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

Privacy agreement

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

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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

| |

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.

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.

This submission is necessarily brief. It does however draw upon my research and the work of the Rural Education and Communities research group at the University of Canberra.

One overarching observation is that there is a need to empower teachers to better engage with their local context in curriculum, and reduce the centralisation and standardisation in education. This sees teachers valuing a form of knowledge in their teaching that marginalises the knowledge rural, regional and remote students often come to school with. As these teachers are themselves not from rural, regional and remote areas they often struggle to make these links. Part of this may also reinforce the need to attract teachers from rural, regional and remote areas or increase the professional preparation placements teachers have in these contexts.

Challenge A:

There is a need to deal with the metro-normative framing of education and achievement, even as evidenced by the terms of reference of this initiative and questions proposed here. This process seems only focussed on post-school issues.

Our research, and time working with rural, regional and remote communities, has suggested that not everyone wants to undertake tertiary study in its present form. That is, tertiary education can be equated with the need to leave – physically and mentally, as it is often seen to not reflect the world and possible work many have in mind – see response to Challenge C. Effort needs to be made to make tertiary study more meaningful to rural, regional and remote communities. This is of course not to position tertiary study as more valuable than vocational training – indeed effort to value both as equally valuable pathways for rural, regional and remote needs to be made.

Here, the framing of equity needs to be considered. Equity is, at the moment, primarily measured by access and achievement, while the nature of what is being accessed and achieved in is not examined. The processes of education need to be considered from a rural standpoint – valuing rural, regional and remote communities in this process is more important than how many succeed by leaving the community.

Challenge B:

Last year we conducted pilot focus groups in preparation for a further study this year. The focus of these focus groups was rural students experiences of 'fitting in' at university. The focus was cultural experience, and not university classes and social life per se. In these pilots we found that students overwhelmingly spoke about a sense of 'difference' to their urban raised peers. They spoke about seeking out similar peers from non-metropolitan backgrounds and often finding it easier to mix with international students. This was striking, for while students may seem similar there was a distinct theme of cultural difference and not fitting in 'main stream' society. Worryingly they also spoke about also not fitting in when they returned home, now being the 'smart' one or the one who left. Here students also spoke about navigating family and community values that were different from the accepted values in their urban university town. This, for us, reinforces the idea of a distinct rural

difference that needs to be engaged with, rather than ignored. Students therefore spoke of a double marginalisation leading to a form of social isolation and the need to develop resilience and new identities for themselves.

Challenge C:

Our ongoing project 'Access, achievement and the spatial distribution of curriculum in NSW Senior Secondary Schooling' is examining inequalities in access to the NSW Higher School Certificate (HSC) Curriculum and HSC achievement. This builds upon my 2016 (Chapter 7 in particular) study that showed rural schools do not provide equal access to subjects that are powerful for future study (i.e. contribute to ATAR). Preliminary results are reinforcing this pattern, and are showing distinct locational and gender patterns in access to the senior secondary curriculum – the basis of university admission.

This current research also builds upon the project 'Enhancing aspirations for STEM careers in rural, regional and remote communities' funded as part of the HEPPP scheme 2016-2018.This project explored the relationship between rural students' knowledge of STEM in rural careers, their aspirations towards STEM careers, subject choices and university admission. Rural students often have less access to STEM subjects in senior secondary high school, a situation that in turn limits their ability to gain entry to university study. The project had a particular focus on how the nexus between aspirations and understanding of rural STEM careers influences senior school subject selection, which in turn impacts upon subsequent university study. Through understanding the needs of the rural sector related to STEM & innovation, and students' perceptions of rural industry, we are able to sketch the beginning of a strategy for highlighting the relevance of STEM to rural careers and innovation that can be used to encourage students to take relevant STEM subjects in their senior studies and subsequently university.

The project identified a lack of understanding of the nature of modern rural industries by many students and teachers in rural schools. Consequently many students, and teachers, did not understand the relationship between school subjects and careers in modern rural industries. Instead teachers, and university aspirant students, used the language of academic disciplines. Similarly rural industry leaders did not understand the language of school subjects, and consequently were not able to link their industry needs and the subjects students study at school. Bringing this together the projected illustrated a significant language gap between students wanting to pursue rural careers, teachers and rural industries.

On a similar theme, the 'Towards Place-Based Education in the Murray Darling Basin' project showed how key ideas in the curriculum were understood differently by rural communities than by teachers –putting them in potential conflict. . That project explored the ways in which sustainability is understood in Murray-Darling Basin (MDB) communities (including Indigenous, rural, small towns and regional centres). The project then examined how local understandings are, and can be, engaged within education to achieve more collaborative outcomes. To achieve these collaborative understandings the project explored approaches to place-conscious education as a vehicle for social inclusion and community representation. By surfacing various understandings of sustainability, the project aimed to help educators, in both the school and community sector, engage more effectively with ideas around sustainability in their work.

The project identified that sustainability is a complex and much contested concept, with the term having different meanings to different people, different cultures and different disciplines. While curriculum and policy documents reference what is referred to as a 'triple bottom line' definition of sustainability (A definition that balances economic, community and environmental outcomes), in

practice they privilege 'environmental' meanings and actions. In relation to understandings of sustainability a non-alignment between communities' understandings and those of teachers/education policy was identified. Communities were largely using expansive meanings of sustainability that encompassed the maintenance of the community, the rural sector, and the environment upon which they depend. Teachers however tended towards meanings that related to environmental meanings only, and as such were at odds with the understandings of the communities they work in. This should be seen as a function of education policy and the curriculum, as these direct teachers actions, and as such it is these that need to be amended. The project found that when we facilitated discussions between teachers and community members common ground for productive action could be identified. However, without this the knowledge valued by teachers (as they interpreted the curriculum) often clashed with that of their communities.

Challenge D

See response to challenge B. Our research suggests that support needs to be built upon the experiences of rural, regional and remote communities and not determined by traditional distributive approaches. Such support will include issues of cultural and knowledge inclusion, recognition of difference, and be flexible to respond to individual needs. It is time to get beyond the one size fits all approach.

Challenge E

This challenge seems to assume that tertiary participation is the only viable pathway for rural, regional and remote communities. This assumption needs to be reconsidered.

The development of sustainable futures for rural, regional and remote communities involves working with these communities to understand each communities' unique needs and challenges. Working to help students understand the value of tertiary education, and the utility of school subjects to their future careers in communities, is important. There is a need for a new model of course organisation, funding and research. At present the funding structures of universities encourages narrow single profession degrees and research (also encouraged by ERA ranking approaches). Needed here instead are multidisciplinary courses in community sustainability/development and/or opening up room in courses for deeper understanding of rural communities. However with many professional bodies having registration requirements linked to university degree content, and these bodies dominated by metropolitan members, these aspects are often marginalised.

Following the rural medical school option, rural, regional and remote communities as training centres for other professions such as teachers may be a useful consideration.

The American model of rurally based universities is a positive aspiration – however until these communities are genuinely valued in national culture they will remain unattractive for students. The rural as fearful trope doesn't help here.

Challenge F

Yes, there is considerable value in a National Regional Education Commissioner. This role would liaise strongly with communities, professions and institutions to set firm benchmarks. They would be an advocate for rural, regional and remote communities. Success should include potential new measures and be broader than improving access and achievement rates compared to metropolitan communities. Instead it could include quality of life, civic participation, mental health and so forth.

The role should also include research priorities and pushing for increased funding for research. There is considerable funding put into university aspirations, especially through the HEPPP scheme and the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. However from 2017 the HEPPP research strand was stopped. An analyses of the ARC grants awarded shows merely a handful of rural (social, education and community) related projects funded in the last few years – perhaps influenced by the cultural norm of those making such decisions. The main philanthropic organisations are all delimited

by their charters and fund community development related projects with defined community partners and geared towards local solutions. Consequently, there is very little genuine research in this space. Finally, it needs to be factored in that research in these contexts costs more and as such they are often at a disadvantage in the 'value for money' test as one needs to travel often for days, take more expensive flights and/or hire cars, accommodation and (often) food. Personally I often sleep in a swag by my own vehicle, travelling on weekends to save time, to make the limited funds stretch.

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.

The metro-normative framing of education and achievement, and equity, needs to be challenged. Instead we need to understand the rural as different, and not loose this in the search for a form of equalisation between city and rural, regional and remote communities.

One overarching observation is that there is a need to empower teachers to better engage with their local context in curriculum, and reduce the centralisation and standardisation in education. This sees teachers valuing a form of knowledge in their teaching that marginalises the knowledge rural, regional and remote students often come to school with. For instance, in one of our projects we identified a lack of understanding of the nature of modern rural industries by many students and teachers in rural schools. Consequently many students, and teachers, did not understand the relationship between school subjects and careers in modern rural industries. Instead teachers, and university aspirant students, used the language of academic disciplines. Similarly rural industry leaders did not understand the language of school subjects, and consequently were not able to link their industry needs and the subjects students study at school. Bringing this together the projected illustrated a significant language gap between students wanting to pursue rural careers, teachers and rural industries. Similarly in another project we identified that what teachers understood the curriculum needing and valuing was very different to the values and understandings of the local communities, thus creating conflict.

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.

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You may elect **not** to have your submission published. If you do not want to have your submission published, **do not check** the relevant box on this document.

Before publication, your email address, if provided with your submission, will be removed. **However, your name will be published with your submission.**

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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.

For any queries relating to this Privacy Notice and Terms and Conditions for Submissions, the Strategy or your submission please contact the Regional Education Strategy Taskforce via email on: RegionalStrategy@education.gov.au