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Responses

Curriculum and assessment

One area where the delivery of the Australian Curriculum is not meeting the learning needs of regional, rural and remote students is in regards to career education.

Recent research released by the Career Industry Council of Australia shows that career practitioners are among the most significant influences on student career planning. However, many regional and remote schools don't have dedicated and qualified career advisers, nor access to resources support students make informed decisions regarding their post-secondary education. In my experience, this situation is exacerbated in schools located in remote and very remote Australia.

In addition, in smaller communities there is often a limited array of university educated role models living and working in town which can limit students' exposure to different career and education options available after school; and students face lower community and family expectations regarding post schooling destinations. Consequently, students living in remote Australia are significantly disadvantaged in this regard, as they are not necessarily aware of all of the job and career options available to them after graduating from school. Unclear or uninformed career goals can impact a student's motivation and achievement during school and their success in their post school education.

Conversely, as recognised by the recent Department of Education discussion paper 'Improving Completion, Retention and Success in Higher Education', 'early intervention with students can assist senior secondary subject choice, promote career aspirations throughout a student's high school career and contribute to more considered decision making'.

University outreach programs have proven to be an effective way to connect regional and remote students to universities. They can provide career development activities to students throughout the school community; and showcase to students, staff and the broader family unit the value of a university degree and different pathways to achieving higher education goals.

RECOMMENDATION: Career education needs to be prioritised in regional and remote schools throughout Australia. This can be achieved through training and recruitment of staff and prioritising time in the timetable to allow for meaningful career education and support; connecting with university outreach programs; accessing government resources and programs (where available).

Rating: 6

Teachers and teaching

Rating: 0

Leaders and leadership
Rating: 0

School and Community
Rating: 0

Information and Communication Technology
Rating: 0

Entrepreneurship and schools
Challenges facing students include:

-        Students face a significant financial burden when relocating for study and are more likely to work while studying. Consequently, this can add more pressure and strain on their study; limiting their ability to socialise and participate in co-curricula activities. (Freeman, Klatt & Polesel, 2014; Richardson, Bennett & Roberts, 2016)

-        Students can experience higher rates of mental ill-health during transition. This can be associated with relocation challenges; experiencing imposter syndrome and culture shock; homesickness; feeling isolated; and loneliness (Burke et al, 2017).

-        Students are not necessarily provided with information about university admissions, pathways, scholarships and accommodation. This is important information that will aid students in making informed decisions about courses and support. A student's university experience can be negatively impacted if they are not provided with timely information to assist with transition.

Gaps that need to be addressed include:

Addressing the financial pressure facing students is critical. There are currently some issues that if addressed appropriately, would make a significant difference to students in need:

-        While many scholarships and allowances don't release funding until after census date, the Start-Up Scholarship was established to provide much needed support to eligible students upon enrolment. This scholarship was turned into a loan but I recommend it be converted back to reduce the financial pressure associated with repaying the loan.

-        Scholarships for students from remote Australia: The establishment of the Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships program is a positive step. However, in allocating scholarships, I recommend priority be given to students relocating from remote Australia, recognising the higher costs associated with relocation.

Remote schools need to prioritise career education; supporting students to make informed decisions about their future and equipping them with support to successfully transition Partnerships with universities helps facilitate this; however the proposed HEPPP funding formula does not recognise the cost associated with engaging remote schools. I recommend the funding model be redesigned to provide additional funding to universities engaged with schools in remote Australia, recognising the higher cost associated with delivering programs.

Rating: 7

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding

Rating for enrolments: 0

Rating for clusters: 0

Rating for distance education: 0

Rating for boarding: 0

Diversity

Rating: 0

Transitioning beyond school

The proposed HEPPP funding model needs to be amended to recognise the higher cost of delivering outreach to remote communities. Through HEPPP, universities have developed programs to inspire and support students in regional and remote areas to achieve their post schooling goals. However, there is significant expense associated with engaging remote schools and the HEPPP funding model needs to be re-designed to take this into consideration.

To qualify as Independent and be eligible for financial support from the Australian Government, many rural students take a gap year. The recent change to eligibility for Independent status has been a positive step but still students are unable to access funding until after semester has begun. The same applies to many scholarships which are often paid after University Census dates. The Start Up scholarship provided an effective mechanism through which students received funding during the transition. However, this is now a loan. It is advised that converting this back to a scholarship to reduce the financial burden for relocating students.

'Addressing the directional flow of rural students moving to cities' should be reframed to consider how we can increase the connection between rural and metropolitan Australians. Lower university attainment in rural areas has a detrimental effect on a community's human capital and actively discouraging students to move to cities for further education is an opportunity missed for students and their community. Instead, metropolitan and rural students should be supported to study the course of their choice, at the university of their choice.

We need to remove the divide between rural and metropolitan Australia and showcase to all students the benefits of living and learning in a range of environments. We need to consider what can be done to connect university students with rural communities, during their study and upon graduation. This would facilitate more students connecting with rural Australia and helps to generate more dynamic human capital. Entrepreneurship and innovation is fostered during university and by encouraging graduates to live and work in rural communities we have the potential to generate prosperity and create opportunities in regional Australia for future generations.

Rating: 7

Additional Comments

My 2017 Equity Fellowship through the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education is focused on remote students' participation in higher education; exploring issues relevant to their success and exploring ways in which they can be supported more effectively by the Higher Education sector and Australian government. I focused the Fellowship on remote students enrolled in Australian universities as they are a group of students who are often neglected by research. Their

challenges and needs are often presented collectively with regional students and while the needs of regional students should not be diminished, it is important to recognise that there is significant differentiation in the level of geographical isolation being felt in remote and very remote areas across Australia.

A recent report (Bankwest Curtin Economic Centre, June 2017) details educational advantage and disadvantage across Australia. It clearly demonstrates the correlation between remoteness and educational disadvantage, with children living in remote Australia being among the most disadvantaged. For example, a child born in remote Australia is only one-third as likely to go to university as a child born in a metropolitan city. When considering strategies and priorities as a result of this review, it is important to remember this extreme variation in degree of disadvantage and to prioritise the needs of the most marginalised.

It is also important to remember that education is a lifelong journey and many university students living in regional and remote Australia are mature age, enrolled part time and study online. Schools are a valuable community hub where a culture of lifelong learning should to be fostered and community based university graduates can be celebrated. There are also resources within the school that could be better utilised by the community to support university students studying online; and school communities should support their success and recognise the value they could add to the school community.

References cited in submission:

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Freeman, B., Klatt, M., & Polesel, J. (2014). 'Deferring a university offer in regional Victoria: final report'

Harvey, A., Brett, M., Cardak, B., Sheridan, A., Stratford, J., Tootell, N., McAllister, R. & Spicer, R. (2016). 'The Adaptation of Tertiary Admissions Practices to Growth and Diversity'. Report for the Australian Government Department of Education and Training, Melbourne, Access and Achievement Research Unit, La Trobe University

Richardson, D. S., Bennett, P. D., & Roberts, A. P. L. (2016). 'Investigating the relationship between equity and graduate outcomes in Australia'