



Australian Government
Department of Education

Inquiry into Regional Australia

Submission from the Department of Education to the *House of Representatives Select Committee on Regional Australia*

October 2019

Opportunity through learning

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Inquiry into Regional Australia

Introduction

The Department of Education (the department) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the *House of Representatives Select Committee on Regional Australia Inquiry into Regional Australia*.

Education plays an integral role in the social and economic prosperity of regional areas. As the House of Representatives Select Committee on Regional Development and Decentralisation highlighted in its *Regions at the Ready* report, communities with strong education sectors are more likely to experience economic growth. The majority of individuals who study in the regions go on to work in a regional area after graduation.¹ Improving educational outcomes in regional and remote areas not only benefits those communities, but can also provide flow-on benefits for the nation's prosperity.

Participation and attainment rates in higher-level tertiary education continue to be significantly lower in regional and remote areas compared to major cities. Individuals living in regional and remote areas are half as likely as their metropolitan counterparts to obtain a Bachelor degree or higher by the age of 35.²

In November 2018, the Australian Government announced a Regional Higher Education package, to improve access to higher education for individuals in regional and remote areas. This built on the Government's 2016 Regional Student Access to Education Package, and the 2018 Government response to the Independent Review in to Regional, Rural and Remote Education (Halsey Review). These include additional Commonwealth supported places for regionally focused universities, scholarships for regional and remote tertiary students and improved access to Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY.

The department plays an important role in improving equity of access to education for students from all areas of Australia, including regional and remote Australia. The department oversees a number of Government initiatives that support regional education, which are outlined further in this submission.

In particular, this submission addresses two of the inquiry's Terms of Reference:

- Examining the effectiveness of existing regional service delivery and development programs
- Consider other measures to support the ongoing growth and sustainability of regional Australia.

¹ Nous Group (2018) The economic impact of the Regional Universities Network. Report commissioned by the RUN, Canberra. p. 4.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2016) Census of Population and Housing.

Australian Government independent review of regional education and national strategy

Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education

In 2017, the Australian Government established the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (the Halsey Review) to consider the key issues, challenges and barriers that affect regional, rural and remote student learning outcomes.

The report ([Attachment A](#)) outlined how the achievements of regional, rural and remote students have in the main lagged behind urban students for decades with student educational outcomes decreasing as geographical distance from urban areas increases.

The report outlined the difficulties in attracting and retaining teachers and experienced school leaders, access issues to education such as vocational education and university options, and appropriate, affordable and reliable information and communication technologies.

The Government accepted all 11 recommendations of the Halsey Review, including a recommendation to “...establish a national focus for regional, rural and remote education, training and research to enhance access, outcomes and opportunities in regional Australia” (see below on the National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy). The Government’s response to the Halsey Review is provided at [Attachment B](#).

National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy

Building on its response to the Halsey Review, in November 2018 the Government announced its intention to develop a National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy, focused on improving participation and outcomes of regional, rural and remote students in tertiary education. It appointed a Regional Education Expert Advisory Group (EAG), chaired by the Hon Dr Denis Napthine, to lead this work. The EAG undertook extensive consultation across the country, and was supported by a Regional Education Taskforce within the department.

The Hon Dan Tehan MP, Minister for Education, released the EAG’s National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy final report ([Attachment C](#)) on 28 August 2019.

The Napthine Review makes seven recommendations and proposes 33 individual actions, to improve regional and remote tertiary education outcomes. The recommendations cover:

- improving access to tertiary study options for regional and remote students
- improving financial and other supports, including for equity groups
- building aspirations of regional and remote students, including through providing better career advice and strengthening schools
- developing regional communities including through strengthening the role of tertiary providers in regional Australia.

The Napthine Review found that the contribution of regional and remote Australia is not being maximised. It found that boosting the contribution made by regional and remote areas, including the capacity of educational institutions, will help to build the nation, increase productivity, and promote decentralisation.

The Government has accepted the aims of the Napthine Review recommendations and is considering feedback from stakeholders on the individual actions proposed in the report, toward developing a response.

International students in regional Australia

In 2016, the Australian Government launched the *National Strategy for International Education 2025* (the National Strategy) to advance Australia's role as a global leader in education, training and research. It also established a world-first Council for International Education (the Council) to champion a whole-of-government approach to international education.

As Australia's largest services export industry, international education contributed \$35.1 billion to our economy in 2018 and supported over 240,000 jobs. While international education brings significant cultural and social benefits to our schools, vocational institutions, universities, workplaces and communities, only three per cent of international students choose to study in Australia's regional areas.

Goal 9.2 of the National Strategy highlights the importance of regional Australia to the Australian international education, and commits to attract more international students to regional communities by promoting opportunities in regional Australia.

To share the benefits of international education across Australia more broadly, the department oversees a suite of policies and initiatives to encourage international students to study and work in regional Australia.

Growing International Education in Regional Australia

To support the implementation of the National Strategy, a priority for the Council is to look for opportunities to communicate the benefits of international education across Australia, and identify ways to encourage a diverse range of study opportunities, including outside of major capital cities.

In early 2019, the Expert Members of the Council released a discussion paper on *Growing International Education in Regional Australia* ([Attachment D](#)) and undertook a series of targeted roundtables in regional education destinations, including in the Australian Capital Territory, Geelong, Warrnambool, Adelaide, Newcastle, Cairns, Armidale and Perth. Stakeholders from the Northern Territory and Tasmania participated in the Adelaide based consultations. Minister Tehan opened and participated in the first roundtable consultation held in Warrnambool.

Outcomes from the consultation informed the Expert Members' advice to the Australian Government on how to grow international education in regional Australia ([Attachment E](#)). The Australian Government provided a response to the Expert Members' advice ([Attachment F](#)), which formed an important part of the *Planning for Australia's Future Population* announced by the Prime Minister on 20 March 2019.

Programs and initiatives to support regional education

The department supports the participation of individuals from regional and remote areas in accessing and succeeding in tertiary education by overseeing the implementation and ongoing management of a number of key regional education programs.

Regional University Centres

The Regional University Centres (formerly Regional Study Hubs) program was initially funded in 2018-19, with a commitment of \$16.7 million over four years to establish eight Centres. In November 2018, as part of its Regional Higher Education Package, the Government expanded this funding to a total of \$24.2 million, for the establishment of 16 Centres.

Regional University Centres are facilities that regional students can use to study tertiary courses locally delivered by distance from any Australian institution. Centres provide infrastructure including study spaces and high-speed internet, administrative and academic support services, and student support services, including pastoral support. Centres must have a partner university, however, students studying by distance through any tertiary institution are able to access the Centre.

In the 2018-19 Budget, the Government announced funding of \$14 million for additional Commonwealth supported places (CSPs) for students studying at the Centres. These places were allocated to the universities that had partnered with one or more of the 16 Centres.

On 29 April 2019, the Government announced a further commitment of \$15 million for five additional Centres (including additional CSPs), as part of the Government's Plan for Regional Australia. The application process for this round of Centres is currently open, and will close on 28 November 2019.

Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships

The Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships (RRES) Program supports students with the costs of studying at university or at a vocational education and training institution. The scholarships are valued at up to \$18,000 each and are available to support students studying for six months full-time or up to 8 years part-time, on campus, or through online and distance education.

The Government has committed a total of \$58.1 million to support the RRES program. Three rounds have been run so far, for students commencing study in 2018 and 2019.

Destination Australia Program

A key element of the Government's *Planning for Australia's Future Population* is the new Destination Australia Program. The aim of the Program is to attract and support international and domestic students to study in regional Australia, to grow and develop regional Australian tertiary education providers, and offer students a high quality learning experience.

The \$93.7 million Program allows tertiary education providers, including vocational education and training and higher education providers, to apply for funding through a competitive grants process to administer and promote scholarships for Australian and international students who live and study in regional Australia. Over 1,000 scholarships valued at \$15,000 per student, per year, will be available for students undertaking a

Certificate IV through to PhD. This will encourage diversification of where international students choose to study, as the majority study in Australia's three largest cities (Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane).

Under the Program, a 'regional location' is defined according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Australian Statistical Geography Standard Remoteness Structure. All institutions whose location is NOT classified as 'Major cities of Australia' will be eligible. Use of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Australian Statistical Geography Standard is consistent with definitions used for other education programs in the Education portfolio.

The Program will work together with the announcement, also part of the Government's *Planning for Australia's Future Population*, of an additional year for eligible international students on a Temporary Graduation Visa (subclass 485) who live and study in regional Australia. This initiative is being delivered by the Department of Home Affairs.

Enabling Growth and Innovation (EGI) program

The department seeks to support regional Australia to continue to experience the transformative potential of tertiary education, by boosting enrolments and increasing domestic participation in regional Australia. Through the EGI program, the department has funded a range of projects to assist in spreading the benefits of international education to regional areas, including:

- *International School Engagement in Regional Australia* delivered by Indigenous Professional Services to support regional Australian schools to identify and build their capacity to implement a diverse range of appropriate international engagement activities. The department has received the draft final report, which is currently under consideration.
- *Expanding research collaboration between regional Australia and Southeast Asia* to be delivered by PhillipsKPA. The project will be undertaken in collaboration with regional Australian universities to conduct research workshops in Australia with the purpose of enabling Australian and Southeast Asia (SEA) researchers to develop productive linkages and identify mutually beneficial research collaboration. A final report is due in March 2020.
- *Growing Regional Pathways to Higher Education* delivered by Victorian TAFE Association to identify new approaches to grow international student enrolments in regional areas. The project is due for completion in July 2020.
- *Promoting destination diversity in International Education* delivered by the Australian Council for Education Research to identify existing study programs in regional institutions including the regional footprints of Group of Eight universities.

Schools-based initiatives

The Government remains committed to providing Australian families with choice and equity in school education. The Government is providing a record \$310.3 billion in recurrent funding to all Australian schools from 2018 to 2029. Of this, an estimated \$69.7 billion will benefit students in regional and remote schools.

The Government is continuing to work with state and territory education authorities (which have constitutional responsibility for schooling) to ensure all students can access a high quality education regardless of where they live.

A number of initiatives are being implemented:

- The Government has committed \$21.2 million to establish the High Achieving Teachers Program to support the recruitment of high achievers into teaching, specifically in regional, rural and low socio-economic schools.
- A national teacher workforce strategy is also being developed. This initiative commits all governments to review teacher workforce needs of the future to recruit and retain quality teachers and attract teachers to areas of need.
- An additional \$15 million has been provided to Teach for Australia to train teachers to become high quality school leaders in rural, remote or disadvantaged schools.
- The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership has undertaken research into best practice approaches to teacher and school leader training, professional learning and support for regional, rural and remote settings.

In addition, to assist in driving the aspirations and motivations of young people, the Government committed \$2 million to expand the Country Education Partnership's Rural Inspire program to encourage young people in rural communities to set their sights high, develop their motivation and increase their ability to choose and achieve positive career, life and learning goals. This funding was a direct recommendation of the Halsey Review.