

Recipient Details

Name of organisation or individual: [O] The University of Western Australia

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Responses

Curriculum and assessment

Australian Curriculum recognises the need to engage gifted and talented students but flexibility is required in how it is delivered in rural schools. Gifted and talented programs are generally offered to identified students in metropolitan areas with students in regional and remote areas being unable to access these valuable extension opportunities. Professor Peter Merrotsy (UWA Graduate School of Education) suggests alternative entry pathways for equity groups and Indigenous students should be established for academically selective programs; and online provision be provided to allow access for academically gifted students living in regional and remote areas.

In addition, it is advised that mother tongue be a recognised medium of instruction during the early years of schooling and that there should be continuity of access to first language studies throughout schooling.

Examples of innovative ways in which the curriculum is being delivered in rural schools are:

1. Online Telescopes for Students: SPIRIT is a world class internet accessible telescope initiative for students and educators in Western Australia that is hosted by the International Centre for Radio Astronomy Research, a joint venture between Curtin University and UWA. The initiative allows schools to access the same tools used by researchers and astronomers to observe and collect astronomical data. Students remotely control either of the two SPIRIT robotic telescopes in real time to take images of distant astronomical objects, as well as schedule automated data acquisition as part of more sophisticated research projects. Every year the telescopes are used by hundreds of students from schools throughout Western Australia and beyond.
2. Warrego School, Northern Territory: This is a highly regarded example of an effective cross curriculum approach that is responsive to the needs of the community. Its success was documented in the SBS documentary Bush School.

Rating: 6

Teachers and teaching

In order to improve retention of 'top teachers' it is important to recognise that financial remuneration is not necessarily the reason why staff leave a rural school. Isolation, personal and professional, is often cited as being a significant reason for leaving a rural community (Jenkins, Reitano, & Taylor, 2011).

Strategies to improve retention include training on resiliency and self-care for mental wellbeing; and financial bonuses for high achieving staff who remain in a school for an extended period of time.

Professional development (PD) is vital in addressing staff attrition and should include school based support; centralised professional development activities; and focus on discovery approaches to

learning. An example that Aspire UWA delivers is funded by a Department of Education and Training 2016 National Priority Pool grant. Together with Professor Peter Merrotsy, workshops are delivered in rural areas, focused on discovery approaches to deliver the Australian Curriculum (Mathematics). This is a valuable activity that UWA would like to continue however there are limited opportunities to access additional funding.

There are challenges associated with delivering inclusive education in rural secondary schools and tailored PD for teachers focused on effective strategies and resources to support students with disabilities is critical (Kuhl, Pagliano & Boon, 2015). Expertise within the university sector could be drawn upon to facilitate this.

Professor Vaille Dawson (UWA Graduate School of Education) has suggested the following innovative approaches to support a high quality teaching workforce:

- A model blending Teach for Australia approach and traditional university based courses with paid internships for the second year of the Masters of Teaching.
- The Commonwealth funded Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship was a merit university scholarship where upon graduation, the recipients were required to work in a rural setting for an agreed period of time. This model could be adapted to prospective education students and be restricted to applicants from regional and remote areas.
- Offer paid industry internships to 'top teachers' after three-five years working in a rural school. This is based on a similar model developed by the Royal Society of New Zealand.

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

Rating: 0

School and Community

Aspire UWA uses a combination of campus and school based experiences to motivate and support rural students to realise their aspirations.

Camps allow Year 9 and 11 students to experience university life first hand. Camps have delivered rich experiences to over 1800 students since 2009. Immersing rural students in university life while living in a residential college builds confidence and helps make informed decisions. The positive impact on motivation can last for years after; "Aspire UWA was definitely one of the best things we had at school. When you look at who came out of Karratha in terms of who ended up aiming for and going to uni, it was the group that went to Aspire and had a lot of contact" (UWA and Aspire remote partner school Graduate).

Regular visits to partner schools allow the Aspire team to work with entire classes. Delivering activities that build capacity within the whole school population, the team extends the learning achieved in the school curriculum. Activities delivered are responsive to the needs of individual schools.

Universities, Government, Corporations and philanthropists all play an integral role in raising aspirations and motivations for students to transition to post-secondary opportunities including higher education. Community events and outreach to regional and remote areas is an important aspect of this.

An innovative initiative that connects schools with the broader community is Astrofest, an educational celebration of astronomy and space, coordinated by the International Centre for Radio Astronomy Research (ICRAR), a joint venture between Curtin University and The University of Western Australia.

Astrofest plays an important part in inspiring the community and promoting education around the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) radio telescope, the biggest radio telescope in the world, part of which is being built in the outback of Western Australia. Astrofest is a free event aimed at families, attended by a broad cross section of the community. By demonstrating the fascinating work astronomers do, Astrofest inspires young people to consider careers in STEM. Each year several regional Astrofests are delivered throughout Western Australia in partnership with schools and educational organisations including Scitech and Aspire UWA.

Rating: 6

Information and Communication Technology

Rating: 0

Entrepreneurship and schools

Regional (10.1%) and remote students (14.9%) have higher first year attrition rates than metropolitan students (7.1%) (Department of Education and Training, 2017). Supporting a successful transition into further study needs to be prioritised by both the secondary and tertiary education sectors. Recognised challenges associated with transition include:

- Financial pressures: students face significant a financial burden when relocating for study and are more likely to work while studying. Consequently this can add more pressure and strain on their study, limiting their ability to socialise and participate in co-curricula activities.
- Psychological distress: When transitioning, rural students can experience higher rates of ill-mental health (Orygen, 2017). This can be associated with relocation and enrolment challenges; experiencing imposter syndrome; homesickness; feeling isolated; and loneliness.

In order to help students transition successfully it is important that the government address the financial challenges regional and remote students face in meeting living costs associated with relocation:

1. The University commends the Australian Government on the establishment of the Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships program. As a university with a growing number of regional and remote students we strongly support this initiative and the valuable support it will provide potential students as they prepare to transition into tertiary study. However, in establishing this new program we recommend that priority be given to Indigenous and students relocating from remote and very remote Australia (as defined by Australian Statistical Geography Standard).
2. It is suggested that the Australian Government, through the Department of Social Services, convert the start-up loan back to a scholarship providing up to \$2050 a year to students to help fund upfront expenses associated with study.

University outreach programs play a vital role in connecting schools and their students with universities; and supporting a successful transition experience. However the proposed changes to HEPPP funding model partner do not recognise the significant cost associated with engaging regional and remote secondary schools in a sparsely populated state like Western Australia.

Rating: 6

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding

Rating for enrolments: 0

Rating for clusters: 0

Rating for distance education: 0

Rating for boarding: 0

Diversity

Rating: 0

Transitioning beyond school

A change that will negate post school opportunities for rural students is the HEPPP funding model that is currently under consideration in Parliament. It is proposed that future HEPPP allocations be calculated using a loading of \$985 per low SES student. However, this does not recognise the significantly higher costs to deliver outreach to rural students in large states. This penalises the most remote students and particularly Indigenous Australians as over 60% of Aboriginal people in WA live in rural areas. An adjusted loading for large states with higher outreach costs would improve access to outreach programs to students living in the most remote areas of Australia.

Through HEPPP, outreach programs were developed and extended throughout Australia facilitating connections between schools, universities, philanthropic organisations and corporates. At UWA, Aspire has developed 63 partnerships with schools throughout WA, 43 of which are in rural communities. Achieving cultural change in schools to raise expectations of high academic performance and normalise the goal of higher education is challenging, however in consecutive partner school surveys, school staff identified marked improvements in attitudes to higher education that they attributed to Aspire's influence.

'Addressing the directional flow of rural students moving to cities' should be reframed to consider making the directional flow two ways. Creating a greater sense of connection between rural and metropolitan areas through higher education is vitally important for the future of rural communities. Lower university attainment in rural areas has a detrimental effect on rural communities Human Capital, and can impact a community's 'potential to drive innovation and economic growth' (Regional Australia Institute, 2017).

UWA's regional campus, the Albany Centre and the Rural Clinical School are two ways in which this connection is facilitated by UWA. The Rural Clinical School involves medical students spending a year of their studies living and working in a rural community. Research demonstrates that the students who participate in the program are almost four times more likely to return to work in rural Australia compared to others.

A recommendation for consideration is to establish funding programs that facilitate university students learning and living in rural communities.

Rating: 7

Additional Comments

Recommendations to improve education in regional, rural and remote areas include:

- Reassess HEPPP changes, prioritising funding for university to engage regional and remote communities;
- Return the Start-up loan back to a scholarship;
- Prioritise remote and Indigenous students in the newly established STEM scholarship program;
- Establish funding programs that facilitate university students learning and living in rural communities.

UWA is committed to supporting rural students aspire to, and enjoy a rich university experience. This is facilitated through a comprehensive suite of activities:

Accommodation: Some student accommodation at UWA is prioritised for Indigenous, low socio economic or students educated in rural and isolated areas of WA relocating to Perth.

Albany Centre: provides students the opportunity to study part or all of a UWA degree at the regional campus.

Albany Smart Start Program: Based on UWA's successful Aboriginal Orientation Program, it is open to Indigenous and non-Indigenous people over 18 and has no tuition fees.

Aspire UWA: Established through competitive Government funding in 2009, Aspire works with 63 partner schools (including 43 regional and remote schools) to raise aspirations and support students through to successful university transition. A core Learning Framework for students in years 7-12 is delivered that includes school visits, campus based activities, camps and community events.

Broadway scheme: This alternative entry pathway allows students from designated schools (including regional schools) to gain admission to UWA with an ATAR of 75. Students who enter through this pathway are then supported through their transition into university.

Fairway UWA: An alternative entry pathway and comprehensive support program for students in their final year of secondary schooling. Open to students across the state, Fairway supports students who experience financial hardship along with a wide array of challenging circumstances, in achieving their academic potential. To date 96% of the fairway students who completed the program have received offers from universities in WA.

Rural Direct Pathway to Medicine and Dentistry: Partnerships were developed with rural high schools as part of the program to deliver and promote medicine as a viable career choice for rural students. Individualised support is available to assist students in relocating to Perth to commence their tertiary studies.

Scholarships: University and donor funded scholarships are annually awarded to rural students.

School of Indigenous Studies Aboriginal Orientation Course and direct pathway: A year long course which prepares students for direct entry into to undergraduate degrees at UWA.

School of Indigenous Studies High School Outreach Program: The School offers a wide range of programs and activities aimed at encouraging Indigenous secondary students from across the state to complete Year 12 and pursue tertiary studies. SIS visit most regional centres and many schools bring Indigenous student on campus during school camps to Perth.

School of Indigenous Studies Student Services: Aboriginal students are provided personalised support, resources and educational opportunities that enhance their university experience.

Student Wellbeing: Counselling, disability and learning support services work with university programs and provide support to rural students throughout their time at UWA.