractical to introduce. The withdrawal of federal funding for the *myfuture* website in 2014 has led to suboptimal outcomes, with only a few states currently still providing funding. This has exacerbated a confusing landscape of government funded career information websites. Although there is no mechanism to control the number of privately funded career relating sites (nor should there be), there is a role for the federal government, working closely with state and territory governments, to identify a one stop shop for online careers information and also to provide links to relevant government sites (myskills, apprenticeships, defence, etc) as well as reputable and reliable industry and privately operated sites.

Since February 2017 there has been a working group, of which the Australian Chamber is a member, providing input relevant to a career education strategy for schools. During these discussions, it became clear that there is a need for *myfuture* to remain a relevant and sufficiently funded site. However, it was also demonstrated that the Department of Employment was improving its site to provide information on the job outlook for occupations and industries. Both sites, as well as other government funded sites, have useful elements, but there needs to be clarity as to which site is promoted as the “go to” place.

4.2 Career Education in Schools

The working group on the career education strategy has brought together the federal, state and territory governments, school and career stakeholders and industry. This work builds on the earlier collaborative effort to finalise a common view about vocational learning and training for secondary school students.[14]

[14] Education Council (2014), *Preparing Secondary Students for Work – a framework for vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students*,

Career education is defined as "the development of skills and attitudes through a planned program of learning experiences in education and training setting which will assist students to make informed decisions about their study and or work options and enable effective participation in working life." [15]

The strategy is not yet finalised, with the working group recommending a range of short term actions as well as the need to finalise a broader strategic document that the Ministerial Education Council can approve. To achieve the final strategy, the work of the group will likely continue to the end of 2017.

From an industry perspective, it is important that the final strategy includes:

- An acknowledgement of the role of career education for school students in the context of a lifelong career development strategy
- Sets out a vision for the role of career education and emphasises its importance within schools.
- Addresses the capability-building of students who need strong career planning skills, as well as teachers and careers advisers.
- Identifies the ongoing collaboration platforms involving all governments, industry and school stakeholders to achieve real change in the quality, accuracy and timeliness of information and advice provided to school students.

4.3 Information on education and employment outcomes

An important part of an informed market is to provide school students (and others seeking to further their studies) with an understanding of the student experience, as well as the employment and salary outcomes of educational choices. For higher education, this site is www.qilt.edu.au. (QILT stands for Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching).

The site has highly valuable information for potential higher education students, with more improvements to be added as the data broadens and deepens. It is very important that this site continues to be improved to help students make informed choices.

The marketing of the QILT site has been very limited. A name change and significant additional promotional resources and effort are required to maximise its reach.

There is a need for a similar service for VET delivery, although the data is more complex due to the range of qualifications and even more significantly the large number of providers. The current myskills.gov.au site does not adequately perform this comparison. Many providers only train a small number of students which means the validity of the data at provider level is limiting. That said, it is important that students considering study in VET are aware of the employment outcomes for apprenticeships, and specific areas of study. This information is available from the NCVER and needs to be more accessible to the public. Qualification-specific information could also be made available for the top 10 or 20 high volume qualifications and also for providers where there is sufficient data. Specific provider

[15] http://www.pssfw.myskills.gov.au/media/1188/attachment-c-common-career-education-terms-20151203.pdf

comparators for small providers could be achieved within broad ranges which may indicate if the provider, in relation to employment outcomes, was below, above or around the average.

5 Apprenticeships and Traineeships

The highest priority in the education and training portfolio for members of the Australian Chamber has been to reverse the decline in apprenticeships and traineeships. This priority saw apprenticeships as one of the top 10 issues highlighted to restore Australia's competitiveness during the last Federal Election.[16]

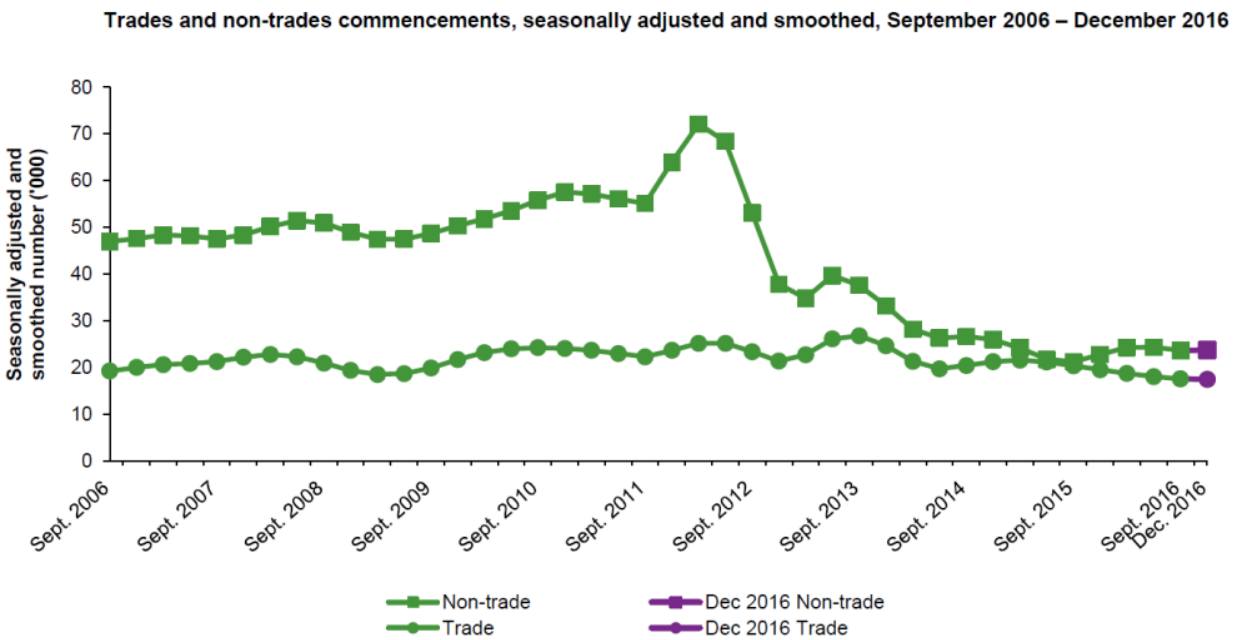
The Australian Chamber is strongly committed to apprenticeships because:

- They produce skills needed for the economy
- The model is a highly valued combination of three important elements: (1) structured, nationally recognised training (2) work experience and a (3) specialised trainee/apprentice wage
- They are an effective vehicle for successful transitions from school to work.

It has long been the case that a higher proportion of regional students take up a trade than their metropolitan counterparts – making apprenticeships an even more vital topic for the bush.

According to figures from 2016[17], 92 per cent of graduates who undertook a trade apprenticeship and 80 per cent of non-trades trainees were employed after training, which compares favourably against the government funded VET average of 75 per cent. The comparison is even more favourable when you consider that two thirds of students who study VET generally were employed before they commenced their training. This is not the case for apprenticeships and traineeships which have a bias towards entry level, with one third of apprentices in training as at September 2016 aged 15 to 19 and another third aged 19 to 24 years. [18]

Figure 4 illustrates the extent of the decline in apprenticeships:



The only positive for young people out of the latest figures is that, due to the high impact of adult apprentice wage increases that were effective from 2013, the number of trade commencements in the year to September 2016 for those aged 24 years and less declined by 8 percent compared to a dramatic slide for those 25 years and older of 26 percent.

Reflecting industry's strong concern over this dramatic slide in apprenticeship numbers, the Australian Chamber joined with AiG and BCA in a joint statement, calling for a national approach to apprenticeships with specific recommendations on how the situation can be addressed.[19]

One of the reasons behind higher proportions of regional students undertaking VET studies, trade or non-trade, is that often a regional area will have a VET facility, such as a TAFE campus. In fact most regional, rural and remote areas have good access to VET predominantly through investment in TAFEs. Better use of this infrastructure, not only for TAFE but for other tertiary course delivery should be considered to improve the local availability of more educational options in regional areas.

.

5.1 Skilling Australians Fund

The announcement in the Federal Budget of a $1.5 billion Skilling Australians fund which delivers partnership apprenticeship projects with the States and Territories provides opportunities to reverse this slide. If achieved, the target of 300,000 new apprenticeships, will deliver much needed skills development as well as a highly valuable vehicle to transition young people from school to work.

In discussions with both the federal and state territory governments, the Australian Chamber has emphasised:

- The critical importance of industry involvement with the fund, not just in the projects put forward by the State/Territories, but in the governance of the fund and the prioritisation of funds and effort;
- The power of apprenticeships to assist in transition from education to work.
- The value of leveraging the investment to achieve real change in the apprenticeships system, to deliver a national approach that still allows for different needs at both state and industry level;
- The importance of not prioritising one industry over another. All industries should have the opportunity to identify those skill priorities that are important and work with Governments to maximise apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities;
- That although innovation and new approaches to apprenticeships is welcome, achieving growth and employer engagement will be achieved if we can restore the business case for employers to offer the opportunity. This business case across industries and could include restoration of the involvement in valuable Certificate II

[19] Australian Chamber, AiG & BCA (2017) Governments need to make 2017 the Year of Vocational Education and Training, See also the media release accompanying the joint statement: https://www.acci.asn.au/news/coalition-business-groups-calls-decisive-action-rescue-australias-ailing-apprenticeship-system

traineeships where they remain relevant, which for a modest investment of training funds and employer incentives, could again provide the valuable transition option that was removed in 2011 with a change to policy and incentives.

- projects should not only be state-specific as regions such as the Albury and Wodonga or Gold Coast/Tweed heads often fall across state boundaries, and some projects will achieve improved outcomes from a national approach. To enable this, industry should be able to partner with multiple state governments on a single project.

6 Literacy and Numeracy

One of the most frequently raised issues raised by employers when discussing the job readiness of young people is concerns about basic literacy and numeracy. The Australian Chamber strongly supports the need for minimum standards across all states and territories for literacy and numeracy where school leavers are assessed to the standard before they enter into either the workplace or further education. The need for this minimum standard for literacy and numeracy is reinforced by the fact that the outcomes for all Australian school students over the last two decades have fallen as measured by international standards. NAPLAN data has also revealed falling standards in some areas and as discussed above standards are falling even lower in regional areas.

The UNICEF's Report Card 14: 'Building the Future; Children and the Sustainable Development Goals in Rich Countries' published in June 2017. What this report card shows is that in the rankings for Sustainable Development Goal 4, concerning quality education, Australia now ranks 39th out of 41 countries considered 'rich' by the UNICEF[20].

This new ranking is in part[21] made up by PISA noting that the performance of Australian students in reading, mathematics and science has been consistently falling since 2000[22].

The Australian Chamber has called for all Governments to agree that states and territories should have within their separate schooling systems a minimum standard for literacy and numeracy for school leavers which is in line with international benchmarks outlined by PISA. For school leavers (at or before year 12) to meet this minimum requirement requires a whole-of-school-life approach. NAPLAN, being primarily a school benchmark, is not capable of achieving this aim.

The Australian Chamber's investigation has found that currently progress on implementing minimum standards for literacy and numeracy is different amongst the states and territories. Some, such as Queensland and Western Australia, already have in place a separate standard for literacy and numeracy that students must meet prior to graduating secondary school. Others are in the process of implementing a minimum standard, whilst some appear only to be relying upon NAPLAN results as an indicator for a student's progress, which as mentioned above is not a sufficient source.

[20] UNICEF Office of Research (2017). 'Building the Future: Children and the Sustainable Development Goals in Rich Countries', *Innocenti Report Card 14*, UNICEF Office of Research, Innocenti, Florence, Page 6.
[21] The other part is determined by participation in early childhood learning prior to entering primary school.
[22] PISA, 'Compare your country; Australia', http://www.compareyourcountry.org/pisa/country/aus?lg=en

PISA's assessment strategy and primary aim is strongly supported by the Australian Chamber: 'what is important for our citizens to know and be able to do?'[23] . This is a question Governments across Australia need to be consistently asking themselves when developing education policies - particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy. Australia's falling standards in this area equates to less people being equipped to fully participate in further education or the workplace, ultimately damaging the broader Australian economy. Considering results for regional, rural and remote students this is an even more pressing issue in regional communities because, looking at the 2015 PISA results tabled above, under 50% of students are meeting the National Proficient Standard – indicating that for regional students, the answer to the question 'what it important for our citizens to know and be able to do?" is a lot more than the evidently know now.

It was pleasing to see that the Federal Government's *Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes* agenda has included a strong focus on literacy and numeracy, acknowledging that 'good literacy and numeracy skills are the foundation for successful progress in school and into the broader world of work and/or study'[24]. It is now critically important that the States universally match that agenda, and put in place appropriate measurements of gain in literacy and numeracy throughout a student's schooling in order to ensure that every school leaver meets the minimum standard aligned with international standards as defined by PISA.

7 Connectivity

Obviously, one of the biggest hurdles facing not just regional students, but regional communities is connectivity.

The continuous rollout of the National Broadband Network should go some way to addressing this; however more needs to be done.

In the recent 2017-18 Federal Budget, the Government announced that a $272 million fund will be established to 'drive major transformational projects of more than $10 million' in regional Australia[25].

In order to greatly enhance value of the additional funds, the Australian Chamber believe that there is an opportunity for the $272 million to be prioritised to projects which will deliver measurable and substantial economic and community benefits to regions by focusing in part on issues of regional connectivity (both digital and physical), including roads and communications infrastructure that enables people to better connect between regions and connect both nationally and internationally.

[23] OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results in Focus,* OECD Publishing, Paris, Page 3.
[24] Department of Education and Training, 'Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes', *https://www.education.gov.au/quality-schools-quality-outcomes-areas-future-focus*
[25] Minister for Regional Development, 09/05/2017, *Investing in growth for our regions, http://minister.infrastructure.gov.au/nash/releases/2017/May/budget-infra_01-2017.aspx*

Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

8 Building on the advantages of regional areas

There is no doubt that students from regional, rural and remote schools face challenges and disadvantages not faced by their counterparts in the city, yet the regional environment does present the opportunities to build on some comparative advantages.

Local schools and tertiary institutions in rural areas have the important and perhaps underestimated benefit of being an integral part of their local community. Also, generally speaking, rural centres have a much greater sense of 'community' then a city does. This in part arises from the dynamics of a smaller population base, meaning you are far more likely to have a personal connection to your school principal or a local business owner. And if you know somebody, or if you are related to somebody, you are far more likely to care about that person. Whilst difficult to quantify, this sense of community, of caring about one another, cannot be underestimated. If a teacher takes a personal interest in a particular struggling student who happens to be connected to someone they know or a small business owner offers a job to their neighbour's child then the student in question has an advantage over the often nameless crowd of metropolitan students. Although it should not always be true, the cliché of "if it is not what you know but who you know" can work to the advantage of rural students who can with the right guidance can build on their connections. This can assist in areas such as obtaining work experience which, as the evidence presented above indicated, is profoundly important. It is also often the case that regional communities have strong clubs and volunteer opportunities that can build work readiness if students are actively encouraged to participate.

The Federal Government's current focus on decentralisation may also present advantages for regional areas. When announcing the Government will begin examining which Government departments and agencies could feasibly relocate to regional areas, Minister for Regional Development Senator the Hon Fiona Nash said 'It's important for Government to lead by example and invest in rural, regional and remote Australia, creating long term careers and confidence in those communities'[26].

Although the Australian Chamber is mindful that shifting public sector instrumentalities is not always successful and has some reservations about a "public sector led" approach, there is no doubt that there is a need for more highly skilled job opportunities for regional students. A comprehensive approach to decentralisation and population policy will create a more favourable economic framework for skilled opportunities in regional, rural and remote locations and should be part of a long term solution to improve educational outcomes for regional students.

In summary, despite the significant differences in educational outcomes and the barriers that regional, rural and remote students face, there are strengths that regional communities inherently have that can be built on to improve educational outcomes, as well as opportunities that can be created through a longer term strategic approach to regional economic growth and decentralisation.

[26] Minister for Regional Development, 'Coalition begins decentralisation process', April 19, http://minister.infrastructure.gov.au/nash/releases/2017/April/fn054_2017.aspx

Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

9 Conclusion

There is a discrepancy between the education results of metropolitan students and those of rural, regional and remote students. Results over many years show that the further away a student is from a large urban centre, generally speaking the worse off they are likely to be when it comes to educational outcomes. This discrepancy must be addressed.

School funding formulas based on socio-economic need is an important part of the solution, as is ensuring that students have the information they need to make the best career choices. Regional digital connectivity is also important. Government should, and is trying to, address these issues.

Answers can also in part come from regional communities themselves. Regional communities have the ability to work together in ways urban areas often cannot, to affect positive improvement in areas such as work experience and mentoring. If the policy settings are right, if the funding is properly targeted with tangible outcomes and if a town works together there is an opportunity to lift the outcomes for regional students. This is in the national interest as this not only improves local economies and their economic output, but the national economy overall.

Australian
Chamber of Commerce
and Industry

10 About the Australian Chamber

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry is the largest and most representative business advocacy network in Australia. We speak on behalf of Australian business at home and abroad.

Our membership comprises all state and territory chambers of commerce and almost 70 national industry associations. Individual businesses are also able to be members of our Business Leaders Council.

We represent more than 300,000 businesses of all sizes, across all industries and all parts of the country, employing over 4 million Australian workers.

The Australian Chamber strives to make Australia the best place in the world to do business – so that Australians have the jobs, living standards and opportunities to which they aspire.

We seek to create an environment in which businesspeople, employees and independent contractors can achieve their potential as part of a dynamic private sector. We encourage entrepreneurship and innovation to achieve prosperity, economic growth and jobs.

We focus on issues that impact on business, including economics, trade, workplace relations, work health and safety, and employment, education and training.

We advocate for Australian business in public debate and to policy decision-makers, including ministers, shadow ministers, other members of parliament, ministerial policy advisors, public servants, regulators and other national agencies. We represent Australian business in international forums.

We represent the broad interests of the private sector rather than individual clients or a narrow sectional interest.

Australian Chamber Members

AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER MEMBERS: BUSINESS SA CANBERRA BUSINESS CHAMBER CHAMBER OF COMMERCE NORTHERN TERRITORY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY QUEENSLAND CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY WESTERN AUSTRALIA NEW SOUTH WALES BUSINESS CHAMBER TASMANIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY VICTORIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY AUSTRALIA ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY MEMBER NATIONAL INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS: ACCORD – HYGIENE, COSMETIC AND SPECIALTY PRODUCTS INDUSTRY AGED AND COMMUNITY SERVICES AUSTRALIA AIR CONDITIONING AND MECHANICAL CONTRACTORS' ASSOCIATION ASSOCIATION OF FINANCIAL ADVISORS ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS OF NSW AUSTRALIAN AUTOMOTIVE DEALER ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIAN BEVERAGES COUNCIL AUSTRALIAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIAN DENTAL INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF EMPLOYERS AND INDUSTRIES AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF TRAVEL AGENTS AUSTRALIAN GIFT AND HOMEWARES ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIAN HOTELS ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIAN MEAT PROCESSOR CORPORATION AUSTRALIAN MOBILE AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION ANIMAL MEDICINES AUSTRALIA AUSTRALIAN MINES AND METALS ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIAN PAINT MANUFACTURERS' FEDERATION INC AUSTRALIAN RECORDING INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIAN RETAILERS ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIAN SELF MEDICATION INDUSTRY AUSTRALIAN STEEL INSTITUTE AUSTRALIAN SUBSCRIPTION TELEVISION AND RADIO ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIAN TOURISM EXPORT COUNCIL AUSTRALIAN VETERINARY ASSOCIATION BOATING INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION BUS INDUSTRY CONFEDERATION BUSINESS COUNCIL OF COOPERATIVES AND MUTUALS CARAVAN INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA CHEMISTRY AUSTRALIA CHIROPRACTORS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA CEMENT CONCRETE AND AGGREGATES ASSOCIATION CONCRETE MASONRY ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA CONSULT AUSTRALIA COUNCIL OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION CRUISE LINES INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION CUSTOMER OWNED BANK ASSOCIATION DIRECT SELLING ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA EXHBITION AND EVENTS ASSOCIATION AUSTRALASIA FINANCIAL PLANNING ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA FITNESS AUSTRALIA FRANCHISEE FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIA HOUSING INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION LARGE FORMAT RETAIL ASSOCIATION LIVE PERFORMANCE AUSTRALIA MASTER BUILDERS AUSTRALIA MASTER PLUMBERS AND MECHANICAL SERVICES ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIA MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY ASSOICIATION OF AUSTRALIA MEDICINES AUSTRALIA NATIONAL DISABILITY SERVICES NATIONAL ELECTRICAL AND COMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT SERVICES ASSOCIATION NATIONAL FIRE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION NATIONAL ONLINE RETAIL ASSOCIATION NATIONAL RETAIL ASSOCIATION NATIONAL ROADS AND MOTORISTS ASSOCIATION NSW TAXI COUNCIL OUTDOOR MEDIA ASSOCIATION OIL INDUSTRY INDUSTRIAL ASSOCIATION PHARMACY GUILD OF AUSTRALIA PHONOGRAPHIC PERFORMANCE COMPANY OF AUSTRALIA PRINTING INDUSTIRES ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA RESTAURANT AND CATERING AUSTRALIA RECRUITMENT AND CONSULTING SERVICES ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA ROOF TILING ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA SCREEN PRODUCERS AUSTRALIA THE TAX INSTITUTE THINK BRICK AUSTRALIA VICTORIAN AUTOMOBILE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE