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I agree to the Privacy Notice and Terms and Conditions of Submissions included at Attachment A to this document*

Yes ☒

Note: If you do not accept the Privacy Notice and Conditions of Submissions please do not complete or submit this form.

I agree to have my submission published.*

Yes ☒

No ☐

Your details

Title*	Ms
First name*	Beth
Last name*	Blackwood
E-mail address*	███████████████
State/Territory*	ACT

Would you like to receive updates about the Strategy's process? *

Yes ☒

No ☐

Submission details

I am making this submission as a: *

Educator ☐

parent/carer/guardian ☐

Student / potential student ☐

School ☐

University ☐

Training Provider ☐

Employer ☐

community organisation ☐

government agency ☐

peak body / Think Tank ☐

academic person ☐

Other ☒

Are you submitting on behalf of an organisation (including a business, other body or agency)? *

Yes ☒

No ☐

Please specify the organisation on whose behalf you are submitting

Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia

I confirm that I have the organisation's agreement to make this submission. *

Yes ☒

No ☐

Note: If you do not have the organisation's agreement, please go to the previous question and select "No" to confirm you are not submitting on behalf of an organisation.

Please use the space provided below to respond to the questions above

The table cell will expand to accommodate your response. Please limit your response to 3000 words.

Please refer to attached submission

Please provide a short summary of the key points in your submission

Please limit your response to 300 words— **note:** any text above 300 words will be excluded from your submission. The table cell will expand to accommodate your response.

Drawing on surveys of its members, AHISA presents a range of information provided by school principals on the provision of school education to students from RRR locations, including challenges, success factors and recommendations to government.

As well as data on schooling provision in RRR locations, AHISA presents information contributed from Heads of city boarding schools serving students from RRR locations. Out of area education provision for RRR students must be taken into account in development of the national strategy.

Key points include:

- AHISA supports the recommendation of the final report of the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education that availability, accessibility and affordability of internet access and digital technologies are a priority for government policy development.
- VET provision by schools is costly and government funding provision for VET courses, including up to Certificate III and IV levels should be reviewed. More schools in RRR locations could be encouraged to pursue RTO registration if the compliance burden for RTO registration and on staff for assessment and training certification is reduced. This could begin by recognising the existing regulatory environment in schools as education institutions and teaching qualifications of staff.
- To assist schools in RRR locations to develop and support student aspirations, consideration should be given to a grants program to subsidise travel of secondary students to university open days, to undertake student exchanges, or to attend special education opportunities such as youth leadership conferences or elite sports events.
- Education provision for students in RRR locations cannot be separated from social, health and economic issues.

30 January 2019

The Hon Dr Denis Napthine
Chair
Regional Education Expert Advisory Group
Department of Education and Training
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601

Emailed to regionalstrategy@education.gov.au

Dear Dr Napthine,

Regional, rural and remote education national strategy consultation

The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on a national strategy for regional, rural and remote education (RRRE).

AHISA understands the focus of the national strategy is on post-school education. We have therefore limited our submission to those challenges outlined in the consultation framing paper which touch on the role of schools in establishing pathways for students to post-secondary education and training and in developing students' post-school aspirations.

Our submission draws on AHISA members' experiences of successful education provision for Indigenous students from regional, rural and remote areas as detailed in AHISA's submission to the Inquiry into Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Students[1]. It also presents findings from two surveys of our members undertaken in 2017 to inform AHISA's submission to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education[2], and from a survey undertaken in January 2019 for our submission to the Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System.[3]

AHISA welcomes any inquiries you may have about this submission. These may be addressed to me at email ceo@ahisa.edu.au or telephone (02) 6247 7300.

Yours faithfully,

(Ms) Beth Blackwood

AHISA Chief Executive Officer

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ABOUT AHISA

AHISA Ltd is a professional association for Heads of independent schools.

The primary object of AHISA is to optimise the opportunity for the education and welfare of Australia's young people through the maintenance of collegiality and high standards of professional practice and conduct amongst its members.

AHISA's 440 members lead schools that collectively account for over 443,000 students, representing 11.5 per cent of total Australian school enrolments and 20 per cent of Australia's total Year 12 enrolments. One in every five Australian Year 12 students gains part of their education at an AHISA member's school.

AHISA's members lead a collective workforce of over 40,000 teaching staff and some 27,000 support staff.

The socio-economic profile of AHISA members' schools is diverse. Over 20 per cent of our members lead schools serving low- to very low-SES communities.

AHISA believes that a high quality schooling system in Australia depends on:

- Parents having the freedom to exercise their rights and responsibilities in regard to the education of their children

- Students and their families having the freedom to choose among diverse schooling options

- Schools having the autonomy to exercise educational leadership as they respond to the emerging needs of their communities in a rapidly changing society.

TERMINOLOGY

In this submission, AHISA has adopted the acronyms used by the Regional Education Expert Advisory Group in its framing paper: the acronym 'RRR' signifies 'regional, rural and remote'; and the acronym 'RRRE' signifies 'regional, rural and remote education'.

For its 2017 and 2019 surveys, AHISA invited members to indicate the location of their school by state/territory and according to the Australian Standard Geographic Classification system, which allows for the definition of location as 'Major City', 'Inner Regional', 'Outer Regional', 'Remote', and 'Very Remote'. This system has been adopted by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and is used to define the location of schools on My School profiles and in the reporting of NAPLAN results by geolocation. In this way, data from the surveys may be correlated with data held in Australia's National Education Evidence Base.

In referring to vocational education and training (VET), we have also attempted to align with terminology recommended by the *Preparing secondary students for work* framework[4] (2014), published by Education Services Australia on behalf of the Education Council. The framework encourages adoption of the terms 'vocational learning' and 'vocational education and training' or 'VET' to distinguish between learning such as career education, offered as part of the general school curriculum, and the provision by schools of nationally accredited training (including part-time apprenticeships and traineeships) under which qualifications are issued by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).

AHISA is aware that terminology and the understandings that inform it are important in discussing issues relating to location. For example, there is a view expressed in research literature that terms such as 'regional' and 'remote' risk 'constructing non-urban locations as inherently deficient and marginal'.[5] There is also a view, as expressed in the *Red Dirt Education* compilation report[6], that the term 'disadvantage' in relation to remoteness is 'a Western construct that has been developed to give a sense of privilege to the values, knowledges and ways of being that are not rooted in the context of remote Australia'.

AHISA members who lead schools in 'Remote' or 'Very Remote' locations are alive to the need to make explicit the assumptions that can inform definitions of terms and their use. For example, one respondent to AHISA's 2017 member surveys commented that a lack of aspiration for tertiary education or lack of attendance at school due to family/cultural obligations could not be assumed as having a negative impact on the educational experience of students from Very Remote areas and that time taken by students to meet family and cultural obligations, for example, should be viewed and supported as valuable and positive.

In this submission, following a recommendation by Professor Elizabeth McKinley[7], we have preferred use of the term 'opportunity gap' over the term 'achievement gap'. AHISA recognises, however, that identifying achievement gaps can be a useful and important means of identifying opportunity gaps.
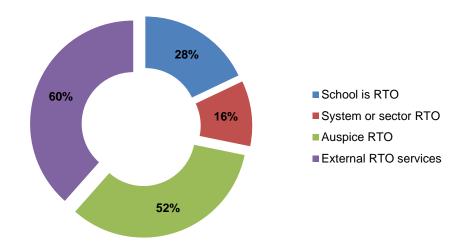
1. STUDY OPTIONS IN RRR AREAS (Challenge A)

Q1. What opportunities exist to expand options for further study in RRR areas?

Q2. What potential is there for universities, vocational training providers and other service providers to better work together in RRR areas, including opportunities to expand service offerings and better support articulation between VET and higher education?

AHISA's 2019 member survey of VET provision in schools found that, while just over a quarter of schools are Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), most schools seek external providers or use auspice RTO arrangements (that is, training and/or assessment is undertaken by the school, while an external RTO issues the qualification or Statement of Attainment). This finding holds when looking at data for RRR schools only (see chart below), although RRR schools are more likely to be an RTO.

In practice, independent schools provide VET programs under sometimes multiple arrangements, depending on the needs of students. The reliance by schools on external RTO services or auspice arrangements suggests, however, that opportunities for schools in RRR locations to expand VET service offerings – either with or without partnership arrangements with higher education or other providers – will be limited without significant additional government support. The high cost of VET provision was mentioned in AHISA's survey as a major challenge for respondents' schools.

Heads of schools in RRR locations made several suggestions that governments could consider to support VET provision generally and in RRR areas. Of particular interest in regard to supporting the expansion of VET provision in RRR locations, other than increased financial support to offset the cost of provision, are:

- *Compliance.* Regulatory bodies to take into consideration that independent schools which are RTOs already meet significant compliance, reporting and audit obligations through state/territory school registration, ASIC, ACNC and federal Department of Education and Training requirements. Schools as existing education providers could be a special

category of registration for RTO status. More schools could be encouraged to pursue RTO status if the compliance burden is eased.

- *Staff qualifications*. School staff members offering VET courses are required to hold a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. Prior recognition given to tertiary qualified teachers who seek the Certificate could encourage more teachers to participate in VET provision. VET staff who are also teachers (common in many schools) are required to meet rigorous and frequent professional development requirements to maintain both their teacher registration and their Certificate IV qualification. To ease this burden, the Certificate IV qualification should be recognised for at least five years.

- *VET course fee subsidies*. Many families cannot afford school fees plus VET course fees. Subsidising fully, or in part, students' enrolment in externally provided VET courses could encourage greater take up of VET by students, contributing to skills acquisition and exploration of career options. One Head suggested that all TAFE courses be made available free to secondary students.

Some independent schools in RRR locations have already forged or are in the process of considering post-secondary education and training options to address the issue of professional development of staff. For example, at least two schools have partnered with universities to act as a regional centre for provision of graduate diploma or masters degree courses in education. One Head responding to a 2017 AHISA survey reported their school was considering applying for certification as a provider of certified professional development of teaching staff to overcome the time/cost challenges staff development represents in RRR locations. This suggests partnerships between RRR schools and universities could be a viable option for the provision of higher education and professional development for teachers – contributing to quality schooling provision in RRR locations and supporting recruitment and retention of teachers.

Data from AHISA's VET Review survey show that the main educational field[8] for which VET provision is made by the respondent RRR schools is 'Food, hospitality and personal services' – a similar result when data from schools in Major City locations are included. While courses in 'Engineering and related technologies' are popular for students in Major City and RRR locations, students in Major City locations are more likely to choose courses in 'Creative arts' and 'Management and commerce' than students in RRR locations.

Whatever form VET provision may take, it is of interest to note that all those responding to AHISA's survey (including all RRR schools) have students achieving at Certificate III level in at least one educational field. Independent schools located in Major City locations, however, are more likely than schools in RRR locations to also have students achieving at Certificate IV level or even to offer diploma courses.

In a recent study published by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)[9], the authors note an increase in the uptake of Certificate III qualifications in recent years which they attribute to two factors: 'firstly, schools wanting to ensure that students have the opportunity to enter the workforce with some higher-level skills, making them more marketable; and, secondly, jurisdictions might be promoting these higher-level courses to enable students to gain more points towards the completion of secondary school studies or to boost university entrance scores'.

AHISA Heads responding to the survey reported that they consider Certificate III courses to provide a deeper learning experience for students, to be more engaging and to establish a better

pathway to further education and training. As AHISA's survey data show, students in schools of all respondents had access to Certificate III courses across a range of educational fields. This could in part explain the finding in the NCVER study that students from non-government schools are more likely than those from government schools to achieve at this level. It also suggests that further research may be required to assess the potential of RRR schools in all sectors to promote or offer Certificate III level VET and what support might be needed by schools if they are to achieve this.

Levels of certification offered through all forms of provision (RTO, auspice RTO etc), by field of education – RRR schools only

	Number of schools responding				
	Cert I	Cert II	Cert III	Cert IV	Total mentions
Natural and physical sciences	0	1	0	0	1
Information technology	3	7	5	1	16
Engineering and related technologies	3	11	3	0	17
Architecture and building	2	5	2	0	9
Agriculture, environmental and related studies	2	9	4	0	15
Health	0	4	2	2	8
Education	0	3	3	0	6
Management and commerce	0	2	2	2	6
Society and culture	1	1	0	0	2
Creative arts	2	4	6	0	12
Food, hospitality and personal services	5	17	4	0	26
Total mentions	18	64	31	5	

Also of interest in the AHISA survey results is that some 96 per cent of RRR Heads reported that their school participates in school-based apprenticeship or traineeship programs, compared to only 58 per cent of schools in Major City locations.

Responses to AHISA's 2017 surveys indicate that schools in 'Inner Regional' and 'Outer Regional' locations in particular are already adopting or preparing to adopt a greater focus on supporting entrepreneurial activity among students. While some Heads mentioned an existing focus on entrepreneurship in the secondary Business Studies curriculum, others gave examples of programs or ventures established or supported by their school which are either related to or separate from the Business Studies curriculum, including:

- Encouraging students to engage in social entrepreneurialism.

- Making it a requirement for students studying the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) to establish ventures to raise money for attendance at a VCAL camp.

- Making it a major assessment task for Year 11 Business Studies students to create a business proposition which they then present to a panel of business professionals from the local community (in the style of the television program, *Shark Tank*).

- Using a Conservation and Land Management course as a platform for growing trees for the community and land care organisations.

- Establishing a student run café to put into practice hospitality and financial literacy skills.

- Making and posting YouTube clips on learning a language other than English.

That is, schools in RRR locations are expanding provision for students to help equip them to contribute to their local communities and/or create work opportunities within them.

Connecting with community

It should be noted that independent schools in RRE locations are also helping to expand educational and/or social opportunities for children and adults in their communities.

Almost all respondents to AHISA's 2017 survey of schools in RRR locations mentioned that their school's facilities were accessible to the community in some way, either for use of facilities such as sports or performing arts facilities, for cross-cultural exchange or volunteer service, for course provision to the wider community or even to supply basic needs for food and shelter.

One Head mentioned classes for teaching the local Indigenous language were open to the community, while another Head said the school's students taught Aboriginal cultural dance and didgeridoo to younger students in other schools. Another Head mentioned the school was open for extended hours six days a week, 51 weeks of the year to be a point of access to food and shelter for students and community youth.

Of interest is that 40 per cent of respondents reported their school had purpose-built facilities to serve both community and school needs.

Most respondents also mentioned that their school linked with the community through: service learning projects to enhance community wellbeing; linking teaching of the curriculum with community projects; or participation in community festivals or programs.

Over a third of respondents reported their school invited Aboriginal elders to offer cultural programs or teach language, in a voluntary or paid capacity.

The importance of internet access and digital technologies

The final report of the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRE)[10] lists as the third of four priorities for action to improve RRRE opportunities the need to address 'the patchiness of ICT' in RRR locations:

> The availability, accessibility and affordability of ICT for RRR schools, teachers, students, parents and communities have to be improved, and improved quickly. (Page 6)

AHISA's 2017 surveys confirm the importance of internet access and digital technologies for RRE schools as a key means to overcome the 'tyranny of distance' and to expand their educational offerings and meet the individual learning needs of students as well as the professional development requirements of staff.

Expansion of educational offerings could be in the form of providing an opportunity for one or more students to access a senior secondary course via distance education, providing extension work for gifted and talented students through access to MOOCs, or offering students the opportunity to complete an online Certificate or Diploma course as a specialist elective.

Some Heads reported their school was accessing programs, platforms and learning management systems such as Google Classroom and SEQTA, noting that digital media also provided an important way to connect and communicate with the community, including through live streaming of school events.

Reliable and affordable access to ICT is becoming increasingly important with the development of augmented reality and artificial intelligence enhancements to curriculum delivery and assessment.

The IRRRE report recommends the establishment of an ICT taskforce to improve access to and the use of ICT in RRR education. If the Australian Government pursues the appointment of a commissioner to oversee the implementation of a national RRRE strategy, such a taskforce could be sited within the office of the commissioner. A taskforce established outside the office of a commissioner could lead to unnecessary duplication of effort or confusion in RRE communities.

2. RAISING ASPIRATIONS (Challenge C)

Q6. What actions would help to raise aspirations and support informed career choices for students from RRR backgrounds?

The results of AHISA's 2017 member surveys clearly reveal that some of the greatest challenges in raising RRR students' aspirations for post-secondary education are difficult for schools to address. As the following table shows, 'Depressed local economic conditions' was the most commonly reported factor deemed to influence the aspirations of students attending independent schools in RRR locations. For schools in 'Very Remote' locations, health issues were reported as having the most significant impact on students' aspirations, followed by lack of part-time employment opportunities for school-aged students.

Top mentioned factors having had or continuing to have a negative impact on the education experience/aspirations of RRR students

INNER REGIONAL	OUTER REGIONAL	REMOTE	VERY REMOTE
Depressed local economic conditions	Depressed local economic conditions	Depressed local economic conditions	Health issues eg hearing disability
Limited further education or training opportunities in the local community	Lack of aspiration for tertiary education	Lack of aspiration for tertiary education	Lack of part-time employment opportunities for school-aged students
Lack of employment opportunities for school completers in their local community	Lack of employment opportunities for school completers in their local community	Limited opportunities for formalised early childhood learning	Lack of employment opportunities for school completers in their local community
Absenteeism	Limited cultural facilities in the local community	Health issues eg hearing disability	Limited opportunities for formalised early childhood learning
Dislocation from family	Dislocation from family	Absenteeism	Limited access to quality primary schooling opportunities
Student's home environment	Absenteeism	Language difficulties	Language difficulties

Schools are, however, active in employing a range of strategies to motivate students, to support students in realising their aspirations or to support students' transition to further education or training.

A strategy commonly reported by Heads of schools in 'Inner Regional', 'Outer Regional' and 'Remote' locations was 'Visiting university open days'. For schools in 'Very Remote' locations, arranging student exchanges with city-based or overseas schools and arranging specialist VET placements were the most mentioned strategies. Student exchanges arranged with city-based or overseas schools were also a commonly used strategy for 'Outer Regional' and 'Remote' schools.

Schools in 'Inner Regional' locations were more likely to report drawing on a wider range of strategies, including allowing students time for attendance at elite athlete training or other elite academic or sports events, arranging specialist VET placements, operating a buddy scheme with

alumni, bringing in guest speakers or mounting specialist programs run by the school's careers adviser. Another strategy mentioned was supporting students to acquire the necessary bridging skills to enable them to access tertiary options.

Heads leading schools in RRR locations also mentioned a number of curriculum or co-curriculum based strategies used to engage students, including (in order of number of mentions):

- Accessing online courses.
- Using external vocational education and training providers, including industry providers.
- Using video conferencing.
- Participation in agricultural shows.
- Offering subjects with a regional application, such as agricultural science, marine studies.
- Linking curriculum with localised projects.
- Offering co-curricular programs with a regional focus such as equestrian eventing, shooting, diving.
- Establishing a school farm.
- Offering transition programs during the first years of boarding to bridge literacy and numeracy gaps.
- Partnering with other schools or across campuses to expand subject options.
- Accessing government-provided distance education courses.
- Offering an Indigenous language.
- Creating links with regional universities.

One Head mentioned that their school (serving students with multiple disadvantages) created its own courses to promote school engagement, such as short-term creative projects in visual art, craft or graphic design that would allow students to experience success in education and in a school environment.

Another Head mentioned that their school had established 'Academies of Excellence' for students in Years 7 to 10. The Academies are built on students' interests such as robotics, coding, drama, music, science and agriculture and involve a 10-week (term) project.

Heads of RRR schools participating in AHISA's 2019 VET Review survey mentioned several innovations they had introduced to promote students' learning through VET courses, including:

- Initiating a course for students who are young mothers and who are attempting to gain a Higher School Certificate. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural arts are the basis for an enterprise/business project in both art and textiles. Students sell their products while learning skills and gaining certificates.
- Connecting with farmers and RTOs to facilitate the provision of agriculture courses for students.
- Introducing specialised units relating to the entertainment industry.
- Successfully linking with an external provider 400km distant to the school to deliver a Certificate IV Business course at the school.
- Collaborating with other schools to expand the courses available to students in all participating schools.

- Partnering with schools from other sectors in a joint venture to improve provision.
- Building relationships with local businesses to facilitate workplace learning programs.
- Containing costs by combining Year 11 and Year 12 classes to increase numbers in each class to allow for better teacher to student ratios.

Heads in AHISA's 2017 surveys also reported a number of strategies are adopted to meet students' individual learning needs across all subject areas, including:

- Personalised learning plans for students, which may include the student's own learning goals.
- Accessing other secondary providers, including distance education and online courses.
- Accessing mentors from the community or alumni.
- A 'stage not age' approach to choosing electives and senior secondary subjects.
- An Aboriginal education worker to support each subject offered.
- Extending library hours.

These strategies and approaches suggest that, at the very least, governments should consider travel grants for secondary students in RRR locations to assist in attending university open days, undertaking student exchanges, or to attend special education opportunities such as youth leadership conferences or elite sports events.

Provision for RRR students in out of area schools under hostel, home stay, boarding or other residential arrangements is an important aspect of supporting educational opportunity for students from RRR locations and assists in fostering – and fulfilling – students' aspirations, especially for entry to university courses.

The challenges faced by RRR students living away from home to attend school – whether that school is in a RRR location or a 'Major City' location – and the strategies AHISA members' schools are adopting to overcome these challenges are detailed in AHISA's submission to the IRRRE. Recommendations to government on ways to support out of area provision for students are included in the section below.

Recommendations to government

AHISA's 2017 surveys invited Heads of boarding schools in 'Major City' locations and Heads of schools in RRR locations to submit any recommendations they would make to governments for programs or services that would make a tangible difference to the quality of education their schools could offer to students from RRR locations. All suggested recommendations are listed below. (It should be noted that, depending on the state or territory, once a student enters a non-government school they may lose significant entitlements such as free access to government support services, adding considerably to the cost of education for children attending non-government schools.)

Recommendations to government
(in order of number of mentions)

MAJOR CITY BOARDING SCHOOLS	REGIONAL AND REMOTE SCHOOLS
• Full funding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students irrespective of the SES of the school they attend	• Federal or state/territory government capital funding for new residential facilities or facilities refurbishment
• Federal or state/territory government capital funding for new residential facilities or facilities refurbishment	• Free access for students to government-provided distance education courses
• Full and free access to government-provided services for students with disability, such as speech therapy, irrespective of the school they attend*	• Full funding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students irrespective of the SES of the school they attend
• Full and free access for students to government-funded mental health services, irrespective of the school they attend	• Free access to NBN Co's Sky Muster distance education satellite service
• Free access to government-provided distance education courses for students from regional, remote and very remote areas irrespective of the school they attend	• Federal government loan subsidies for capital expenditure
	• Reduction of local government rates, fees, charges
• Introduction of by-passing laws in all jurisdictions so that students attending boarding schools in other states/territories are eligible for state recurrent funding	• More housing for transient youth
	• Access to grants to cover programs such as keeping young mothers at school
• Increased federal recurrent funding for boarding students	• Support for ICT resources and maintenance
	• Funding for transport (buses, fuel, drivers) to collect students and return them home
• Extending Abstudy to cover the cost of parents coming to Year 12 graduation or valedictory events	• Increased funding for regions experiencing economic stress
	• A review of the ABSTUDY application and approval processes
• Funding to cover the cost of additional academic support out of school hours, particularly in literacy and numeracy skills	• Increased support for students with disability, especially in areas where services are non-existent or under-resourced
	• Recognition of the role independent schools play in providing educational choice in regional areas
	• Recognition that independent schools may be the sole provider in some remote areas

* It was reported that some students enter secondary boarding with hearing or language difficulties that were not diagnosed in their home location and may need intensive 'catch up' support.

3. SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS (Challenge D)

Q8. How can we better support Indigenous people from RRR areas to access and succeed in tertiary education?

A quality school education is a proven pathway to accessing and completing tertiary education. AHISA members' schools have a track record in providing residential scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students, both with and without the support of the Australian Government and/or philanthropic organisations.

In 2016-17 AHISA made a two-part submission to the Inquiry into Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students conducted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs in the 44th Parliament, and resumed in the 45th Parliament. AHISA's submissions are published at http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Indigenous_Affairs/Educational_Opportunities/Submissions.

The submission confirms the viability and success of residential scholarships for ATSI students in 'Major City' and RRR locations in providing for ATSI students from RRR locations. AHISA recommends continuation and even expansion of Australian Government support for scholarship programs as this support encourages contributions from private individuals, school communities and philanthropic organisations. The submission also details factors that contribute to the success of scholarship programs, including:

- Sensitivity of school communities to the cultural backgrounds of ATSI students is important in helping students develop a sense of belonging at school.

- Efforts by schools to promote and celebrate Indigenous cultures and support ATSI students in the expression of their home cultures are important in helping students maintain their cultural identity.

- Developing trust through long-term relationships between schools and remote Indigenous communities helps students transition to city boarding schools.

- A higher proportion of ATSI students within a school can augment students' sense of belonging.

- The commitment of school leaders underwrites program innovation and success.

- The school's ethos and values inform the development and implementation of strategies to support ATSI students socially and academically.

- High expectations of students as a component of the 'academic press' that has been shown to contribute to overall student achievement in independent schools is also a factor in the achievement of ATSI students from regional and remote areas attending 'Major City' boarding schools on residential scholarships.

- The holistic care of students in boarding houses – where attention to the physical and emotional wellbeing of students is as important as academic studies – and the provision of safe learning environments are contributing factors to the success of scholarship programs for ATSI students.

- Establishing post-school pathways supports the long-term success of metropolitan residential programs for ATSI students from RRR locations.

Part 1 of AHISA's submission draws on articles describing the provision of Indigenous education in AHISA's members' schools as published in AHISA's biannual journal, *Independence*. Highlighted were practices found to be successful in supporting retention of ATSI students in city boarding schools, key features of relationships between city independent schools and remote Indigenous communities and challenges in on-country provision for ATSI students. It describes factors found to have contributed to the success of residential programs for ATSI students from RRR locations attending city schools. It also describes features of successful partnerships between independent schools in both 'Major City' and RRR locations with RRR Indigenous community schools, supporting the proposition that between-school collaborations are a viable option for increasing educational opportunities for ATSI students.

Part 2 of the submission covers innovative approaches to educational provision for ATSI students, both on-country and out of country, developed by AHISA members' schools. These include:

- Melbourne Indigenous Transition School, Richmond, Victoria: A one-year residential and academic program to assist ATSI students from RRR communities to transition successfully to city boarding schools.

- Woodleigh School, Mornington Peninsula, Victoria: Assistance in program development and teacher professional learning for a 'Very Remote' community school, plus primary-level student exchange.

- Wesley College, Melbourne, Victoria: Establishment of a senior secondary school, Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School, that provides on country provision for Aboriginal students and for which Wesley College serves as a remote campus. (Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School is near Fitzroy Crossing, WA, and is designated 'Very Remote' by ACARA.)

While the 2017 member surveys conducted to inform AHISA's submission to the IRRRE gave rise to some recommendations to support ATSI students, AHISA's submission to the Inquiry into Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students focuses particularly on on-country and out of country provision for ATSI students in AHISA members' schools and on the ways in which members' schools are contributing to provision for ATSI students and their teachers through collaborative arrangements with remote Indigenous community schools.

Some of the ideas contributed by school leaders to inform AHISA's submission to the Inquiry into Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students include suggestions for government sponsored programs to support creation of educational opportunities for ATSI students in RRR locations. The OECD notes that 'practices that benefit Indigenous students also benefit non-Indigenous students'.[11] Some suggestions may therefore be of interest for closing the opportunity gap for all students in RRR locations, and include:

- Seed funding for 'pop up' schools in regional and remote areas; for example, pop up schools to deliver specific programs in STEM subjects. These 'schools' could deliver short courses to students and professional learning for teachers.

- Funding to support teacher exchanges and ongoing collaborative professional development of teachers in remote community schools.

- Capital funding to build teacher accommodation in remote communities, suitable for short and longer-term stays for staff from schools willing to establish teacher visitation programs to schools in these communities.
- Funding to facilitate teacher secondments between 'Major City' and schools in remote areas.

AHISA's submission to the Inquiry into Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students supports the views of Heads responding to AHISA's 2017 surveys: that education provision for ATSI students in RRR locations cannot be separated from social, health and housing issues. The surveys further reveal that limited or no access to medical services, ancillary services or mental health services in RRR locations can also present a challenge to recruitment and retention of staff, with flow-on effects in education provision for students.

This suggests that if the Australian Government decides to appoint a commissioner to oversee the implementation of a national RRRE strategy, an important role of the commissioner should be to liaise with the National Rural Health Commissioner. ∎

NOTES

[1] AHISA submission to the Inquiry was in two parts and may be accessed at http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Indigenous_Affairs/Educational_Opportunities/Submissions.

[2] Submissions to the IRRRE are posted at https://submissions.education.gov.au/Forms/IRRRRE/pages/index.

[3] AHISA's submission to the Expert Review is posted at https://www.ahisa.edu.au/AHISA/Advocacy/Submission_Resources/Submissions_2019/Expert_Review_of_Australia_s_VET_system.aspx.

[4] Education Council (2014) *Preparing secondary students for work: A framework for vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students*. Prepared by Education Services Australia. Accessed at https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/preparing-secondary-students-work.

[5] Welch A, Helme S & S Lamb S (2007) Rurality and inequality in education: The Australian experience, in Teese R, Lamb S & Duru-Bellat M (eds) *International studies in education inequality, theory and policy Volume 2: Inequality in education systems*, Springer, Netherlands: 272. As quoted in NSW Department of Education and Communities Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (2013) *Rural and remote education: Literature review*, page 2.

[6] Guenther J, Disbray S & Osborne S (2016) *Red dirt education: A compilation of learnings from the Remote Education Systems project*. Alice Springs.

[7] McKinley E (2017) From inequality to quality: Challenging the debate on Indigenous education in, Bentley T & Savage GC (2017) *Educating Australia: Challenges for the decade ahead*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press; pp191-205.

[8] The fields of education referred to are those reported in the annual National Report on Schooling in Australia. See https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-data-portal/participation-in-vocational-education-and-training-(vet)-including-vet-in-schools#view4.

[9] Misko J, Korbel P & Blomberg D (2017) *VET in Schools students: Characteristics and post-school employment and training experiences*. NCVER Research Report. Accessed at https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/vet-in-schools-students-characteristics-and-post-school-employment-and-training-experiences.

[10] Halsey J (2018) *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education: Final report*. Accessed at https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/01218_independent_review_accessible.pdf.

[11] OECD (2017) *Promising practices in supporting success for Indigenous students*. Paris: OECD Publishing. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264279421-en.