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

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.

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Yes ☒

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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? *

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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

Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia

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.

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?**

For students to access further study there needs to be improvements in access to better schooling opportunities to set students up for success. Improvements include:

- better access to quality early childhood/primary education/high school education in RRR locations
- access to appropriate physical resources e.g. accessible classrooms, better transport, quality teaching/ learning activities e.g. reasonable subject choice, career development, Professional Development (PD) for teachers, teacher aides etc
- access to technology (e.g. broadband, computers, assistive technology)
- appropriate financial support to address the link between poverty and achievement
- activities that build aspiration for post-school study, lift achievement and aid retention. This requires quality career education at all ages
- specific strategies to support students in remote Indigenous communities.

It's important to interrogate the existing research and practice that illustrates not only the challenges and barriers but provides strategies and programs to support these goals. EPHEA has a network of practitioners across Australia who can assist and the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) is an excellent resource to support appropriate strategies.

It's also important to consider how to attract those with interrupted schooling i.e. mature-age students to be better supported to return to study and develop formal vocation education and training (VET) or Higher Education (HE) qualifications. Enabling programs are a key area where students can develop key preparatory skills to set them up for tertiary study. Recognition of prior learning, micro-credentialing and other systems which recognise vocational experience are also important. An understand of, and connection with, industries and employment opportunities in the region are vital. Students still need access to both VET and HE opportunities which again provide freedom of choice and movement. Access to both online and face-to-face or mixed mode options would support different learners appropriately.

EPHEA is supportive of campus expansion and funding for regional hubs. However, more needs to be done to support RRR students to re-engage with education. Most universities employ strategies to support students in RRR locations e.g. career information, pathways, graduate employment outcomes. Consideration needs to be given to how monies announced for these campus expansions and regional hubs will be deployed and how will these programs show evidence of efficacy.

Better funding through HEPPP has and can continue to deliver positive outcomes which enhance understanding of tertiary options and graduate outcomes in RRR communities. The fundamental guidelines under which HEPPP operates works in that it:

- utilises best practice and research gained from outreach and retention work over many decades
- works to support sustained, place-based, cohort-specific, whole-of-community approaches which address a range of complex factors
- seeks to innovate and adapt to change (e.g. policy, cohort needs, new approaches)

While EPHEA understands that the VET sector is a state-based funded activity the effective intersection of schooling, VET and HE is vital to RRR students to being able to seamlessly move between these sectors. The Government appears silent on this issue leaving a vital sector to States with limited collaboration.

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?**

RRR students may not have a choice but to relocate and the current range of Commonwealth income supports do not meet the needs of all students. While we applaud the intent of the Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships Program (RRESP), which provides for students at all levels of education, there are some fundamental flaws in this program including:

- No access for students not engaging in STEM-related programs e.g. business, law, human services
- No flexibility for students who can only engage in part-time study (due to disability, family or other commitments) and scholarships are taxed if part-time
- No clarity about whether students can apply at multiple levels of education i.e. undertaking pathways through enabling or VET qualifications before HE.
- The application has subjective elements like 'capability' which can limit students whose first language is not English (including Indigenous students).

It runs parallel to the existing Commonwealth Scholarships program and Centrelink income support which is already needs-based and could be enhanced to support RRR students. For example, Relocation Scholarships support the additional costs of relocating to study but students also need support for additional costs of living in remote locations and to support learning activities such as practicums or internships, online students studying off campus, and unforeseen circumstances.

Currently the Relocations Scholarships can limit the choices for students in RRR locations who may be relocating within an inner regional area to a major city but are deemed ineligible because of the categorisation under Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC).

Due to lack of infrastructure such as reliable and cost-effective transport, suitable accommodation, access to part-time work etc students who want to move within or between an outer regional or inner regional area to a major city are limited to some scholarships and income support options. This leads students to compromise their study choices and outcomes. For those with existing commitments or challenges (e.g. disability, family commitments, part-time work etc) it makes access

to university or VET limited. This means that students would only have access to the Commonwealth Start-Up Loan. On top of HECS-HELP this is a significant burden for LSES RRR students.

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

EPHEA believes that the work of equity practitioners in their respective institutions is very supportive of RRR students. Much of this work is supported by HEPPP-funded strategies and is reported on annually. This includes outreach (aspiration-building) activities to attract students to HE; transition-in and orientation activities that specifically support students who are RRR – especially Indigenous students, LSES and first-in-family (FiF)students; retention and support activities to promote a sense of belonging; on-campus accommodation with residential support strategies; welfare and scholarship support to address financial issues; peer mentoring etc.

However, the Government could be doing more to ensure HEPPP-funding is more flexible. EPHEA has previously advocated more stable funding e.g. three-year funding for more sustained and stable programming and resourcing; better accountability; and consideration for the additional costs associated with undertaking outreach activities in RRR areas. The tyranny of distance faced by equity practitioners to work in RRR areas adds significant costs to provision of outreach and retention activities. In addition, the ability of prospective students, families and communities to engage with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) needs to be factored in. Attracting talented academic staff and practitioners, provision of transport and technology infrastructure are also key issues that need to be addressed in RRR locations serviced by study hubs.

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?**

The NCSEHE has several reports which identify the key issues and challenges as well as provide recommendations on improving access for RRR students to HE. These reports include the NCSEHE Focus piece *"Successful outcomes for regional and remote students in Australian higher education Issues, challenges, opportunities and recommendations"*[1] summarising recent research funded by the NCSEHE; Louise Pollard's (EPHEA Executive member and NCSEHE Equity Fellow) report *"Remote student university success: an analysis of policy and practice"*[2] and the publication resulting from the Building Legacy and Capacity Workshop on higher education participation and completion of regional and remote students. These research and policy papers from the NCSEHE show there are general issues that apply across the whole of regional Australia and affect all RRR students with specific reference to unique issues on some areas.

Each region is subject to different levers and challenges influence by education systems, location, employment and industry opportunities, cultural differences, climate change etc. For example, the Queensland Widening Tertiary Participation Consortium recently completed a study of the key factors for supporting effective WP activities between urban and regional schools. It includes key recommendations to support better funding for WP in RRR locations.
https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/widening-regional-and-remote-participation-interrogating-the-impact-of-outreach-programs-across-queensland/

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[1] NCSEHE (2018). Successful outcomes for regional and remote students in Australian higher education Issues, challenges, opportunities and recommendations from research funded by the NCSEHE
[2] Pollard, L. (2018). Remote Student University Success: An Analysis of Policy and Practice. NCSEHE.

In terms of HEPPP/NPP funding, the best way to support LSES RRR schools and communities would be to:

- Reinforce that all universities must spend a minimum amount of their base grant on outreach
- Use the discretionary funding (NPP) to incentivise collaboration amongst providers in geographical regions
- Where such collaborative arrangements identify which universities have high-cost outreach areas to service, allow NPP grants to account for the elevated costs of provision.
- Ensure accountability of HEPPP-funding when reporting to the Department annually.

This aligns with Recommendation 3 of the ACIL-Allen Consulting HEPPP evaluation – that universities be required to collaborate within defined geographical regions to ensure coverage of relevant schools[3].

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?**

Multiple or cumulative disadvantage is a strong focus for equity practitioners and requires additional work. However, there is a body of research that already addresses some of the issues e.g. Professor Tony Vinson's seminal work on multiple factors of disadvantage. Poverty, racism and location are key factors and equity practitioners address these activities through 'place-based' and 'cohort-specific' HEPPP funded activities, and scholarships /welfare support. However, more needs to be done including:

- Ensuring HEPPP-funding can address the complex interplay of factors that impact access and participation in HE. Currently HEPPP-funding is focussed on LSES and doesn't explicitly address other equity groups. While practitioners take a broader view of this the *Other Grants and Guidelines* which covers HEPPP funding remains too narrow and is out of date. Annual HEPPP funding is incongruent with the longevity and stability needed to implement programs which will have a sustained impact on aspiration, decision-making and achievement in communities experiencing economic and social disadvantage.
- More support to fund school and VET sectors in the same way HEPPP-funding supports HEIs to encourage stronger inter-sectoral partnerships, enhance resourcing and provide more seamless transition between sectors.
- Additional funding when working with RRR students which recognises the additional cost of provision of services in RRR locations.
- Specific consideration of the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their needs requires close consultation with relevant Indigenous stakeholders.
- Consideration of scholarship and income support processes that consider multiple disadvantage.
- Ensure accurate data analysis of students from RRR backgrounds. The 'first address' indicator is the more accurate for the purposes of identifying RRR students, as many students update their address in the student system after arrival, giving a misleading impression when reported to the Commonwealth that they are urban students.

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

The Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) is not adequately supporting all the needs of Indigenous student support units or the students themselves. We strongly suggest that the 2018

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[3] ACIL-Allen Consulting (2017). *Evaluation of the HEPPP Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program*. Report to the Department of Education and Training.

review the Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) may address some of these issues and provide options to improve the current structure. This includes:

Failure of scholarships to meet the needs of students. Issues include: limitations on dual holdings which is confusing for students and results in students turning down scholarships or risking overpayment; implications for students who are part-time, have carer responsibilities, or cultural needs. Remote students are not adequately compensated for expensive travel and relocation costs.

The need for more tutorial assistance. The ISSP requires providers to 'prioritise towards activities that maximise outcomes for the majority of eligible students, rather than to concentrate high levels of support to a few specific individuals'. Students need a combination of both. There are not enough tutors or not suitable trained to operate in a culturally safe way. Indigenous students with disabilities are provided with additional tutoring but are less likely to disclose disability and are missing out on vital support.

More funding to support learning and support activities. Consideration needs to be given to culturally appropriate teaching and learning activities which complement tutoring and at present this is not eligible under ISSP. In addition, many Indigenous students may need enabling programs and the current system limits the number of enabling places available. Many of these issues were flagged by the Intensive Research Universities (IRU)[4] and Universities Australia[5] prior to the changes.

Most important is the need to collaborate with those at the frontline – staff situated in Indigenous Education Units who understand the specific needs of their communities is essential. There is significant research going on in this space including Frawley et al (2017). *Indigenous Pathways, Transitions and Participation in Higher Education: From Policy to Practice*; Wallace, Ruth (Ed). Learning Communities: International journal of learning in social contexts special issue. *Indigenous pathways and transitions into higher education*. October 2015, Vol. 17; Pollard, L. (2017). *Remote Student University Success: An Analysis of Policy and Practice.* NCSEHE.

Challenge E: Attracting people and jobs to RRR areas

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

School leaders may also be able to leverage a university partnership to engage with industry in the region. Equity practitioners have worked closely with their Alumni Offices to identify partnership opportunities. Examples include a mining company annually sponsoring an academic and several students (including Indigenous students) from the Business School to visit schools in the remote region where industry is based to share experiences and lead activities; industry partners offering site visits when RRR students visit campus; industry partners working with students on projects or offering work experience.

Equity practitioners acknowledge that parents and communities are important influencers in decision-making about future employment and study choices. In communities with generational disadvantage and high unemployment, equity practitioners work with schools to engage with the community and parents. Outreach programs have engaged with community members through initiatives such as:

- Attending agricultural, sporting and community events which embed career and study pathways from an equity perspective, rather than recruitment
- Timing school visits to coincide with parent/teacher evenings

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[4] IRU Indigenous Student Success Program: designing to improve outcomes. December 2016

[5] Universities Australia. (2018). Submission to the post-implementation review of the ISSP. Canberra.

- HEIs having a visible presence when visiting schools, so that parents recognise that university staff are in town and encourage interaction or equity staff embedded in RRR schools (e.g. two UNSW staff in Gilgandra High School work with partner schools in region)
- Having permanent presence in regional hub e.g. using existing premises such as local library, council, or business which creates additional partnership opportunities
- Delivering short courses like Information and Communication Technology (ICT) basics for adults, to make connections with parents and community
- Inviting parents and the community to Open Days, especially regional university campuses, or other events on campus and graduation ceremonies
- Providing on-campus experiences where all costs are covered for RRR students, including flights, accommodation, food.

Quality ICT education expands opportunities for RRR students to explore beyond their community. Equity practitioners have adopted ICT to create resources that can be easily accessed and shared. Most universities have extensive on-line resources that aim to provide information about HE pathways and career choices that are open to everyone. Uses of ICT to widen participation include:

- Online mentoring programs via Skype or similar
- Online Games that help students learn about university (Curtin) other examples include what's uni like www.whats-uni-like.edu.au
- Scholarships/income info e.g. The Aspiration Initiative, Pinnacle Scholarships, Country Education Foundation, Smith Family, Study Assist, Good Universities Guide
- Career Development modules e.g. My Future
- You to Uni www.youtouni.com.au
- Information videos of aspects of university life, made with needs of RRR students in mind –e.g. Make your Mark www.makeyourmark.edu.au; Think Your Way www.thinkyourway.edu.au
- Academic skills resources in online modules designed for equity students
- Use of social media tools/technologies to connect students from RRR schools who have met while attending residential camps
- Utilisation of Virtual Reality e.g. https://www.newcastle.edu.au/profile/erica-southgate?mobile=true to allow students to investigate career options and disciplines.

Universities encourage entrepreneurism, particularly amongst students, and can offer models that support this activity. Entrepreneurs can support these activities through philanthropy. Students have established 'incubator labs' on campus to encourage 'start-ups' and could share experiences with RRR communities. Hackathons are intensive activities to generate resources, usually apps. These kinds of events could be sponsored in RRR centres or teams sponsored to attend competitions. This creates opportunities for students to create their own opportunities and partner with local business/ industry. Regional development grants to support start-ups would also assist.

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

Students must be able to have choice – there are many reasons why students choose to stay in their local area, but students also need to have the opportunity to explore further afield if that's their desire. Access to quality career information is essential. In many schools Career Development is not a compulsory curriculum element and Guidance Officers have competing demands e.g. delivering career activities and managing the complex needs of students such as behaviour management and personal support. More funding to support career development is required.

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

Provided there is suitable income and scholarships support additional incentives may include:

- Additional subsidies for transportation to and within RRR locations
- Access to suitable accommodation including accessibility considerations for people with disabilities
- Scholarships and income support which allows for additional costs of living and transport in RRR areas
- Additional income support for people with disabilities or carer responsibilities
- Discounts for HECS-HELP to undertake study in RRR locations in priority employment areas in that region e.g. STEM, Human Services and Health, Agribusiness and vocational roles such in areas such as Agriculture, Engineering etc
- Subsidies to take on internships or work placements outside of the region
- Collaborations with local industry to support part-time employment while studying or graduate employment to retain quality graduates in RRR locations
- Visa incentives for international students to choose RRR locations
- Regional development grants to attract employment through graduate employment programs

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?**

Consult stakeholders, including students, in design of national RRR strategy. A Commissioner/Board role should not duplicate or impede existing practices, but oversight could manage intersection between stakeholders, funding structures and agencies to improve outcomes where progress is slow.

Equity Practitioners with expertise in the RRR space, Indigenous educators and practitioners, and researchers involved in relevant activity should be included. Student and community voices are essential in consultations and should be included consistently.

There are existing arrangements in place to monitor outcomes from HEPPP-funded activities by the Department of Education which could be further strengthened in terms of accountability and in sharing good practice with the sector. Further Investment in monitoring and evaluation of all programs should be ongoing. We are aware that the Department has projects around evaluation in progress.

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.

1. Fund quality early childhood and primary/secondary school sectors to ensure RRR students have post-secondary options on par with metropolitan peers

2. Embed career development (CD) in RRR secondary schools; offer teacher PD; utilise equity practitioner expertise; make CD relevant to region through links to local industries/employment options/alumni and recognize the HEPPP-based interventions currently in place.

3. Income support and scholarships need to be more flexible, especially for part-time and online students. Improvements to Commonwealth income support as well as university-administered grants are essential to supporting the costs of RRR students.

4. Regional infrastructure, especially internet and transport, needs attention.

5. Utilise the expertise of equity practitioners and educators in HE and VET sectors. Much experience and research exists that can contribute to a RRR strategy and its delivery.

6. Consult Indigenous educators in design/delivery of strategies in culturally appropriate ways for Indigenous students.

7. Recognise context is important: study hubs and regional universities only work for some contexts, solutions need to be flexible. Online study is growth area and the importance of provide suitable preparatory studies can't be overlooked. Enabling programs need to be included with other strategies for increasing the participation and success of RRR students.

8. Recognise impact of multiple equity group membership during schooling and fund resources/support needs appropriately

9. Improve support through HEPPP, ISSP, DSP funding in three-year budgets for stability; consider the whole-of-student journey and fund appropriately to respond to multiple factors of disadvantage. Support HEPPP to fund real costs of outreach in remote regions; include RRR for NPP funds to drive innovation.

10. Consult stakeholders, including students, in design of national RRR strategy. A Commissioner/Advisory Board's role should not duplicate or impede existing practice but oversight could manage intersection between stakeholders, funding structures and agencies to improve monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.

Attachment A

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

The department reserves the right to publish any submissions, including only a sample of submissions, made in relation to the Strategy. This includes by making those submissions publicly available on the department's website, or through any report/s arising from the Strategy.

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.**

Note, any information about individuals contained in your submission will be published. Note also that the name and address of any organisation you represent, if included in your submission, will also be published.

The department reserves the right to amend or redact prior to publication, or to not publish, any submission if it considers the submission to be defamatory or derogatory in any way, or if it includes information relating to individuals.

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Third party information, including of individuals, in submissions

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

The attached table (Attachment 1) shows the enrolment of RRR students at QUT. The 'first address' indicator is the more accurate for the purposes of identifying RRR students, as many students update their address in the student system after arrival, giving a misleading impression when reported to the Commonwealth that they are urban students.