



Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Submitter: La Trobe University
Submitting as a: Other (university)
State: Vic.

Summary

La Trobe welcomes the focus of the review on improving outcomes and educational performance for all students, including disadvantaged and vulnerable students.

To achieve this, immediate action is required to address the continuing gap between educational attainment in regional and metropolitan schools. Low school achievement continues to limit growth in regional higher education participation and attainment. Too few young people in rural, regional and remote Australia complete secondary school and even fewer achieve at high levels across a range of disciplines.

La Trobe recommends a close alignment between this Review and the ongoing 'Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education' being led by Professor Halsey.

While needs-based funding is not the panacea for lifting educational outcomes in Australia's schools, adequate resources are essential for success particularly in low SES and regional schools. The same concept should be applied to the regional delivery of higher education where currently government funding does not cover the higher cost of delivery.

La Trobe also makes a number of additional recommendations, including:

- enhancing the Australian public's knowledge of the benefits of education in order to combat the issue of low expectations;
- providing increased opportunities for academic pathways for all students;
- increasing the breadth and depth of regional school curriculum options;
- improving professional development for teachers;
- improving career advice; and
- ensuring a stronger and more systemic link between education policy reform and academic research into education such as early intervention strategies.

Main submission

INTRODUCTION

La Trobe University welcomes this Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools. Through their research and through training future and current teachers, universities have an important role to play in lifting education outcomes in earlier stages of education.

La Trobe offers Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses at all of its Victorian campuses, namely Melbourne, Bendigo, Mildura, Shepparton and Albury Wodonga, and is committed to ensuring that our graduates contribute to achieving education excellence across Australia's schools including in regional Australia.

La Trobe welcomes the focus of the review on how to improve outcomes and educational performance for all students, including disadvantaged and vulnerable students. To achieve this, immediate action is required to address the continuing gap between educational attainment in regional and metropolitan schools. Low school achievement continues to limit growth in regional higher education participation and attainment. Too few young people in rural, regional and remote Australia complete secondary school and even fewer achieve at high levels across a range of disciplines(a).

For this reason, La Trobe recommends a close alignment between this Review and the ongoing 'Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education' being led by Professor Halsey.

While needs-based funding is not the panacea for lifting educational outcomes in Australia's schools, adequate resources are essential for success particularly in low SES and regional schools. The same concept should be applied to the regional delivery of higher education where currently government funding does not cover the higher cost of delivery.

The submission is structured in sections as follows:

- A. Addressing lower educational attainment in regional Australia
- B. Response to consultation questions
- C. La Trobe initiatives for improving educational outcomes

A. BRIDGING THE GAP IN EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES BETWEEN REGIONAL AND METROPOLITAN AUSTRALIA

The latest NAPLAN results continue to show that the more remote the school, the lower the mean scale score. The logical conclusion is that some segments of the Australian population have not had to the opportunity to study in all academic areas

or to reap the benefits of an education that may lead to higher education. This needs to be urgently addressed.

In order to improve student outcomes across all cohorts of students, Federal and State Governments must pay special attention to addressing the education gap between regional and metropolitan Australia. Some of the challenges and potential solutions for improving regional education outcomes are highlighted below.

BUILDING SCHOOL, COMMUNITY AND PARENTAL ASPIRATION

La Trobe and Monash Universities research(b) highlights the extent of unfulfilled university aspiration in regional Australia and the many impediments between the aspiration and the decision to undertake university study. What emerges is that while regional communities and in particular regional students are aspirant, lower educational achievement is leading to unfulfilled or abandoned aspirations. Universities with long-standing partnerships in the communities in which they are located can play a crucial role in building both community and parental aspiration, and in developing and implementing strategies for turning those aspirations into real pathways. The viability and presence of regional campuses is critical to improving the knowledge and awareness of the benefits of investment in education, higher education and research, including further research into building better communities of practice.

Recommendations

1. Enhance the Australian public's knowledge of the benefits of education in order to combat the issue of low expectations.
2. Provide increased opportunities for academic pathways for all students.

THE CURRICULUM IS NOT BEING DELIVERED AT AN EQUIVALENT LEVEL

One of the barriers to improvements across the Australian education system is the capacity to deliver the curriculum at an equivalent level in all geographies. The current situation means that Australia has a national curriculum in metropolitan Australia but only a partial one in regional Australia. In Victoria (and presumably in other states as well), the number of Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) subjects that a school can offer is limited to its resources and to the critical mass of students. These schools tend to have a disproportionate number of teachers teaching 'out-of-field', in subjects other than those they are accredited to teach. For instance, non-metropolitan schools, without the strength of numbers, find it harder to access appropriate resources, including high quality and diverse teaching staff. Additionally, access to and quality of professional development for teachers impact on curriculum delivery. Universities with regional campuses can become hubs for teachers' professional development in regional areas.

Increasing incentives for universities to provide higher education (or Advanced Placement) subjects could potentially increase the breadth and depth of regional school curriculum options while making students more familiar with higher education. One other way of expanding the curriculum could be through programs delivered online.

Curriculum hierarchy and impact requires further consideration to avoid disadvantaging regional students. The highest status VCE subjects, which are all adjusted after study scores are reweighted and converted to ATARs, tend to be Languages Other than English (LOTEs), physics, chemistry, and the higher level mathematics. These subjects are rarely offered in regional schools. Accordingly, La Trobe recommends a review of the weighting of school subjects within the curriculum (across each state) and of 'academic' subjects provided by higher education institutions with a view to developing a more equitable process. Similarly, further research is needed on the effectiveness of different state approaches to the curriculum on regional Year 12 completion and higher education participation. There is currently limited cross-jurisdictional evidence and research available. The gaps and opportunities within an essentially federal school system are significant and are a good example of the kind of evidence-based research that is still required.

Recommendations

Increasing the breadth and depth of regional school curriculum options

3. Increase incentives for universities to provide access to higher education subjects for students in regional schools.
4. Support delivery of digital or online programs to broaden student access to subjects such as foreign languages or specialist mathematics, which tend to not be offered regionally.
5. Review the weighting of school subjects within the curriculum across each state and of academic bonus points provided by higher education institutions to make the system more equitable.
6. Conduct further research on the effectiveness of different state approaches to the curriculum on regional Year 12 completion and higher education participation.

Improving professional development for teachers

7. Increase resources for professional development for teachers in particular for those based in rural, regional and remote schools. Make better use of regional university campuses for the provision of such professional development.

THERE IS SCOPE TO IMPROVE CAREER ADVICE

La Trobe argues that one key way of addressing one of the Review's Terms of Reference to improve the 'preparedness of school leavers to succeed in employment, further training or higher education' is to improve career advice especially for disadvantaged and vulnerable students.

In March 2016, La Trobe University researchers published a study (c) about the adaptation of tertiary admission practices to growth and diversity. The outcomes suggest that most students still do not understand the tertiary admissions process, that career advisers are overworked and that there is limited knowledge of the actual professions. The situation is particularly difficult in regional and disadvantaged communities with students from low SES and regional backgrounds most likely to lack information about tertiary admissions.

In this context, the federally funded Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP), plays a crucial role in raising awareness of higher education and informing career aspiration in regional and low SES schools. As government pressure on findings savings in the higher education portfolio mounts, La Trobe strongly advocates against any cuts to the HEPPP program.

Recommendations

8. Increase resources for career advice in schools particularly in low SES, rural, regional and remote schools. Include career advice as an integral part of the curriculum.
9. Ensure that schools' career advice is constantly updated to reflect the latest information and evidence on the jobs of the future.
10. Ensure that schools' career advice includes information regarding tertiary pathways and admissions processes within mainstream curricula to inform students of their potential options.
11. Ensure that the new requirements for transparency of admissions-related information and the government's Quality Indicators in Learning and Teaching (QILT) website, aimed at enabling students to make more informed choices, take into account differential capacity to access, understand and respond to the information provided.

B. LA TROBE UNIVERSITY'S RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

What should educational success for Australian students and schools look like?

- What capabilities, skills and knowledge should students learn at school to prepare them for the future?

Schools should equip or provide students with:

- the ability to be adaptive, responsive and skilled up with technological knowledge to navigate change and critically reflect on information suitability;
- skills to develop knowledge in discipline areas such as social sciences or mathematics but also to be able to navigate the interdisciplinary dimension to better articulate knowledge and skill options;
- opportunities to be agents of change – schools should be physical and virtual spaces to navigate and optimise students’ ability to be agents of change; and
- pathways into a range of further educational options and transnational opportunities in various workforce opportunities.

Learning technologies and innovation

- Further research is required into learning technologies and their impact on addressing capacities for learners as they move into employment and further education.
- Accountability measures need to be designed in a way that incentives innovation in developing learning opportunities in diverse digital and physical spaces.

Teachers

- In order to maximize impact for learning and on learners, the following improvements are required:
 - teachers’ career pathways and their employment sustainability;
 - teachers’ professional development requirements – this is particularly important in rural, regional and remote Australia where there are limited opportunities for professional development; and
 - retention of teachers in disadvantaged or vulnerable communities where a consistent teaching staff make a demonstrable difference.
- How should school quality and educational success be measured?
 - Robust research around accountability measures that measure the success of teaching beyond NAPLAN and standardised test scores, which are known to disadvantage young people from low SES backgrounds.

- Strong benchmarking to support teachers in monitoring their students' progress and development and to provide evidence of impact for all learners.
- Literacy and numeracy competencies with clear knowledge gains in cultural, social and political knowledge subjects.
- Evidence of pathway growth and access opportunities developed for all students.

What can we do to improve and how can we support ongoing improvement over time?

- How could schools funding be used more effectively and efficiently (at the classroom, school or system level) to have a significant impact on learning outcomes for all students including disadvantaged and vulnerable students and academically advanced students?
 - What actions can be taken to improve practice and outcomes? What evidence is there to support taking these actions?
 - What works best for whom and in what circumstances?

The school funding model should be directly linked to:

- innovative models of learning and pedagogy that directly impact on student achievement and community engagement; and
 - evidence of growth and progression in line with accountability practices that equip students and parents to better understand achievement and progression points.
- What institutional or governance arrangements could be put in place to ensure ongoing identification, sharing and implementation of evidence-based good practice to grow and sustain improved student outcomes over time?

La Trobe recommends a stronger and more systemic link between education policy reform and academic research into education such as early intervention strategies.

Australia is home to some of the world's finest universities that consistently rank among the highest in the world. They are renowned for their teaching and research expertise. La Trobe University submits that this expertise could be put to better use by education policy reform being better informed by academic research.

There is a wealth of research on early intervention strategies and all stages of the education path that could be drawn upon in a more regular and systemic way. For example, universities could work closely with lower and earlier levels of education to raise students' and communities' awareness, aspiration, opportunities and achievement. Universities could also become sites of earlier learning for schools with

inadequate facilities and become the providers of lifelong professional development and mentoring for teachers.

- How can system enablers such as targets and standards, qualifications and accreditation, regulation and registration, quality assurance measures and transparency and accountability provisions be improved to help drive educational achievement and success and support effective monitoring, reporting and application of investment?

This can be achieved through:

- close alignment with Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers and career progression standards; and
 - agreement from COAG to link the CHESSN and the relevant states' student identifier numbers such as the Victorian Student Number (VSN). By enabling the tracking of students, this will make it possible to measure school effectiveness in terms of post-secondary outcomes.
- Are there any new or emerging areas for action which could lead to large gains in student improvement that need further development or testing?
-What are they and how could they be further developed?
 - Are there barriers to implementing these improvements?

As La Trobe argues in Section B, one of the main barriers to national educational achievement is the gap in regional and metropolitan educational attainment.

C. LA TROBE INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND BEYOND

La Trobe University has deployed a number of strategies to equip both secondary school students and our own students with the skills and attributes required to prepare them for further education and for work. These initiatives include:

Schools Partnerships Program (SPP)

La Trobe University's School Partnerships Program (SPP) – funded through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) – works collaboratively with identified schools to raise awareness of higher education and inform career aspiration. Created for Years 7-10, a range of activities closely linked to curriculum are designed to engage students and their school communities to inform aspirations, motivation and learning confidence. Based on our work with 32 Victorian schools (including 20 regional schools), we estimate that as a result of such interaction with a university, around 10% of students change their mind positively about the likelihood of going to university.

Aspire Generation Early Admissions Program

Our Aspire Generation Work Studies unit was developed to support students in Years 9 & 10 to foster ability through leadership, volunteering and service skills. This unit addresses the content descriptors of the Australian Curriculum: Work Studies. These activities include student engagement with real-world information and learning stimuli, group work, visible thinking routines and use of ICT for investigation and demonstration of thinking and learning. Students are encouraged to find and pursue volunteer and community service opportunities throughout the unit.

Aspire Program Early Admissions Program

Through our Aspire Program we recognise and reward future students' leadership skills and community contribution. Aspire uses a student's leadership and volunteering experience as part of the basis of admission to the University. Successful Aspire applicants are guaranteed access into La Trobe courses, subject to satisfying minimum ATAR and course prerequisites. Students who form part of this cohort are supported by an enrichment program designed to transition them to life at La Trobe and advance their leadership skills. The Aspire Program has grown significantly since its launch in 2014. Each year, we have seen growth in applications and offers. In 2017, 2200 unique applicants received an offer through the program (a 16.5 percent increase on 2016). The Aspire cohort's academic performance and retention at La Trobe is better compared to their peers.

Albury-Wodonga pilot scheme

At the suggestion of principals, La Trobe is working with three partner schools on both sides of the border in the Albury-Wodonga region to increase progression from Year 11 to 12, and then to education after the age of 18. Schools in this region report up to 15% drop out rates between Years 11 and 12. La Trobe is providing bridging programs and student mentoring for Year 11 students selected by their school to participate. These students receive an indicative offer at the end of Year 11, in order to provide greater certainty about returning to school for Year 12. The first cohort to complete this program will complete Year 12 in 2017.

Uni Bridges program

The Uni Bridges program is a partnership between La Trobe University, participating secondary schools, the Koorie Academy of Excellence and Quantum Victoria to increase the aspiration and capacity of secondary school students. The partnership with 12 participating secondary schools from northern metropolitan Melbourne and the Greater Bendigo region allows Uni Bridges students to participate in hands-on laboratory sessions at La Trobe and Quantum Victoria. In addition, the program provides an alternate pathway into tertiary studies in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines at La Trobe University.

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