

Recipient Details

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Responses

Curriculum and assessment

Based on feedback received from engagement with our community, a critical factor in education delivery in country areas is enrolment numbers, particularly for secondary schooling. Our community members are telling us that low and/or falling enrolment numbers impact a school's ability to offer subjects beyond the basics in a traditional teaching setting.

While our community members report that this does not extinguish a student's ability to study a particular subject, it usually means the subject is offered in a way that is very different to the approach adopted in a school with higher enrolments; for example, there may not be very experienced teachers available on the ground to support a student in these studies.

If there is a true commitment to provision of a level educational playing field across Australia, country schools need greater and genuine support in subject delivery. By way of example, perhaps it is not viable for every country secondary school to have a specialist Economics teacher but what should be achievable is for all senior secondary school students to have access to Economics as a subject and have genuine support from a dedicated Economics teacher who provides support to a number of schools in a catchment. Genuine support may include periodic on-the-ground tuition in addition to remote learning.

The ability to deliver subjects remotely is critical to ensure the viability of schools into the future, primarily in the high school sector. For this to happen, principals and teachers need to be supported and encouraged to think "outside the box" to identify and implement what works in their school.

Rating: 7

Teachers and teaching

Providing university students with experience in a regional, rural or remote community during their study is a sound way to provide exposure to the way of life in the bush and what is on offer. Council has always placed high value on traineeships and apprenticeships and has financially supported a range of scholarships designed to encourage rural students to spend time in a rural setting during their studies. An example of this is the Moree Plains Shire Council/University of New England Scholarship for a Bachelor of Urban and Regional Planning student which provided \$5,000 per annum up to four years as well as in-kind support provided by the Council's Planning team as requested and, in return, the student was required to undertake unpaid work experience with the Council. This type of arrangement would translate well in the education sector.

Local communities themselves must be appealing to teachers looking to relocate to an area. Ensuring applicants are aware of the merits of a community will assist in promoting the liveability of an area to teachers. Fostering a sense of belonging is critical to ensure that a teacher feels a connection with a community and is motivated to stay. Supporting new teachers through the period

of adjustment that invariably follows moving to a new town (or even just commencing at a new school) is vital and how this is best nurtured will rely upon the circumstances of the school. As an example, the 'Young Professionals' group is a Moree group that has organised regular social evenings to bring together professionals from a range of sectors to meet new people. Supporting new teachers to attend these types of events encourages connection and the sense of belonging.

In addition to welcoming new teachers to a community, the importance of "growing your own" cannot be understated. Based on anecdotal feedback given from a range of representatives of our local professional industries, those who are originally from a community are more likely to return to that community to work after completing studies or to complete studies by distance while working locally.

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

The answer to this is consistent with our teachers and teaching response. Connection and a sense of belonging in a community is key as is livability of any community they are considering.

As previously suggested, "growing your own" high quality teachers is an effective way to assist to attract and retain educational leaders to regional, rural and remote communities as it encourages teachers to grow and develop into education leaders of the future. A teacher with an established life in a community is far more likely to stay, grow and learn and eventually be competitive in securing a leadership role within a school. They will also have a strong understanding of the local community and what works well.

There is one couple we are aware of who have relocated from Sydney to Moree to work in schools here to give back to a community in need now that their own children have completed secondary studies. They are very happy here and are able to get back to Sydney regularly. They are able to provide strong mentorship to younger teachers and ensures the schools that they work within benefit from the many years' experience in the education industry. Promoting a move to a regional, rural or remote school as a viable, worthwhile and fulfilling opportunity by showcasing those that do it is a sound approach to increasing awareness.

Rating: 7

School and Community

Following our recent community engagement for our 10 Year Community Strategic Plan, we have a very active group of community members interested in education options across the Shire, particularly for secondary schooling.

This has prompted local parents' committees to consider ways they might be able to improve connections between schools and the broader community as the members of such committees have firsthand insight into the workings of the local school. One issue that has been identified by many stakeholders is whether enrolment choices are made by families on the basis of fact and data or hearsay regarding a school's capacity to deliver education.

It is proposed that Council provide some marketing support to schools to ensure that myths regarding the educational offering are displaced by fact. This initiative is in the early stages of development so the outcomes are yet to be determined.

In the Moree area, as would be the case in most regional, rural and remote communities, our local agricultural industry is innovative and adopting the latest technologies. Secondary studies should

deliver these practical local skills needed by local employers such as GPS technology, bug checking and drones. Providing a relevant skillset for students interested in a career in agriculture focused on adaptability will ensure students are in the best position to support the local employers. This is not just farming technologies but needs to be schools and businesses in partnership; accountants, engineering and manufacturing companies and machinery sales are some examples.

Bursaries and Scholarships that support students, particularly in relation to post-school transition, are a really effective tool to assist and motivate students.

There is also potential for philanthropic initiatives to be utilised to attract teachers. Council has been involved in supporting the continued provision of surgical services at the local hospital through the acquisition and provision of accommodation for a surgeon. This has been a highly successful strategy. This might be an appropriate strategy to pursue (by councils or community groups or philanthropic individuals) to attract qualified teachers outside the funding provided to the school itself.

Rating: 7

Information and Communication Technology

Reliable access to high speed and affordable internet is a major issue in regional, rural and remote communities and, along with access to adequate resources such as computers, Smart Boards and iPads, is critical to ensuring that ICT supports education. There can never be parity between city and regional, rural, remote communities without this vital service being available to every student across the state. Unlike in metropolitan areas where there is a great deal of competition for ICT provision using NBN, internet service provision in country areas is not always through NBN (for example, SkyMuster) and there is sometimes only a single service provider. There are also limitations on the capacity offered through SkyMuster; it is not realistic to expect a household's internet needs to be entirely dedicated to educational outcomes. This would be unacceptable in a metropolitan area.

Support for remote delivery of additional subjects will broaden the exposure for students and help to boost results and opportunities through exposure to more subjects. There is a range of delivery methods that may be suitable; webinars with teachers qualified in the delivery of these subjects helps to provide access and reduce delivery costs for smaller schools and virtual classrooms in which students from a range of areas all participate in a lesson together (which could include metropolitan as well as regional, rural and remote students) are two such ideas.

The Australian Government needs to work with telecommunications providers to ensure that the level of service is adequate for the needs of regional, rural and remote communities.

Rating: 7

Entrepreneurship and schools

Rating: 3

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding

There cannot be a one size fits all approach to determining what will work. Sensitivity to the individual locations is vital to ensuring the approach is successful.

The 'cluster' model would be effective in providing students from very small schools the opportunity to learn in a larger group to improve learning outcomes.

City to country student learning partnerships, as advocated by the Red Dirt research, is a sensible way to ensure that students in smaller schools are able to both access more subjects but also access them in an interactive way with more students. One shortcoming of subjects delivered in one-directional way online is the lack of contribution of others which for most students is the key to a more enriching learning experience.

In our recent community consultation, it was noted that there is a strong desire amongst local parents in our area for their children to complete their schooling locally rather than through boarding school. However, many parents expressed concerns in relation to falling enrolments in the secondary school and the potential impact this has on the education capable of being offered.

There is a feeling that diminishing enrolments mean that local high schools are simply not able to offer the curriculum to provide a diverse and enriching experience for students. Whilst ever this sentiment exists, it is difficult to stem the flow of students seeking education in larger regional centres and cities.

Rating for enrolments: 7

Rating for clusters: 5

Rating for distance education: 4

Rating for boarding: 4

Diversity

Strong connections with the local culture are critical in regional, rural and remote areas. For all children living in these areas, a strong sense of place and an understanding of their community make-up is paramount to developing delivery of education that is targeted to the needs to the children. We agree with the suggested approach of identifying local people to provide comprehensive inductions for new teachers into schools and encourage ongoing relationships to ensure influence in school practices on a day to day basis.

Funding for access to support services and resources for children with disabilities, gifted and talented and those for whom English is a second language, in particular, is vitally important.

Rating: 7

Transitioning beyond school

Careers expos are a fantastic way for students to be made aware of the options available to them when they finish school. Universities and colleges going to the regional, rural and remote areas to showcase the range of courses available along with the options for accommodation will provide students with a greater level of understanding of available further studies. Support for students once in tertiary education is also important to combat the difficulties faced with leaving one's home and family. Particularly for students in the more remote schools, shifting to a large campus with a different style of delivery and large student numbers provides compounding challenges for students. It is really the role of universities to provide support to these students, and ensure they are aware of the support that exists, to assist with the transition and to ensure that the experience is a positive one, this will help to ensure students complete their degrees.

Support for students who wish to enter the workforce straight out of school needs to be provided early to ensure these young people are competitive when applying for roles. Ability to write a high

quality job application and interview well are key and schools can and should be assisting students through this. Engagement with local employment agencies would enhance this.

Meeting people who live and work in the area who have gone on to further study are invaluable resources to provide students with relatable examples of people returning to their communities or making fresh starts in other regional, rural and remote communities.

Mentorship programs would be highly effective to assist students to develop a sense of what they want their future to look like, be it straight into the workforce, on campus or off campus study or a combination of both. Local professional businesses would have a vested interest in these types of programs being successful as many of indicated to Council in previous discussions that the attraction and retention of qualified staff is a challenge and that those with a local connection are far more likely to stay with them.

Rating: 7

Additional Comments

The model adopted by the Country Universities Centre in Cooma is an innovative approach to bringing universities to the students rather than the students going to the universities. It helps to ensure that those who wish to undertake tertiary education but who for many and varied reasons, are unable or unwilling to leave their community, are better supported in their efforts to complete tertiary education. It was pleasing to see in the Discussion Paper that there is a commitment from the Government to see the establishment of eight community-owned regional study hubs across regional Australia to support the delivery of courses by distance locally. There may be the ability to extend this beyond eight study hubs through the use of existing infrastructure to support this (such as Tafe campuses, many of which are underutilised in smaller communities). We are of opinion that investment in these hubs is critical to ensure access to tertiary education for students from regional, rural and remote locations.