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.

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.

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- questions marked with a * require an answer to be provided.

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I agree to have my submission published.*

Yes ☒
No ☐

Your details

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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

National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE)

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

Yes ☒

No ☐

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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.

In addressing the National RRR Education Strategy, the NCSEHE focussed on five key documents produced by or with the support of the NCSEHE, each of which addresses components of the 13 key questions from the Framing Paper with solution based initiatives.

1 Communique from the SPERA (Society for the Provision of Rural Education in Australia) 2018 conference held at Curtin University on 30 November 2018.

On the 30 November 2018 SPERA held the *Symposium Discussion* with the key purpose to drive the endorsement of the communique which was future focussed contributing to the national RRR Strategy.

Symposium Open Discussion

The symposia explored the key areas highlighted within the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE) final report. Following Emeritus Professor John Halsey's overview 60 delegates broke up into three discussion groups:

1. **Workforce capacity (teachers and education leadership)** led by Phil Brown, Country Education Partnership (CEP)
2. **Equity and curriculum breadth (rural schools and their significant role in community/economic development; improving learning access and breadth; and the use of technology)** led by Sue Ledger, SPERA
3. **Transitions and rural youth aspirations** led by Sue Trinidad, NCSEHE

Key Points recorded from symposium discussion:

Regional Australia is central to Australia's economy and society. It accounts for 30 per cent of Australia's economy (Gross Domestic Product) and 60 per cent of its exports. Regions are central to the brand and image of Australia - the outback, self-reliance, a fair go and community spirit – as well as most of its internationally famous tourist icons.

Regional education is critical to building on those assets and capabilities and to forge an even better strategic future for regional Australia in ways that strengthen the Australian economy and society and its place in the world.

Achieving success through regional education requires leveraging the capacities of regional industries, leveraging the local knowledge of individuals and communities, and understanding and sustainably using its environment – and to do all three in ways that create sustainable local futures while contributing to Australia's national development and engaging in the global economy for the benefit of all.

The themes that contribute to workforce capacity, curriculum development, and transitions and rural youth aspirations:

- Developing workforce capacity through more capable, connected and supported teachers that provide inspirational leadership in schools and within the wider community.
- Developing an equitable education system through curriculum that is innovative, technologically-advanced and relevant to regional Australia. Ultimately to contribute to local

economic development and capable of engaging with national and international organizations.

- Facilitating the aspirations of young people and individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to maximise educational reach and potential for all. This is achieved by developing and evaluating transitional strategies to help people to access tertiary education. Furthermore, to support them through lifelong learning in a way that leads to measurable successful outcomes for schools, other educational organizations, communities and the nation.

The common denominators shared by these themes include:

- Collaboration between all stakeholders – students, their families, local community and business organisations and national policy makers.
- Connected stakeholders in a range of current and emerging technologies to ensure people in regional Australia are technology-literate consumers and producers of the goods, services and technologies at the local, national and international level.
- Developing widely understood and supported goals within a national narrative on the importance of regional Australia, to facilitate an equitable education system.
- Changing the mind-set of national policy makers to understand the role of regional Australia to achieve a sustainable and equitable future for Australia.

Six key actions emerged from the 2018 SPERA Symposium, two from each of the three themes:

- **Workforce capacity**. Numerous current programs and emerging creative initiatives are working well across regional Australia. There is an opportunity to leverage the benefits of these programs through a teacher-centric and a complementary student-centric initiative:

    1# Teachers need the improved support of a nationally connected and accessible learning and development program which features information and analysis of all local initiatives to support and further raise teaching and leadership capabilities. This would comprise a nationally-networked service that engages all regional teachers, is adequately resourced in staff and expenditure, and highlights ideas and initiatives for ongoing, place-based professional development and learning.

    2# Students need a teaching framework that supports all students throughout their educational journey, from pre-primary to post-graduate. Students need to know and be confident that their education is student-centred in that it is flexible in meeting individual needs, accommodates background disadvantages, informs them of possible options for learning, and supports their aspirations. This is a complementary measure to teacher learning and development programs that ensures maximum synergies between teacher and student.

- **Curriculum development**. The curricula available in regional educational institutions needs to be relevant to local communities, provide inspiration for the uptake of education and skills, and generate and expand positive outcomes for individuals and communities in regional Australia.

    1# Develop a rural-specific approach to the provision of learning that is deeply embedded in the community, relevant to the experience, daily life and work of regional people, and which is also demonstrably connected to national and international issues, industries and economic and social developments.

    2# There is a need to sustain learning programs that are working well, and develop new initiatives in curricula development. This requires improved networking of issues and ideas, as well as better measurement of outcomes from programs, both of which

need to be professionally managed, outcomes communicated and the service adequately resourced.

- **Transitions and Rural Aspirations to outcomes**. Maximising opportunities for all ages and securing the best economic and social outcomes for regional communities requires the development of 'joined up policy' and seamless programs in two areas: models of financial support for students, and funding models for educational organizations that are tied to better outcomes for regional communities.

  1# Reconfigure models of support for Regional, Rural and Remote students as lifelong learners by making support more visible and easily understood, and resolving work-study conflicts by making study a more attractive option for students on any part of the educational and age spectrum. The HE-VET divide needs to be minimised or eliminated by better integration of the two especially in regional Australia. Improved transitional and enabling programs between stages of the educational journey are required.

  2# Develop a funding model that ties educational institutions to collaboration and alignment of priorities for the benefit of Regional, Rural and Remote students. Long-term commitments to regional communities need to be developed and embedded into regional educational policy. Place-based relationships and solutions need to be at the forefront of community engagement. Community engagement includes working with families as well as students. Regional hubs present opportunities for new models of community engagement. The funding model needs to recognise the high cost of delivering outreach in the more geographically isolated parts of Australia.

2 Widening Regional and Remote Participation: Interrogating the Impact of Outreach Programs Across Queensland

The second document, the *Widening Regional and Remote Participation* report (the 'Queensland Report') produced significant findings and recommendations that are relevant to all RRR students across Australia. The report takes a holistic and systemic view of barriers and enablers in a collaborative approach between regional schools and universities to maximise access and participation by RRR students in higher education. A copy of the report can be found **here.**

The report produced numerous recommendations; a key recommendation was:

- To develop an outreach model that can sustain highly engaged schools in regional and remote locations: this would include authentic information and experiences for students; responsiveness to school structures and sizes; better strategic integration of programs; and assistance with pathways planning.

Additional recommendations in support of the principle recommendation included:

- Long-term funding of the model so it is commensurate with the costs of delivery in regional and remote areas.
- Cultural outreach initiatives, particularly for Indigenous students.
- Increased parental engagement which would also address financial and emotional costs associated with relocation to study.
- Universities to take advantage of ATAR transitions to tailor messages to different groups within the overall student cohort.
- Developing tailored and packaged supports for students from regional and remote low SES backgrounds to reduce the risks in moving to a city to access higher education.

- Several proposed research projects to explore the relationships between widening participation program delivery and, school engagement and university applications.

3   Building Legacy and Capacity Workshop (NCSEHE, October 2017)

The *Building Legacy and Capacity Workshop* was a NCSEHE-sponsored workshop on regional and remote education issues produced numerous insights and recommendations. The report can be found **here.** Policy recommendations included:

- Anticipate the introduction of future based performance-based funding by developing KPI's that reward positive learning outcomes for regional and remote students.

- Create a central platform for developing and sharing effective practice in teaching and learning and the student experience.

- Set up study hubs as places of connection [*Government supported and in 2019 underway*].

- Utilise institutional funding agreements between DET and institutions to negotiate additional institutional funding for regional and remote students, including sub-bachelor load commensurate with demand and an additional loading based on student demographics.

- Improve income support for regional and remote students through reforms to Centrelink payments that take into account the cumulative effect of multiple disadvantage.

- Targeted scholarships [*Government supported and in 2019 underway*] and bursaries to support students and prioritising students in most need.

- Create seamless financial support/ loan schemes for easy transitions between VET and HE systems.

- Encourage cross-sector collaboration (secondary, VET and HE) to meet educational needs in regional areas.

- Re-invest the Educational Investment Fund (EIF) as a national investment into the regions to address structural challenges associated with regional/ remote infrastructure, especially connectivity and public transport and to build capacity in regional/ remote communities.

4   Remote Student University Success (NCSEHE July 2018)

The fourth report, *Remote Student University Access* is a research report produced by NCSEHE Equity Fellow Louise Pollard. It investigated support for and the experience of remote students, taking a closer investigative analysis of the characteristics of the remote cohort in order to develop more effective recommendations for research, policy and practice.

Findings, principles and recommendations in the report are relevant to the National RRR Education Strategy and may be adapted or applied in ways that reflect the goals of the National Strategy.

Two key findings underpin the research:

- Identifying the unique characteristics of the remote student cohort

  o This was seen critical to understand the cohort, which strongly featured two sub-groups: students who re-locate; and students who study on-line. The online cohort is

growing and needs appropriate support. There is a scope for universities to adapt their support programs and teaching practices to enhance the university experiences of both groups of remote students.

- Enhancing remote students university success

    o Support for remote students needs to be whole-of-institution rather than ad hoc. Universal internet connectivity is important. Enhancing students' sense of belonging by strengthening their relationships with remote Australian communities and organizations. Actively promoting students from urban campuses to experience engagement in remote Australia would provide them with a rich learning experience, especially if remote students took a lead in mentoring their urban peers.

The report established six principles to effectively support remote student success. These principles, intended to guide universities and government, can be applied to the development and clarity of the National RRR Education Strategy. The principles are:

- Know your students: recognize diversity across the student cohort.

- Support for students across the student life cycle.

- Collaborate: in the classroom, across institutions, and in the community.

- Celebrate and value remote Australia: in the classroom, through co-curricular activities and across institutions.

- Recognise the challenges associated with geographical isolation through university and government policy.

- Provide financial support to those who need it, when they need it.

The report produced numerous recommendations or areas of focus in three domains: practice, policy and research. A full list of the recommendations can be found in the **report.**

A summarized precis of recommendations included:

- developing a better understanding of diversity within the student cohort;

- being responsive in the design of learning and teaching strategies and student experience programs;

- enhancing the presence of Indigenous knowledges and cultures across the student experience;

- implementing strategies to maintain engagement with remote students who defer an offer or take a break from study;

- enhancing the links between academic and co-curricular programs;

- cultivating partnerships with organizations to create valuable learning and enrichment opportunities; and

- working across institutions to create student learning activities that showcase the value of working and living in remote Australia.

From a National RRR Education Strategy perspective which probably needs to be concise, it may be more productive to assess which recommendations in this report lend themselves towards a coalescing or aggregating into process-driven areas of concern to the National Strategy.

Two proposals that are supported in the recommendations that would assist all RRR students across Australia are:

- A universal student indicator be developed and implemented enabling longitudinal analysis of remote [and all RRR students] experiences across all levels of education.

- Longitudinal and cohort studies specifically designed to track the success of remote [and all RRR] students over extended periods are undertaken.

5   Successful Outcomes for Regional and Remote Students in Australian Higher Education

The fifth report is a NCSEHE *Focus* report, a summary and synthesis of recent research reports sponsored by NCSEHE into regional and remote access, participation and success. It expanded on findings with other observations acquired from NCSHE participation in conferences, forums and seminars. The report can be found **here**.

The structure of the report featured three components: the construction of narratives; motivators and barriers; and pathways and priorities to widening participation. While the three segments are consecutive in the report, they should be seen as concurrent from a policy and strategy construction perspective.

The pathways and priorities section comprises two sections that the Strategy may wish to consider: synchronising local needs with appropriate supports and leveraging equity through networks. It proposes that seeing parts of the problem and advocating partial solutions will never fully address the problem as a whole which can only be fully understood and remedied within a broad framework that takes a comprehensive and coordinated approach to tackling challenges. The essential challenge is to get the big picture architecture right by assessing the relative magnitudes of the drivers and shapers of regional and remote student participation, and then clarify the specific issues and develop targeted responses to them.

Some of the directions proposed for widening participation in regional Australia include:

- Re-imagining educational success by supporting a greater alignment, less division and more integration between higher education and the VET sector. Developing new metrics to measure success, which flow into creating aspirations and community perceptions.

- Better performance measuring of inputs (funding and resources invested in regional and remote tertiary education), outputs (measuring access, retention and completions) and outcomes (the impacts on families, communities and Australia). The evidence-based approach, demonstrating that regional and remote education is an investment with long-term benefits, not a cost, makes it a saleable idea, one that can then become a valid part of a national narrative on education. New metrics on inputs, outputs and outcomes would support the development of a national narrative.

- Targeted outreach in broader segmented networks may lead to more effective outcomes in widening participation. Six areas were highlighted, some or all of which could be developed into specific recommendations in a National Strategy.

  o Building aspirations through coordinated targeting specific disadvantaged groups.

- o Working with communities, particularly with those people who offer the greatest potential to transcend negative with positive narratives about tertiary education.

- o Working with schools – two-way connectivity with school students familiarizing themselves with higher educational institutions, while the educational institutions also go into schools to de-mystify those institutions.

- o Programs that focus on equity groups, including regional and remote students, are still valid and there are specific targets for support of regional and remote students.

- o Programs that focus on areas of study – and in the case of regional and remote students, subject areas that may be of particular interest to regional and remote students and also likely to lead to local economic benefits.

- o Innovation in program delivery is an area of consideration for effective delivery of both education services and support services.

There is a systemic case for developing wider networks to link other stakeholder groups with an interest in broader community and regional economic development.

- Maximising the network effects of information sharing. The effective communication of information and research and the independent evaluations of programs may prove cost effective in widening RRR participation. The development of a national initiative in this area may assist the development of best practice among all stakeholders.

- Cooperation in the delivery of access and participation programs. The *Widening Regional and Remote Participation* report (the 'Queensland Report') supports a coordinated approach among schools and universities in a defined area. A national template model may better support RRR students.

- Community development through networked regional economies, with RRR education playing a more prominent role, could produce better outcomes in widening participation with all stakeholders benefitting. Specific examples of a regional template could include:

  - o A local economic development strategy (incorporating local and regional governments, business and industry, community groups and all levels of education) which incorporates the education sector and a commitment community-wide to widening participation.

  - o A template for local education-business alliances which features a joint approach to skills development and capacity building, and entrepreneurial skills development in both education and industry.

- To highlight issues and progress, an annual national **State of RRR Education** report could be produced.

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.

RRR students face compounding disadvantages: multiple challenges; multiple stakeholders; different government jurisdictions; ad hoc policies; discord between public and private interest; and rapid changes in jobs, skills and employment.

The way forward is to acknowledge that ad hoc approaches will never fully address a complex and dynamic web of issues – a systemic and holistic approach needs to be taken to resolve RRR education issues, which themselves are part of a larger RRR public policy landscape.

Consequently, a National RRR Education Strategy needs to develop the big picture architecture first – getting the right processes in place that are capable of driving change and producing outcomes.

- This includes an ongoing National RRR Education Strategy with the authority (respected RRR Commissioner) and leadership to produce insights and recommendations that addresses multiple issues, implements a holist long-term response that engages stakeholders and monitors success.

- A process-driven approach comprises two-way information and input – top-down (national policy, financial support) and bottom-up (local input to address specific issues). Targeted financial and other resources needed for sustained success.

- Policies and programs need to be evidence-based – to demonstrate that RRR education is a good investment with positive net returns for Australia – which then justifies and enables the development of a national education narrative – from kindy to uni - that incorporates RRR issues.

- Communications (to ensure that best practice, policy and research outcomes are adopted); and community organizations (to provide relevant local-specific solutions). Research issues can be fed into the NPP research prioritization process.

- Specific initiatives cited in submission include solution based initiatives focusing on: workforce capacity; curriculum; building aspirations; an outreach model linking multiple schools and tertiary institutions and recognising the high cost of delivery in remote Australia; financial support mechanism and processes; technological capacity; universal student identifier; family and community support; and linked community economic and social development.

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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.

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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.

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