

Recipient Details

Name of organisation or individual: [O] Edith Cowan University

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Responses

Curriculum and assessment

The concept of 'learning for leaving' embedded in the Australian curriculum is a critical point raised by the discussion paper. As a multicultural country with a population living in diverse and varied geographical settings, there is a real challenge in terms of the role of education in building capacity in, and the sustainability of, regional, rural and remote areas.

The Australian curriculum must to be utilised in flexible ways, connected where possible with the communities within which schools are located. A focus on skills development rather than content would better meet community engagement and entrepreneurship development needs and would actively demonstrate what it means to live, learn and work in the local community.

A highly successful example is Pemberton District High School in Western Australia. It has attracted State-wide recognition for a number of its innovative approaches to teaching and learning. The school has received awards for Outstanding Learning Environments, Partnerships with the Community, Aboriginal Education and Science Teaching and Learning. As a Kindergarten to Year 10 school, Pemberton District High School participates in the primary school-focused Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation Program. This program incorporates sustainable agricultural practices and is complemented by the secondary school level Sustainable Agriculture Program and the Specialist Foods Program. These programs provide rich and valuable learning experiences that are respected in the region for the practical skills that they develop in many aspects of agriculture, including: growing quality produce; fencing; animal husbandry; agricultural skills; marketing; and commercial use of foods. The resulting produce is utilised and appreciated by local retailers and restaurateurs.

Rating: 5

Teachers and teaching

Teaching in regional, remote and rural environments should be included as a specific mandated element, and be embedded throughout the content of initial teacher education curricula.

Edith Cowan University (ECU) supports the view expressed in the discussion paper that 'A very effective way for pre-service teachers to gain in-depth experience of what it would be like to be a teacher in a regional, rural or remote school is through a teaching practice placement, and preferably one that runs for an extended period, say a full term'.

Further support for pre-service teachers to undertake regional, rural and remote school placements would be an effective way to prepare teachers to work in schools in these areas and improve teacher attraction and retention rates.

ECU's teacher education courses include an extended practicum internship in the fourth year, supported by the South West Campus in Bunbury. The Rural Clinical School of Western Australia, which accommodates medical student placements in rural, regional and remote areas, also provides a good model for how education students might be supported.

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

Edith Cowan University would be interested to work with the State Department of Education and Training and the Australian Government Department of Education and Training to develop appropriate, targeted postgraduate courses to meet the leadership development needs of school principals.

Rating: 5

School and Community

Rating: 3

Information and Communication Technology

Digital technology offers both opportunities and threats for the provision of regional, rural and remote education. The prevalence of on-line education increases educational choices for students at every level, but on-line education can reduce the commitment of education providers to maintain locally based infrastructure and teaching staff. Further, wholly on-line study is associated with lower levels of student satisfaction, learner engagement and retention, compared to on campus learning experiences.

The opportunities offered by on-line learning are dependent on reliable, high quality digital connectivity. Virtual learning environments and the students' experiences are dependent on the quality of bandwidth and availability of on-line teaching resources. A guaranteed level of infrastructure performance supportive of full engagement with contemporary on-line learning technology has still to be achieved in most regional, rural and remote areas.

In the delivery of teacher education, Edith Cowan University's School of Education is committed to developing the necessary skills in teachers to allow them to maximise the use of digital technology to enhance the learning experience and overcome the deficits experienced by students in regional, rural and remote communities.

Rating: 7

Entrepreneurship and schools

Rating: 1

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding

Rating for enrolments: 3

Rating for clusters: 2

Rating for distance education: 1

Rating for boarding: 1

Diversity

Rating: 3

Transitioning beyond school

Edith Cowan University (ECU) has a strong commitment to building educational attainment in regional communities. Educational attainment levels in many regional areas are lower than for metropolitan areas and regional school leavers generally achieve lower ATARs. These factors point to the importance of enabling courses as a pathway to university. There is potential for alternative pathways for regional students, with different entry points and multiple exit points. For example, providers could offer more vocational Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas, increasing opportunities to achieve qualifications that have both an employment-focus and provide credit for entry to undergraduate degrees.

The transition to further study is often disrupted by the practice of taking a 'gap year' directly after leaving school. A greater percentage of rurally-based students take a gap year than their metropolitan counterparts due, in part, to the need for students to establish their independent status to receive full support under Austudy. Addressing this anomaly would be beneficial to regional students and enable them to continue into higher education without the need for a gap year.

Affordable accommodation for regional students continues to be a factor in lower rates of participation for regional people in higher education.

ECU has a range of programs focusing on low SES and Aboriginal secondary school students in regional, rural and remote communities to raise awareness, develop aspirations and enrolments in higher education. The Uni Choice program offered from ECU's South West Campus is one such example.

ECU operates a large regional campus in Bunbury. It is regrettable that within a very thin market, local governments and regional planning authorities continue to encourage competition between providers of educational services in such markets, as this undermines the sustainability of regional campuses.

In addition to the university campus, ECU is piloting the Learning Hub model in a number of regional areas to provide on-line students with face-to-face support and opportunities for social interaction and exchange of ideas. On-line learning provides for learning anywhere, anytime, but attrition rates from on-line study are high. More blended approaches may increase attraction and retention for the on-line learning option.

Rating: 7

Additional Comments

Edith Cowan University's Old Ways New Ways program is an example of a successful initiative designed to encourage and support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander primary and high school students from WA communities to study science at upper secondary and tertiary levels.

The program addresses areas of significant disadvantage among Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities such as lower levels of scientific literacy among adolescents and under-representation in science and technology degrees and careers.

The Old Ways, New Ways program acknowledges and respects Aboriginal scientific knowledge, partnering this with Western science to create a culturally relevant, hands-on learning experience.

In 2015, this innovative community outreach project received the prestigious Tribal Award for Excellence in Community Engagement at the 2015 Australian Tertiary Education Management (ATEM)/Campus Review Best Practice Awards. The Old Ways, New Ways program was a finalist in the Western Australian Premier's Science Awards in 2017.

ECU Cultural Awareness Officer Jason Barrow said: "Providing kids with a new lens by which to view the interface between their Aboriginal cultural heritage and contemporary Western science encourages them to not only view their world differently, but to hold on to their heritage, as its worth is reinstated."

In 2014, its inaugural year, the program engaged with 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students increasing to 900 in 2016. To date in 2017, this has grown significantly to 3000 with a specific focus on regional communities in the latter part of the year.