National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy

Submission form

Welcome to the submission process for the National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy (the Strategy).

The Regional Education Expert Advisory Group invites all interested parties to put forward ideas on the framing paper released on 20 December 2018.

The Advisory Group is seeking action-orientated responses to the challenges and key questions identified in this paper. The paper outlines the background of the strategy formation, the problem facing regional, rural and remote education and the challenges faced by those communities.

Your responses to the Framing Paper should focus on practical steps the Government could take to improve tertiary education access and attainment for people from regional, rural and remote backgrounds.

The form can be submitted any time before public submissions close at **5:00pm (AEDT)** on **1 February 2019**.

Please note that the fields in the form are text only and pictures cannot be included. To return your completed form or if you experience difficulties in completing the form, please contact the Strategy Secretariat at RegionalStrategy@education.gov.au.

Note:

- information provided through the submission process may be published with your permission, including in the documentation relating to the Strategy and on the department's website
- questions marked with a * require an answer to be provided.

Opportunity through learning

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Attachment A to this document*

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I agree to have my submission published.*

Yes ☒

No ☐

Your details

Title*	Ms
First name*	Maryanne
Last name*	McKaige
E-mail address*	██████████████
State/Territory*	Northern Territory

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

Yes ☒

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Submission details

I am making this submission as a: *

Educator	☒
parent/carer/guardian	☐
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community organisation	☐
government agency	☐
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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

Charles Darwin University

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

Yes ☒
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Key Questions from the Framing Paper

The Regional Education Expert Advisory Group is seeking responses to the following key questions. Specifically, we are looking for practical steps to overcome the five challenges facing students from RRR backgrounds.

Challenge A: There are fewer study options available in RRR areas

1. What opportunities exist to expand options for further study in RRR areas?
2. 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?

Challenge B: Relocating RRR students face significant financial, emotional and social challenges

3. What financial supports work best for students from RRR backgrounds, including those who choose to relocate?
4. What forms of support might be useful in helping students from RRR backgrounds to continue with their tertiary study?
5. How can universities assist RRR students to feel like they belong on their campus?

Challenge C: Raising aspirations for tertiary education

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

Challenge D: RRR often experience multiple forms of disadvantage

7. What practical steps can be taken to support RRR students who experience multiple forms of disadvantage?
8. How can we better support Indigenous people from RRR areas to access and succeed in tertiary education?

Challenge E: Attracting people and jobs to RRR areas

9. How can tertiary education providers further stimulate economic growth in RRR areas?
10. What actions would further strengthen and increase the attractiveness of regional universities?
11. What policies would attract more metropolitan and international students to study at RRR areas, including regional universities and campuses?

Challenge F: Implementing and monitoring a national strategy

12. Would there be value in establishing a National Regional Education Commissioner to oversee the Strategy and, if so, what should their role be?
13. How should success be measured? What goals and targets, including for tertiary education attainment, should be considered both at a national and individual community level?

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.

Challenge A: There are fewer study options available in RRR areas

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

School attainment levels in RRR areas are, on average, lower than in metropolitan areas. Local high school options can be very limited in regional and remote areas and often Year 11 and 12 subject options for these students are limited, making university entrance challenging. Many of the brightest students in RRR areas opt to relocate to secondary schools and universities in southern cities to further their education. Those in RRR areas not able to enter higher education directly could benefit from having clear pathways articulated from VET to Higher Education so that those who may lack confidence in embarking on tertiary education can start small, gain confidence and qualifications, and progress with further study as appropriate to their life circumstances. In addition, the expansion of demand driven enabling and sub bachelor programs would help many in RRR areas to access tertiary education and expand their options for further study.

In RRR areas where there are multiple providers and the connections and pathways between VET and HE are less apparent, efforts to assist potential students in understanding this opportunity would help to expand their options.

Digital technology and online learning platforms have broadened access to tertiary education to students in RRR areas. However, there are still challenges for RRR students in accessing online learning successfully, particularly when they first engage. It is important to note that:

– Online learning is not always the most appropriate learning option for RRR students and may exclude a proportion of learners especially those already facing disadvantage;

– Access to digital technologies in RRR areas may be limited;

– Online learning is most effective when used in conjunction with other types of delivery – students still require support, face-to-face, and interaction with trainers or lecturers;

Flexible delivery and 'mixed mode' delivery needs to be more truly flexible and responsive to the needs of students. There should be capacity for HE to borrow from the VET model and possibly increase the use of intensives and block training to better prepare students for study (eg enabling courses especially for online environments).

Many students studying independently, such as through online courses, in RRR areas drop out of their courses for a variety of reasons; they may suffer from lack of mentoring/assistance to keep on track with their studies, to surmount hurdles they may encounter such as with their course assessments, with IT, with motivation or in their personal lives. The recent Regional Study Hubs Program has sought to address this to some extent, but this could be further expanded with additional hubs and services that take a more personalised approach to tracking student progression and wellbeing to aid retention. Regional Hubs should also allow closer involvement of local providers in delivery of these services. The current Regional Study Hubs Program was only

accessible to community groups, providers such as CDU, who have a wealth of experience in supporting students in RRR areas, were excluded from applying for funding.

Developing online learning programs that are more culturally relevant and appropriate for students in RRR areas may also assist in expanding options and uptake.

The Away from Base funding model that enables Indigenous students to access compulsory course elements in a location away from their permanent home for short periods could be extended to non-Indigenous students and include enabling programs so that all RRR students have expanded options and support for study in their regions. It may also be worth considering offering some kind of financial incentives to encourage RRR students to stay and study within their home communities as they are then more likely to remain and be part of the local workforce and aspirational role models for other RRR students. Family and peer support is also often better in such circumstances.

In CDU's experience, students in RRR areas will often access and complete only one or two units of study that might help them with their work or enable them to return to work, rather than seeking to complete a full accredited qualification. Offering short courses accredited by the local provider so that there is some reward for this approach may in fact encourage some students to continue with tertiary education at some point and enable them to benefit from what they have managed to achieve.

2. *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*?

To some extent the answer to this question is already addressed in the answer to (1). While CDU is the only university based in the NT, there are a number of other universities and private VET providers operating in the NT in both education and research. CDU has established partnerships with a number of other universities and research organisations such Flinders University, the Australian National University and the Australian Institute of Marine Science to enable course offerings we are unable to sustainably provide ourselves (eg Flinders NT Medical Program, a joint program to train doctors for health care delivery in northern Australia with a focus on increasing the number of Indigenous medical graduates), or to collaborate on research such as through the Collaborative Research Network. These types of collaborations and partnerships are very important in RRR areas where the small population may not otherwise allow comprehensive course offerings or extensive research capability or opportunity.

CDU also has a teaching partnership with the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education for delivery of VET and Higher education programs to Indigenous students. However, in relation to CDU working with other private VET providers in the NT, while on the one hand market competition can be good for both the consumer and the provider, in the case of the NT where there is a limited market this can have the adverse effect of spreading the client base too thinly. CDU has in the past endeavoured to deliver training, in person, to over 150 very remote areas of the NT, which is relatively very costly and cross subsidised to some extent by delivery to larger student cohorts in the urban centres. The competition from private VET providers in the NT, which tend to focus on the higher returns from courses offered in the major urban centres, has meant that CDU's market share in this area is diluted and it is becoming less viable for CDU to continue

to deliver to very remote communities as part of what we see as our community service obligations.

Challenge B: Relocating RRR students face significant financial, emotional and social challenges

3. *What financial supports work best for students from RRR backgrounds, including those who choose to relocate?*

Consideration needs to be given to how the students can be made aware of what assistance might be available to them – the students most in need are still the ones least likely to know what scholarships and assistance are available. Scholarships for RRR students to study elsewhere could also be tied to a requirement that students undertake something like an internship or part of their training in their home community to assist in reconnecting students with their communities and growing regional economies. Given that many RRR students are mature age and have been in employment, it would help to have scholarships available to them that are sufficient in value to better offset income loss due to study.

Centrelink/Youth Allowance is an important financial benefit for students, however it should be reviewed and improved in relation to RRR students who need to relocate to study.

4. *What forms of support might be useful in helping students from RRR backgrounds to continue with their tertiary study?*

RRR students who relocate from the NT to southern cities, or from remote areas of the NT to Darwin, face significant financial challenges in remaining connected to family and their communities because of the high cost of travel to return home during study breaks, compared with the distances most other RRR students would need to travel to relocate to the nearest university. Clearly, apart from financial assistance for students to live and study away from home, financial assistance to allow NT students in particular to return home and maintain their connection to their home community, is important if we are to see them return to find jobs and make their careers in regional areas.

Other forms of support that might be useful include:

- Scholarships dedicated to the cost of relocation and accommodation and provision of suitable affordable accommodation in centres RRR students relocate to;
- Remote delivery support staff and tutors out in the regional and remote areas to provide face to face and online assistance and mentorship to students (such as in a Regional Study Hubs model);
- Financial bonuses for completion of study;
- Assistance with finding part time job opportunities while studying;
- Initiatives to enable students to stay and study in their home communities rather than relocate to study.

5. *How can universities assist RRR students to feel like they belong on their campus?*

Universities could provide tutoring and mentoring support in the first year of study specifically for students from RRR areas who may feel out of place on a university campus, and may struggle to integrate and cope with the demands of study away from home. Universities and student associations could also encourage the establishment of RRR student groups so that these students can meet others in the same situation and provide each other with support and social connections.

There also needs to be recognition that many RRR students will not have an on-campus experience if they study online. Virtual campus experiences could be created for online students to make them feel more connected to their place of study and other students and consideration could be given to providing more support for online students to travel to their university campus for short periods for orientation and intensives for example, so that they feel more connected to their place of study. The Regional Study Hubs model, if expanded, could also help to provide a campus experience and environment for RRR students.

Challenge C: Raising aspirations for tertiary education

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

Students from RRR backgrounds need to be exposed to good role models to raise their career aspirations. Locally, these role models will be people who have either stayed and studied within their communities and gone on the develop careers there, or have relocated or returned to the community after studying elsewhere. Or they could be representatives of universities who visit communities and schools and play a mentoring role to raise aspiration amongst students while still in school.

Students also need to be made aware of the opportunities for pathways into and between VET and HE study and the value of both areas of tertiary education in helping them to achieve their career goals and aspirations. This information can start to be imparted to students while still in school. RRR students need to be made aware that, with online, flexible and mixed mode learning opportunities, they don't necessarily need to relocate in order to get a tertiary qualification and establish a career in their home communities.

Challenge D: RRR often experience multiple forms of disadvantage

7. *What practical steps can be taken to support RRR students who experience multiple forms of disadvantage?*

CDU has had considerable experience with students who experience multiple forms of disadvantage. Support services including counsellors and mentors, specialist tutors and making navigation of enrolment processes and online study as simple and intuitive as possible will all help. While it might be considered that universities should be providing this as part of their normal service provision, there are many competing needs, and giving adequate attention to students with multiple forms of disadvantage requires intense resourcing that is often not feasible. This is exacerbated when students are studying online. In addition, having access to things like good

childcare and mental health services can provide valuable support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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

Indigenous academic support needs to be proactive, nuanced and responsive. Genuine investment in initial language, literacy and numeracy support is needed for remote Indigenous students to be able to successfully engage with Western-style academia. The lack of availability of intensive English language training is a significant impediment to tertiary education access for many people from remote areas, where English might be a third or fourth language. It would also help if universities were able to invest in creation of course resources that are accessible, engaging and comprehensible for Indigenous students.

It is important for universities and training providers to build ongoing and authentic relationships with remote Indigenous communities and organisations to build a level of trust and engagement that will encourage Indigenous people to access tertiary education. Connection to communities and organisations in relation to Indigenous employment would also help to enable providers to be responsive to training needs and potential job outcomes.

An issue has been that while these relationships take time to develop and have in the past been supported by various funding initiatives such as the HEPPP Whole of Community Engagement Initiative, funding is often short lived and the momentum built in engaging with Indigenous communities and people is lost when funding stops. There is a need for longer term and more consistent funding to maintain these relationships so that more Indigenous people will aspire to tertiary education.

There would be benefit in funding Remote Community Engagement personnel to focus specifically on remote delivery and to ensure safe, culturally appropriate and efficient remote delivery is taking place. Employing Indigenous staff wherever possible will also assist in supporting Indigenous people to succeed in tertiary education.

Universities and training providers should also engage with Indigenous students at the secondary school level to establish relationships and trust and to help students develop aspirations for their future and to see tertiary education as part of that aspiration.

Initiatives like the Catholic Education NT *Growing Our Own* program, a joint venture with CDU in the NT to prepare and skill Indigenous teachers to work in remote schools and their home communities, where they have an understanding of the local environment and a commitment to their community, is a good example of how to support Indigenous people to access and succeed in tertiary education.

Challenge E: Attracting people and jobs to RRR areas

9. *How can tertiary education providers further stimulate economic growth in RRR areas?*

Tertiary education providers in RRR areas are major contributors to their local economies and can be a major stimulator of economic growth. In 2016 an economic analysis of CDU's contribution to

the NT by Deloitte Access Economics indicated that CDU's overall operations, together with student and visitor expenditure, contributed around $286 million to the local economy. The recently signed Darwin City Deal, which will see parts of CDU's operations located in the Darwin CBD through a partnership with the Australian and NT Governments and the City of Darwin Council, is expected to significantly stimulate NT economic growth by attracting additional domestic and international students to study in the NT, as has been demonstrated by City Deals elsewhere. Universities stimulate growth as major regional employers and service providers, through the collaborations and outcomes of their research and through the social and cultural roles they play within their communities.

Economic growth anywhere will create demand for skilled labour and qualified professionals. Universities in regional areas are best placed to provide this human capital, being attuned to local workforce needs and having the connections to industry, to government and to the community that will enable them to tailor their programs to meet local demand.

By partnering more closely with industry, local councils and communities in RRR areas across VET and Higher Education, the tertiary education system could work together to connect students more smoothly with internships, traineeships and scholarships that are tied directly to jobs and outcomes.

It would help if funding was available for a specific and targeted position/role within training organisations in RRR areas to engage with industry to ensure courses are aligned with and tailored to local skills requirements and help to oversee the process of industry internships, disbursement of scholarships, and work placements.

10. **What actions would further strengthen and increase the attractiveness of regional universities?**

Regional universities could be made more attractive to students, particularly those who wish to study on campus rather than online, if they offered more affordable, collegial accommodation options and a greater sense of community, such as the 'University town' concept, where students feel they are an important part of the community and that the 'town' is attuned to them and their needs.

Strengthening the research competitiveness of regional universities could also assist in making them more attractive, particularly to international students, who use international rankings largely based on research standing and performance as a guide in selecting which university to choose for study in Australia.

Students who are interested in studying courses online may be more attracted to a regional university if it has a very simple and intuitive application process and state of the art online learning tools that incorporate innovative content and delivery. Some students might also be attracted to an online course from a regional university that includes local content, including cultural content, that sets it apart from other provider offerings.

Dual sector universities supporting regional areas, such as CDU, could also be promoted as attractive options for study due to their connections and pathways between HE and VET and their strong relationships with industry and employer groups.

However, over emphasising the 'regional' label can be a disadvantage in some instances. Regional universities may suffer from international students' preconceived ideas about what regional Australia is like. Many international students are from highly urbanised areas and may be hesitant to consider studying in a regional area in Australia due to a perception, often gained from tourism promotion, that it would be in the sparsely inhabited outback. So, while it is important to acknowledge that there is a need to consider RRR education as worthy of special consideration and policy to ensure access and effectiveness, it may also be important, at least in the international student sphere, to promote and emphasise the benefits of education in a centre like Darwin, which while remote is a capital city, without focusing on its 'regionality'.

11. *What policies would attract more metropolitan and international students to study at RRR areas, including regional universities and campuses?*

Policies to attract more metropolitan and international students to study in RRR areas should be in relation to subsidies and scholarships to attract and support students coming to these areas and in relation to promotion of the benefits and opportunities of regional study including potential for good job outcomes. For example, CDU ranks amongst the best in Australia when it comes to graduate starting salaries and the proportion of graduates employed four months after graduation.

In relation to international students, there may be value in considering adopting a national approach to international student recruitment, such as Canada has established, so that international students access one portal into 'Brand Australia' that then directs them to appropriate universities based on their requirements and priorities, rather than them having to independently search individual universities or be persuaded by agents employed by universities to recruit new students.

Challenge F: Implementing and monitoring a national strategy

12. *Would there be value in establishing a National Regional Education Commissioner to oversee the Strategy and, if so, what should their role be*?

In considering whether there would be value in establishing a National Regional Education Commissioner, it would be worth examining what the role and success of the National Rural Health Commissioner has been and whether this model seems to be working to champion advances in regional areas.

Ideally, a Commissioner would provide a more strategic long term approach to addressing need and opportunity in RRR areas and would champion policy that moves away from a one size fits all approach and promotes the recognition of the diverse needs of institutions in regional areas.

13. *How should success be measured? What goals and targets, including for tertiary education attainment, should be considered both at a national and individual community level?*

Success should ultimately be measured in terms of improved student outcomes including employment success, as well as the research impact and success of RRR universities. Student retention and completion are significant issues for some RRR universities. While there are many

reasons for relatively low retention and completion rates at RRR universities, the goal should be to reach levels comparable to those of the bigger metropolitan universities and to give students adequate support and assist them to make the right choices to enable them to continue with tertiary education wherever possible.

We are fast approaching a point where almost all jobs will require some level of post-secondary education and should therefore consider setting a national goal or target for the proportion of the population we anticipate will require HE or VET qualifications by say 2030. Many growing economies in Asia are already setting targets for the numbers of workers they want qualified in VET and HE to meet actual and anticipated demand. Such targets could include specific mention of anticipated demand and growth in RRR areas so that policies and strategies are able to focus on these for better outcomes.

Success will also be measured in the overall prosperity of a region, which will reflect the role of education and innovation in contributing to economic growth, environmental sustainability and social wellbeing.

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.

- Expanding access to demand driven Enabling and sub Bachelor places at regional universities and articulating clear pathways between VET and Higher Education programs would expand further study opportunities in RRR areas.

- Enabling regional universities to be applicants in an expanded regional study hubs program would further assist and support students in remote areas to access and persist with further study.

- Partnerships between providers in RRR areas can be beneficial in providing more comprehensive services provided they do not dilute the market.

- Scholarships, financial incentives and support for RRR students to remain connected to their families and communities if they relocate for study are important.

- Online students would feel more connected to their campuses if they were given support and the opportunity to spend time there at the beginning of their study.

- Student aspiration needs to be raised by good role models and mentoring.

- Students with multiple forms of disadvantage, including Indigenous students, need specialist tutoring especially in literacy and numeracy, mentoring and support services .

- Education providers need to build long term relationships with Indigenous communities and organisations and begin engagement with students at the secondary school level.

- Education providers can stimulate economic growth in RRR areas by being well connected to industry and the community.

- Promoting the benefits of study at regional universities without over emphasising their 'regionality' may increase their attractiveness.

- Adopting a 'Brand Australia' approach to potential incoming international students would help them choose Australian universities based on their personal priorities rather than different states and territories and universities all competing with one another for the international market.

- A National Regional Education Commissioner might be valuable if the role was focused on championing policy that moves away from a one size fits all approach to RRR education.

Privacy Notice and Terms and Conditions for Submissions

Purpose for collection of information relating to submissions, and the use and disclosure of that information

The Australian Government Department of Education and Training (the department) invites you to make a submission in relation to the development of the National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy (the Strategy).

Through the submission process, the department will be collecting certain information, including personal information. The information collected may include your name, your email address, the organisation you represent (if applicable) and any other information that is included in your submission.

The department may use and disclose this information for the purposes of informing or contributing to the Strategy, policy development related to the subject of the Strategy, publishing submissions (including by making submissions publicly available), and providing feedback to the department's Minister about the Strategy and submission process.

The department may also contact you to provide updates on the progress of the Strategy, if you have indicated in your submission response that you would like to receive such updates.

Publishing submissions

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If you are making a submission on behalf of an organisation, or represent that you are, you must ensure that you have that organisation's agreement prior to making the submission. By making a submission, you represent to the department that you have such agreement.

If there is information in your submission referencing an individual, which is not otherwise publicly available, you must ensure that you have the consent of the individual to whom the information relates to include it in the submission. By making a submission, you represent to the department that you have such consent.

By making a submission, you further represent to the department that your submission does not contain any confidential information about any individual or organisation.

Privacy policy and contact

For further information about the department's privacy policy and how it deals with information, including how you can access or correct your personal information, please see the department's privacy policy.

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