

**Submission to the Parliament Of Australia Senate Standing Committee
on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport's *Inquiry into Rural and
Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities***

Introduction

Geographically, Western Australia is a very large State with a small and very thinly spread population outside the Perth Greater Metropolitan Area. The higher costs associated with the delivery of services to rural, regional and remote areas continue to be an issue in Western Australia, resulting in students lacking the access to education opportunities which those living in metropolitan areas have.

The participation, retention and achievement rates in secondary and tertiary education for rural and regional students are well below those of metropolitan students. This is especially the case for Indigenous students, approximately one-third of whom live in very remote regions of Western Australia.

Providing equitable access to secondary and post-secondary education opportunities to students from rural and regional communities is a priority for the Western Australian Government. The State, through its Department of Education and Training and other Government agencies, is working towards providing equitable access to secondary and post-secondary education opportunities for rural and regional students, and collaborates extensively with the Australian Government in achieving this goal.

In Western Australia:

- 10 **TAFEWA** colleges with nearly 60 campuses deliver vocational education and training qualifications from Certificate I to Advanced Diploma. Six of these 10 colleges are regionally located (see map at Attachment 5).
- 281 private registered training organisations are contracted to deliver User Choice, Productivity Places and Access Programs across the State. These organisations deliver a variety of qualifications including apprenticeships and traineeships and customised programs for at-risk user groups including disengaged youth.
- 768 public schools deliver education to 252 585 school students from pre-primary through to Year 12. 309 of these schools and 69 250 of these students are located in rural and regional areas.

All **TAFEWA** colleges in Western Australia work closely with secondary schools and universities to establish pathways for secondary students through vocational education and training and tertiary education.

The Department of Education and Training also provides funding to two universities for the delivery of specific vocational education and training qualifications.

Itemised response to Terms of Reference

A. *The financial impact on rural and regional students who are attending metropolitan secondary schools, universities or TAFE*

While there is government support in place (see response to Term of Reference (E) below), there is clearly a significant financial impost on rural and regional families where children live away from home to complete their education at metropolitan secondary schools, universities or TAFE. The burden on rural and regional families must be considered in the context that income from businesses in rural and regional areas can be quite unpredictable. By way of comparison, families in metropolitan areas are not usually faced with the choice of either sending their children to expensive boarding schools and residential colleges, or finding suitable accommodation that may essentially involve establishing a second household.

Travel and Accommodation Allowance (TAA)

The Department of Education and Training provides the TAA to apprentices and trainees who are required to travel from their normal place of residence to attend their compulsory off-the-job training. A travel allowance is available to apprentices and trainees for whom the round trip from their residence to the training venue is greater than 70 km (or 1 200 km for travel by air). An accommodation allowance is provided where the round trip is greater than 200 km.

B. *The education alternatives for rural and regional students wanting to study in regional areas*

All public schools in Western Australia are provided with the opportunity to access school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, School Apprenticeship Link (SAL) programs, Aboriginal School Based Training (ASBT) and general Vocational Education and Training (VET) pathways. Aboriginal youth at risk of disengaging from education and training are provided with the opportunity to access alternative programs such as *Kicking Goals*, a program jointly supported by participating TAFEWA colleges and secondary colleges and the Clontarf Football Academy (located in Bentley, a metropolitan suburb).

Agricultural Education

Specific agricultural education opportunities are offered by the Department of Education and Training in 16 rural public schools, each of which maintain farms of varying sizes. The largest of these sites are the five residential campuses of the WA College of Agriculture. Students from both regional and metropolitan areas access specialist Year 10, 11 and 12 programs at these sites through an application process that does not discriminate on the basis of student ability nor on past academic performance.

Students can access the full range of available State and Australian Government boarding allowances. A special allowance of \$2 000 is paid to agricultural students boarding at colleges if they do not receive the Australian Government's *Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme* (AIC).

Rural Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) Students

The Department of Education and Training provides a selective academic program online for rural gifted and talented students wishing to remain at their rural or regional school for Years 8, 9 and 10.

Trade Training Centres in Schools Program

Western Australia acknowledges the Australian Government's efforts to enable better opportunities for secondary students through its *Trade Training Centres in Schools Program*. Under this program, Trade Training Centres (TTCs) have so far been approved for secondary schools in 12 regional communities and six metropolitan suburbs across Western Australia. Each of these secondary schools has identified partnership arrangements with a TAFEWA college or a private Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and in the main represents a cluster of senior and district high schools. The TTCs will focus on improving the quality of schooling and having a highly qualified, well trained workforce, particularly in those industries experiencing skills shortages.

University Education

See response to Term of Reference (D) below.

C. The implications of current and proposed government measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas

Raising the School Leaving Age legislation

In 2005, the Western Australian Parliament passed the *Acts Amendment (Higher School Leaving Age and Related Provisions) Act 2005 (WA)*. This legislation amended the *School Education Act 1999 (WA)*, and raised the school leaving age for a young person in Western Australia to the end of the year in which he or she reached the age of 17 years. Under the legislation, all young people in Western Australia must either attend school full-time or undertake a range of other approved options.

These include:

- full-time home-based schooling;
- full-time enrolment in a training institution (e.g. TAFEWA or a private RTO);
- engaged in an apprenticeship or traineeship;
- undertaking a community-based course;
- full-time in approved employment; or
- a combination program involving part-time schooling, training and/or employment.

By December 2008, the Department of Education and Training had deployed approximately 100 fieldworkers throughout Western Australia's 14 education districts to support young people making transitions from school to work and training.

Since the legislative changes came into effect in January 2006, the number of 16 and 17 year old students undertaking either secondary education, post-secondary education, apprenticeships and traineeships, employment or a combination of these on a full-time basis has increased. It is envisaged that the legislative changes will continue to lead to increased retention among this cohort, which in turn will lead to increased participation levels in post-secondary education.

ABSTUDY and Youth Allowance

While Western Australia appreciates the support offered to students by the Australian Government through *ABSTUDY* and *Youth Allowance*, this assistance alone does not adequately support students. Many students rely on additional financial support provided by parents, and students may be in receipt of scholarships.

The following measures, as indicated in the Australian Government's May 2009 Budget, are likely to have a positive impact on students and are welcomed by Western Australia:

- the exemption of equity and merit-based scholarships from means testing for student income support;
- the introduction of the *Relocation Scholarship* and *Student Start-Up Scholarship* for students commencing university in 2010;
- lifting the Parental Income Test threshold for access to *Youth Allowance*; and
- lowering the age of independence for student income from 25 to 22 years.

Recommendation

- That the Australian Government's *Relocation Scholarship* and *Student Start-Up Scholarship* be extended to part-time university students, and that a similar scholarship be created for students moving to metropolitan areas to commence secondary education.
- That the age of independence for student income be adjusted to 18 years, or the time at which students leave home for study purposes.

D. The short- and long-term impact of current and proposed government policies on regional university and TAFE college enrolments

Training WA: Planning for the Future 2009-2018

Developed by the Department of Education and Training in consultation with the State Training Board, *Training WA* is the blueprint for the Western Australian Government's investment in the State's training system. Key elements of *Training WA* in relation to rural and regional education include:

- The range of publicly funded qualifications in regional areas will be expanded, and the number of publicly funded regional qualifications at Certificate III or above will increase from 415 in 2009 to 450 in 2012.
- Training Councils have been given more resources to consider regional training needs, and 10 year regional workforce development plans will be completed to prioritise training needs and develop appropriate training responses.
- Flexible and innovative training delivery will be encouraged in line with the needs of regional communities. To this end, WestOne Services will establish an e-learning taskforce to work with training providers to make e-learning an integral part of training delivery in Western Australia.
- Pathways between training and employment will be improved, with training in schools focused in areas with strong local employment opportunities.
- As the existing fee structure for gaining Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has been identified as a deterrent to training at a higher level, there will be 50 per cent fee concessions for clients seeking RPL and total fee exemptions for the unemployed undertaking RPL over the next two years.

University Education

There are five metropolitan-based universities in Western Australia, each of which is involved in at least one regional operation. While there are 15 small regional

campuses or university centres, in 12 different regional locations, there are no regional universities.

Western Australian participation rates in university education for people in rural and regional areas are significantly below the national average and other mainland States. The higher education participation rate for people living in non-metropolitan areas is about one-third of that for metropolitan residents.

Under the Australian Government's *Regional Loading Scheme* (RLS), universities have received a loading based on the number of students attending campuses in regional areas. Western Australia receives proportionately less RLS funding than other mainland states. In 2005, for example, Western Australia received only about \$600 000 out of a \$28 million budget for the regional loading; around 2 per cent of the total. By comparison, Western Australia has around 8.7 per cent of Australian people aged 15 years and older who live in rural and regional areas, indicative of the impact of the relative sparseness of population and the lack of large regional centres capable of supporting regional universities in the State.

Whilst the impact of the lack of access is significant, the policy decisions underlying the lack of access lie outside the remit of this submission.

E. the adequacy of government measures to provide for students who are required to leave home for secondary or post-secondary study

Western Australia appreciates the financial assistance provided by the Australian Government through the AIC and *ABSTUDY* programs. This assistance underpins provisions for geographically isolated secondary school students in this State.

Boarding facilities in regional locations

The Western Australian Government has established boarding facilities adjacent to public senior high schools in nine regional locations. The full cost of the boarding service, provided by the Country High School Hostels Authority (CHSHA), is \$16 750 per student. The Western Australian Government subsidises this cost, with the net cost per student in 2009 being \$9 430. For students receiving the Australian Government's *ABSTUDY* allowance, the full cost of this boarding service is met by the Australian Government. A list of hostels operated by CHSHA providing cost per student and accommodation type is at Attachment 1.

The Western Australian Government's *Student Boarding Away from Home Allowance* (SBAHA) is available to resident Western Australian families with students who do not have reasonable daily access to an appropriate primary and/or secondary school and are required to board away from home. The allowance, currently amounting to \$2 000, supplements the AIC, and a child who is eligible for the AIC is also automatically eligible for the SBAHA. The SBAHA is also available to parents who receive the AIC and who have set up a second home. In 2008, there were 2 142 applications for the SBAHA, with a total of \$2.36 million distributed to parents and boarding providers.

For a child receiving the SBAHA and AIC, the net cost of boarding in 2009 is \$606. The Western Australian Government reviews this amount each year to ensure that it is no more than the cost of providing for a child living at home. Where necessary, the Western Australian Government provides a subsidy to maintain the viability of small boarding facilities in key service centres which receive insufficient revenue from fees to meet operating costs.

Through the SBAHA and subsidisation of boarding costs, the Western Australian Government ensures that all geographically isolated students have an opportunity to board away from home to attend a secondary school.

To obtain a hostel, schools and their communities approach the CHSHA which prioritise their work and recommend to the Minister for Education accordingly

The Western Australian Government, in partnership with the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEO), has recently established a boarding facility in Broome. The support needs of the facility's Indigenous students – who comprise more than 90 per cent of the boarding population – have proved to be significantly higher than those of other students. The operating costs of the facility have been 1.7 times greater than those of similar-sized facilities in other locations.

The partnership arrangement with the CEO has been implemented as part of a mutual interest in strategic asset planning and optimum cost efficiency in the delivery of vital services in remote locations. Under this partnership, boarding places are allocated in proportion to the relative capital contributions from the Western Australian Government and the CEO.

Boarding facilities for GATE students

The Western Australian Government has established *Gifted and Talented Education* (GATE) programs in selected metropolitan public schools. The programs are open to students from across the State. The State has established a boarding facility to provide access to these schools for rural and regional students who are offered places in these programs.

AIC support is available for students in Years 11 and 12. However, the GATE program is available for all secondary students (Years 8 to 12 in Western Australia). Students in Years 8 to 10 are thus excluded from accessing AIC support.

To assist students who require accommodation at this boarding facility but who do not qualify for AIC support, the Western Australian Government has created a *GATE Boarding Allowance* which is available to all GATE students who live at least 56 kilometres (i.e. beyond ready access via public transport) from the centre of the metropolitan area. Due to their geographic isolation, students receiving this allowance face a significantly higher net cost in gaining access to an appropriate education. The allowance is currently set at \$2 000, resulting in a net cost for boarding of \$7 430, still a substantial expense for many families.

Recommendation

- That the Australian Government re-establish financial assistance under the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) scheme for Year 8 to 10 students who are geographically remote from metropolitan Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program schools and are excluded from accessing assistance for accommodation.

F. The educational needs of rural and regional students

Staffing allocations for regional and remote secondary schools

The staffing allocation used to calculate a school's base staffing entitlement is derived from student numbers. In addition to the base allocation, rural district high schools and senior high schools receive 'curriculum access' to ensure the provision of adequate curriculum delivery for students. In 2009, the Department of Education and

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Training allocated an additional 272.84 FTE (full time equivalent) through curriculum access to schools in rural Western Australia.

A *Senior School Allocation* is also provided, which supports district high schools in meeting the educational needs of Year 11 and 12 students who elect to remain in a district high school setting. In 2009, 46.6 FTE were allocated with the *Senior School Allocation* totalling \$3.35 million to further support these students.

Transport Assistance Program (Secondary students)

The Western Australian Government provides access to secondary education through the Public Transport Authority. The *Transport Assistance Program* provides students who regularly attend the nearest appropriate school and reside more than 4.5 km from their school with a basic level of assistance to help them get to and from their nearest appropriate schools.

A fleet of contract buses provide services to some 26 000 students per school day. A total of 693 school buses service mainstream schools with a further 117 school buses servicing special education schools, centres and units. A conveyance allowance is paid to parents/carers as a contribution towards the costs of their transporting eligible students to and from school or a bus service in a private vehicle.

Travel and Accommodation Allowance for Apprentices and Trainees

Assistance is provided to apprentices and trainees to attend their training venue if that venue is more than a 70 km round trip from their normal place of residence. The table below summarises the entitlements.

Round trip distance travelled	Travel allowance entitlement	Entitlement
Up to 70 km	Nil	Nil
71 km – 200 km	Private transport: 17c/km AND/OR Public transport: Return Fare (Bus/Train/Ferry)	Nil
201 km – 1 600 km	Private transport: 17c/km AND/OR Public transport: Return Fare (Bus/Train/Ferry) (RTO to arrange return fare for bus/train/ferry and pay relevant invoice)	WA training venues except Nth of 26th parallel: \$35.00/night OR WA training venues Nth of 26th parallel: \$55.00/night OR Interstate training venues: \$55.00/night
More than 1 600 km	Return Economy Airfare AND \$20.00 airport transfer subsidy (RTO to arrange return economy airfare and pay relevant invoice)	WA training venues except Nth of 26th parallel: \$35.00/night OR WA training venues Nth of 26th parallel: \$55.00/night OR Interstate training venues: \$55.00/night
Exceptional Circumstances	Subject to Department approval	Subject to Department approval

Western Australian Department of Education and Training, 2009 'Travel and Accommodation Allowance for Apprentices and Trainees' policy document

include home-based students, students from remote community schools and students studying in regional rural centres where the provision of particular subjects is an issue.

Educational programs are delivered to students through a blended approach of technology and print materials to support student learning. Technology allows for synchronous and asynchronous methods to be used. These assist student learning by enabling regular teacher and student interactions. Synchronous methods include virtual classrooms by internet-based Centra Symposium (a webcasting tool), and teleconferencing lessons. Asynchronous lessons involve a range of interactive materials, including print, video, audio, CD ROMs, online materials, emails, chat lines, and electronic bulletin boards. Face-to-face access occurs during regional visits and camps on the Leederville site.

At-Risk School-Aged Students Program

Training programs for students who have been identified through their District Education Office as being at risk of disengaging from – or who have already disengaged from – school are provided through the *At-Risk School-Aged Students* program. Training delivery is expected to result in students achieving a pathway into further training and/or employment, or to re-engage with the school system. The program is currently being delivered in partnership with metropolitan district education offices, as well as regional district education offices in the Goldfields, Wheatbelt, Midwest, Gascoyne and South West areas of Western Australia. A map of Western Australian Education Districts is at Attachment 4.

Flexible Learning in Schools (FLIS) Project

The FLIS Project is run by the Department of Education and Training in a number of regional and remote schools, and in some small metropolitan schools. FLIS aims to enhance education opportunities by:

- providing access to broader range of courses for senior secondary students;
- connecting students to a larger learning community;
- encouraging the development of independent learning skills; and
- giving access to experienced expert teachers.

Students typically undertake four FLIS lessons per week, consisting of two live interactive online lessons, and two asynchronous sessions whereby students access a website which holds lesson plans and resource materials and which provides forum and chat facilities for teacher and student interaction away from the virtual classroom. Each receiving school has a learning facilitator who supports the local students and interacts with the delivery teacher as required.

Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council (RREAC)

RREAC provides advice to Ministers on the education and training needs of rural and remote Western Australians. In keeping with Western Australian Government priorities, RREAC's terms of reference provide for a strategic focus based on grassroots input from rural communities.

G. The impact of government measures and proposals on rural and regional communities

Enterprise and Vocational Education (EVE) Coordinators

In recognising the higher costs associated with delivery and support to teachers and schools in rural and regional areas, the Department of Education and Training

provides regionally based EVE Coordinators with a larger contingency budget than their metropolitan counterparts. A key aspect of this budget is to develop strategic localised training initiatives to support the needs of local community, industry, and students.

H. Other related matters

Professional development and support for teachers and administrators

To further support the growth of training pathways, the Department of Education and Training provides targeted professional development opportunities for teachers. This professional development targets the growth of auspice delivery where a school partners with an RTO to deliver training to the school students. It looks at bridging the gap in the skills sets of teachers, so that they have necessary qualifications and industry experience to deliver training directly.

The Curriculum Council of Western Australia, the jurisdictional curriculum authority, provides staff in regional and remote secondary schools with the following support:

- professional development sessions for teachers and administrators, conducted in regional centres and through teleconferencing and videoconferencing;
- support materials written specifically to assist teachers in remote schools; and
- workshop opportunities in regional centres for school administrators.

Career development

The Western Australian Government recently approved the development of a new career development strategy for the State. This new strategy will result in the existing 23 Employment Directions Network (EDN) services being replaced by a new network of Career Centres, to be operational from 1 January 2010. One significant Career Centre will be established in each school district, and the Department of Education and Training will continue to fund two or three state-wide specialist career development services to people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and ex-offenders.

A new, more equitable funding model has been developed to support the Career Centres, which will receive funding on a per capita basis (in relation to the population of the district in which they are located), regionally weighted on a sliding scale. Career Centres in rural and/or remote districts of Western Australia will receive a higher level of funding than those in the metropolitan area.

After consultation with selected schools and Career Centres in early 2010, the Department of Education and Training will develop a plan that relates to implementing a comprehensive systemic career development service system across the schools sector.

These new arrangements will result in enhanced outcomes for rural and regional students as well as students in metropolitan areas, and a considerable increase in the number of clients provided with career services in Western Australia.

Attachment 1

Secondary Student Boarding Facilities operated by the Country High Schools Hostels Authority (CHSHA)

Cost per student:

Hostel	Cost per Student
Albany	\$13 117.36
Broome	\$24 331.38
City Beach	\$18 981.21
Esperance	\$13 626.24
Geraldton	\$15 725.26
Katanning	\$30 536.44
Merredin	\$21 388.73
Moora	\$21 493.90
Narrogin:	\$13 108.24
Northam	\$22 183.19

CHSHA Secondary Student Boarding Facilities: Capacity, Actual and Configurations:

Hostel	Capacity	Actual	Configuration
Albany	144	118	90 singles, 54 shared bedrooms (mainly 4 to a room).
Broome	72	72	72 singles.
City Beach	92	53	54 single, 38 shared bedrooms (two to a room).
Esperance	98	90	26 singles, 64 shared bedrooms (2, 3 or 4 to a room), 1 transportable housing 8.
Geraldton	124	113	96 singles, 28 shared bedrooms (4 to a room).
Katanning	60	18	60 shared bedrooms (2 and 4 to a room).
Merredin	70	43	70 shared bedrooms, (34 in 3 or 4 to a room, 2 x 18 bed cubicle style dormitories).
Moora	50	36	50 singles
Narrogin:	234	184	150 singles, 84 shared bedrooms (12 with 4 beds to a room, 2 x 18 bed cubicle style dormitories).
Northam	47	36	43 singles, 4 shared bedrooms (2 to a room)

Note: Capacities/configuration at Albany, Esperance and Narrogin include additions currently in progress.

Terms of Reference

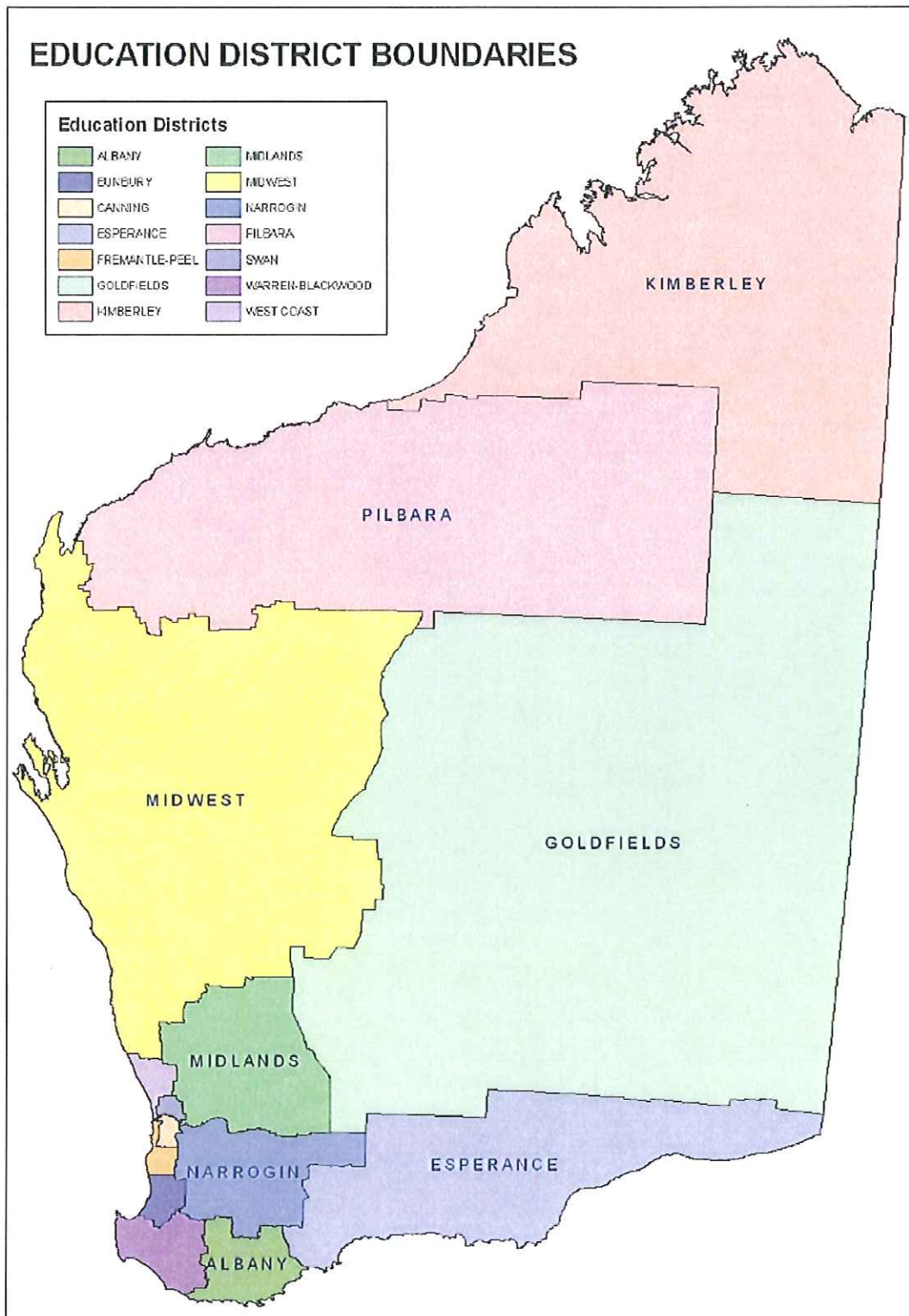
An assessment of the adequacy of Government measures to provide equitable access to secondary and post-secondary education opportunities to students from rural and regional communities attending metropolitan institutions, and metropolitan students attending regional universities or technical and further education (TAFE) colleges, with particular reference to:

- a. the financial impact on rural and regional students who are attending metropolitan secondary schools, universities or TAFE;
- b. the education alternatives for rural and regional students wanting to study in regional areas;
- c. the implications of current and proposed government measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas;
- d. the short- and long-term impact of current and proposed government policies on regional university and TAFE college enrolments;
- e. the adequacy of government measures to provide for students who are required to leave home for secondary or post-secondary study;
- f. the educational needs of rural and regional students;
- g. the impact of government measures and proposals on rural and regional communities; and
- h. other related matters.

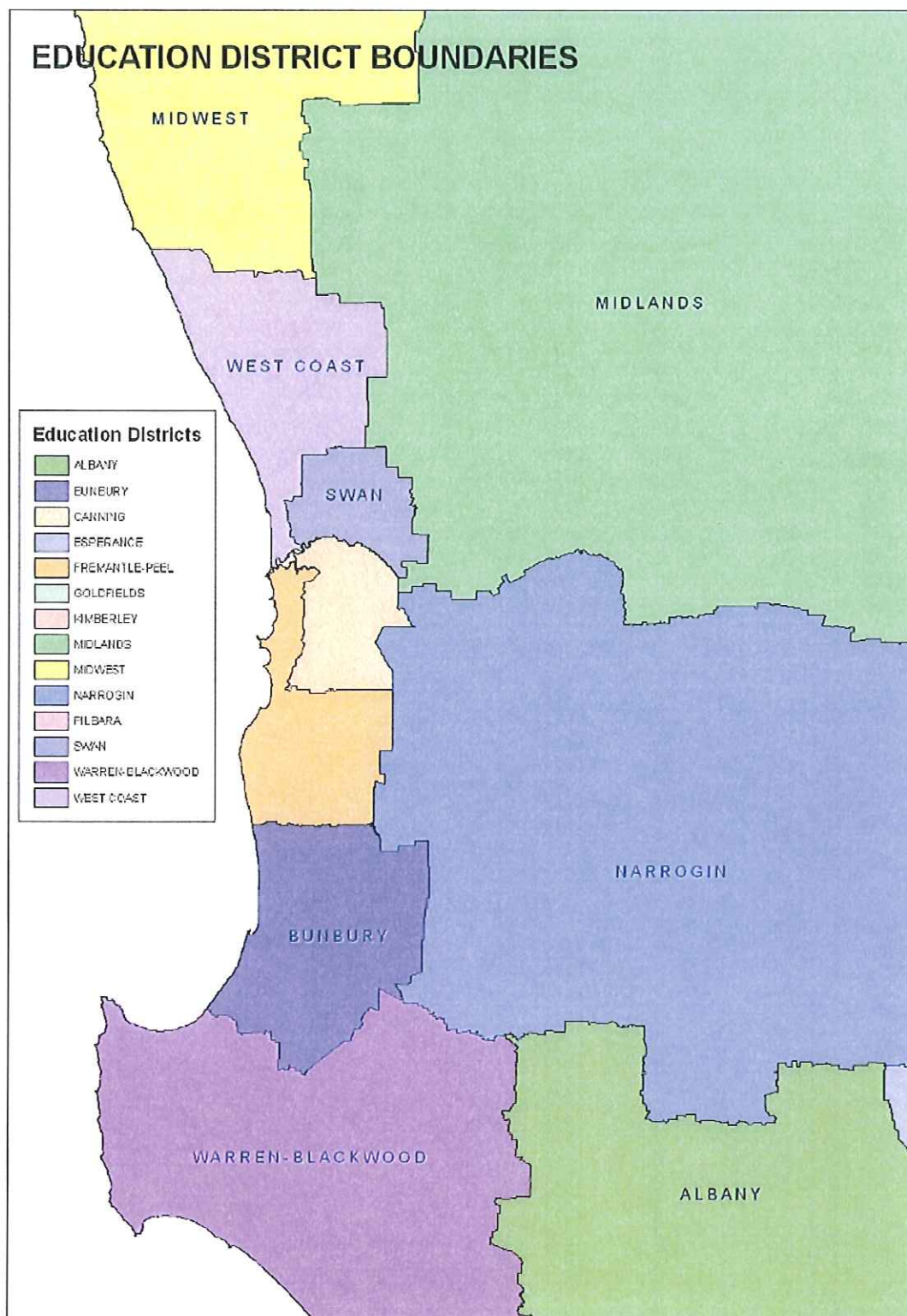
Glossary of terms used in response

AIC	Assistance for Isolated Children
ASBT	Aboriginal School Based Training
CEO	Catholic Education Office of Western Australia
EDN	Employment Directions Network
EVE	Enterprise and Vocational Education
FLIS	Flexible Learning In Schools
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GATE	Gifted And Talented Education
RLS	Regional Loading Scheme
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RREAC	Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SAL	School Apprenticeship Link
SBAHA	Student Boarding Away from Home Allowance
SIDE	Schools of Isolated and Distance Education
TAA	Travel and Accommodation Allowance
TAFE	Technical And Further Education
TAFEWA	Technical and Further Education Western Australia
TTC	Trade Training Centre
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WACE	Western Australian Certificate of Education

Map of Western Australian public school districts



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Map of Western Australian TAFEWA districts

