

Tim Watling
Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations References Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Re: Questions on Notice for the Foundation for Young Australians (Submission 55)

Dear Mr Watling,

We would like to thank the Committee for providing Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) and a group of students with the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into Teaching and Learning. We hope that our Submission and our appearance on 22 February, 2013 were of assistance to the Inquiry.

We thank Senator McKenzie for her Questions on Notice regarding education for students in remote and regional Australia. We hope the response will assist the Committee in their inquiries. We note that, to our knowledge, there is limited international evidence on rural education at a policy level. To this end, we have also included examples of successful non-government initiatives in Australia.

FYA is deeply committed to the provision of a fairer and future focussed education system that engages all young Australians, including in regional areas. We have a range of initiatives that work with young people in regional Australia, including the Worlds of Work (WoW) program, Change It Up and NAB Schools First. A brief description of each follows and more information is available at <http://www.fya.org.au/>.

We look forward to continuing this important conversation with the References Committee, as well as other policymakers and government representatives.

Yours sincerely,

Ricky Campbell-Allen
Director, Centre for New Public Education
Foundation for Young Australians

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Question on Notice: In relation to Figure A2 (p. 33), please present this data to show the urban/rural breakdown.

Figure A2 describes the breakdown of workshop participants who subsequently submitted questions to SSO. It should be noted that this a small subset of the 4,436 students who participated in SSO, as it excludes:

- Students who participated in workshops, but did not submit questions (although they could have voted on questions posed by others in the workshop)
- Students who asked questions, but did not attend workshops
- Students who voted on questions, but did not attend workshops

The use of this data is therefore very limited in understanding the demographic breakdown of students involved in SSO. However, this is the subset of participants which had complete demographic data available. Future versions of SSO will collect more detailed demographic data from a wider range of participants as the technical platform for SSO is developed.

The urban/rural breakdown of workshop participants is found in Figure 1 below. The classification is made by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, classifying Post Codes as metropolitan, regional and remote. SSO workshop participants were 87% metropolitan, and 13% regional, with no participants from remote Australia. It should be noted that this sample is biased, as workshop participants needed to be able to attend workshops in Australian capital cities in person, which would be disproportionately more difficult for students in regional and remote Australia. As the SSO program expands beyond its pilot stage in 2013, we will be working to more actively engage rural and regional Australians in workshops.

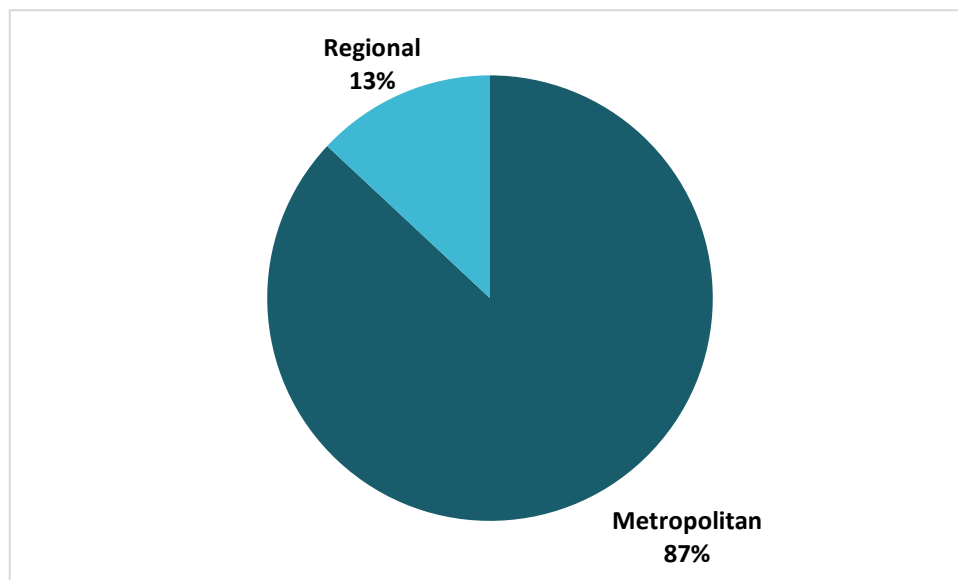


Figure 1: Proportion of SSO workshop participants who submitted questions by location

Question on Notice (Continued): The next question relates to the discussion of PISA results for students in remote and regional areas (p.17). Please comment on any international experiences you are aware of where teaching and learning challenges in remote/regional areas have been adequately addressed. I am also interested in any international initiatives to ensure that remote/regional students receive a broad education and access to a range of extra-curricular activities

International Examples

There is limited international evidence that focuses on education in rural, regional and remote communities among countries with comparable education systems to Australia. Much of the existing research focuses on education in developing countries. International comparisons of rural/regional/remote education are complicated by inconsistent definitions across countries. For example, the population of Australia's major regional centres such as Bendigo or Wagga Wagga would be counted as 'urban' under the classification of many countries. While regional and rural education is not our area of expertise, there are several pockets of success that we would like to highlight both internationally and nationally. Of the top performing countries in international literacy and numeracy testing, both Finland and Canada have large rural populations and strong performance on educational equity.¹ We have not studied the Finnish or Canadian systems in detail, which makes it difficult to provide any definitive claims about their success in regional/remote education.

Finland has 17% rural population, but there is virtually no difference in educational outcomes between urban and rural communities, after accounting for socio-economic disadvantage. Finland is widely recognised for delivering a high quality education for all students, regardless of their background, although Finland's population has lower diversity than many comparable nations. Finland's provision of rural education is therefore a potential direction for future research.

Canada has a province based education system: there is no Federal department of education, and there are significant differences between provinces. Overall, Canada has an education system that produces higher outcomes than Australia, as well as more equitable schooling, measured by smaller variation in outcomes between students.

Looking more closely at the Canadian provinces reveals some potential parallels with the Australian system. Alberta (18%) and Ontario (15%) are both provinces with higher proportions of rural population than Australia (12%), but achieve higher average PISA results as well as high equity.² Earlier work by the Canadian Council on Learning revealed that Ontario and Manitoba appear to have relatively small differences in urban vs. rural PISA results.³ While Manitoba's educational outcomes are below Australia's, Ontario's higher average results, higher equity and similar regional/rural demographic make it a potentially useful case study for further research.

¹ See PISA 2009 at a Glance : <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264095298-en>

² See Canada's analysis of PISA 2009: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-590-x/81-590-x2010001-eng.pdf>

³ http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/LessonsInLearning/10-03_01_06E.pdf

Australian Examples

There is a history of partnerships with business, philanthropy and government working together to improve the educational opportunities in rural Australia, such as those provided by the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (<http://www.frrr.org.au/>).

There are a range of different programs that aim to deliver broader educational opportunities to young people in rural/regional areas, both targeting barriers to teaching and learning, as well as delivering broader educational opportunities and extracurricular activities. For example, the Country Education Project (<http://cep.org.au>) builds the capacity of rural schools throughout Victoria through collaboration and local partnerships. Programs highlighted by the CEP include the eBiology Project, which worked across 9 rural schools and utilised a blended learning approach, as well as the Rural Youth Ambassadors program which provides opportunities for rural students to develop leadership and provide input into education at the state level.

We would also like to highlight several current FYA initiatives that provide extra-curricular activities and a broader education to young people in rural and regional Australia:

- **NAB Schools First (NSF)** is a national awards program that recognises and rewards outstanding school-community partnerships that are having a positive impact on students beyond the classroom. In 2012, NSF supported rural schools in NT, QLD, NSW and other states to ensure students remain engaged in the community throughout their schooling. Since 2009, NSF grants have reached 440 schools around Australia, with 48% of award winners in regional and remote areas. For example, Comboyne Public School in regional NSW received seed funding to develop a Community Garden which strengthened ties between the school, the local pre-school and local business.
- **Worlds of Work (WOW)** is a national initiative for young people aged 15 years and older that builds the skills needed to equip young people for the 21st century workplace through a hands on careers development program. WOW has delivered programs in regional and urban areas, including Bendigo, Alice Springs, Jabiru, Queanbeyan and Wollongong. In 2012, the program reached over 1,000 students, with around one quarter of WOW programs delivered in regional Australia.
- **Change It Up (CIU)** sparks the change making potential of bright young people in regional and rural Australia. In 2012 Change It Up partnered with ABC Heywire to support young change-makers in regional Victoria to have their voices heard by their community. This successful pilot is now being scaled up, so that in 2013 the program will involve over 250 students across 15 communities in rural and regional Victoria.