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Department of Education and Training
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**Regional Development Australia Midwest Gascoyne Submission to:
INDEPENDENT REVIEW REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE
EDUCATION**

1. The gap in educational achievement between regional, rural and remote students and metropolitan students.

- There is a general trend of decreasing educational achievement with increasing remoteness in regional, rural and remote (RR&R) areas in both Western Australia and Australia. This is reflected in WA vs. Regional WA NAPLAN results.
- Aboriginal educational achievement is stifled in West Australian (WA) RR&R schools through the absence of shared Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leadership roles.
- There are a growing number of developmentally vulnerable children in RR&R areas of WA, widening the gap between country and metropolitan student achievements.
- The Pilbara region is experiencing significantly low retention rates.

2. The key barriers and challenges that impact on the educational outcomes of regional, rural and remote students, including aspirations and access issues.

- The decision to move Year 7 students to high school has severely impacted Primary school numbers and the viability of some RR&R areas. Many parents believe their children are too young to board at that age and so move the whole family to either Perth or a large regional centre.
- There are a number of players in the education, training and employments spaces in the regions that operate within silos and are subject to substantial centralised decision making.

Breaking these silo will enable opportunities for partnerships between agencies, not for profits and RTO's leading to cost savings and accessibility of under utilised regional programs.

- RR&R areas in WA have difficulty attracting and retaining teachers, qualified professionals (i.e. school psychologists) and qualified students entering the workforce.
- RR&R populations in WA have limited accessibility to human and logistical resources (as mentioned above), thus social issues impacting educational performance are inadequately addressed.
- RR&R schools in WA have negative associated images due to:
 - A fluctuating one-line budget system
 - High staff turnover
 - Reduced capital investment into school amenity.
- School closures in RR&R areas of WA are forcing more students to relocate away from their homes, decreasing educational accessibility.
- RR&R teachers have to uptake other roles within the school (e.g. financial management), which can act as a barrier to deployment of quality teaching.
- Schools in WA RR&R schools are constrained by the 'one-line fits all' budget, which limits school curriculum.
- The Pilbara region has poor attendance, which is considerably lower in the Aboriginal population.
- The Mid West region has highlighted student behavioral management issues, which act as a learning barrier to the both students and peers. It is suspected that this is experienced across regional WA.

3. The appropriateness and effectiveness of current modes of education delivered to these students, including the use of information and communications technology and the importance of face-to-face regional, rural and remote education provision.

- There is a higher expense of ICT in RR&R areas in WA, acting as a barrier to deploy such ICT educational delivery to these students.
- There currently is no cost-effective common user infrastructure in RR&R WA (i.e. towers, backhaul networks, poles etc.).
- There is currently unreliable connectivity and limited infrastructure capability to enable home-based educational activity such as homework, courses for tertiary & TAFE, which stifles educational opportunity and outcomes for West Australian RR&R students.
- There is a lack of remote ICT systems and local IT specialists in RR&R WA to operate and maintain remote ICT systems (meaning contractors are sourced from Perth, dramatically increasing maintenance costs).

4. The effectiveness of public policies and programs that have been implemented to bridge the divide.

- The COAG review of Closing the Gap (CTG) priorities revealed that two of the targets are on track to be achieved, however two are not.
- CTG fails to recognise and include Aboriginal populations who hold many different Aboriginal languages and significant life survival skills.

- The current incentive packages available in RR&R WA, which attract and retain teachers are only available to handpicked selection of schools – disadvantaging other schools that are also in dire needs of this policy intervention. These are not currently effective in attracting and retaining experienced teachers.
- There is a lack of actual RR&R WA teaching role incentives to bridge the divide. In fact there are a number of incentive programs delivered by the Commonwealth to the States to ensure delivery occurs however these packages need bolstering, specific focus and targeting combined with greater resourcing to facilitate on ground outcomes. (i.e. affordable living prices such as rent).
- Certificates of currency are creating a time and financial cost to individual RR&R schools and teachers in WA.
- There is a perception in the school communities that important issues are being overlooked at a higher decision making level in the Regions. It is expected that there is limited upwards flow of important information. Again, it is suspected that these issues are experienced more broadly across the vast regions of WA.
- There are concerns in WA regarding previous commitments around ICT connectivity for all RR&R area schools. This has resulted in some substandard services (need to ensure that the aim of 98% of schools connected to FIBER is achieved).

5. The gaps and opportunities to help students successfully transition from school to further study, training and employment.

- Accessibility to long-term employment prospects become more limited in RR&R WA as you travel further away from regional centres.
- The creation and development of post-school opportunities in RR&R WA communities are limited by substandard ICT (unreliable connectivity, uploads and download speeds, limited bandwidths, cost, limited infrastructure capability and data capacity for both school and home based educational activity).
- There is limited access to the suite of resources that enable the transition from secondary to tertiary education.
- There is a gap in appropriate, consistent accessibility to child psychology services to assist in overcoming trauma and PTSD for students to overcome experiencing social issues before becoming entered into the formal Education system aged 4-5 years.
- There are a lack of residential colleges within the regions; meaning students who have to leave small communities for education have to leave the region.
- Increasing Aboriginal participation in university education in the regions is deemed a priority focus.

6. Innovative approaches that support regional, rural and remote students to succeed in school and in their transition to further study, training and employment.

- There is strong consensus that further empowerment and concentration of investment into quality early childhood learning resources and programs will foster student and future employment opportunity and success in RR&R areas of WA.
- **Aboriginal Biodiversity Conservation Foundation (ABC):** has established school trial sites for Aboriginal Environmental Education programmes in the Pilbara, Gascoyne, and Mid West regions of WA.
- **North Midlands Project:** non-for-profit community capacity building organisation based in Carnamah to improve the community's quality of life, health and well-being through arts, culture and heritage. The **Learning Hub:** a training and resource facility providing access to education and workforce development services in partnership with LGAs, schools, businesses and Community Resource Centres.
- Review Dr. Chris Sarra's work 'Lifting the Lid on Low Expectations for Indigenous learners' for Aboriginal educational solutions.
- **Local PCYC:** Geraldton implemented a one-on-one program in 2002 which saw significant drop in number of juvenile offending within the first six months after implementation.
- Direct instruction programs.
- Providing a regional university presence so that WA RR&R students don't have to relocate.
- Target WA RR&R tertiary students to offer extra support and significant mentoring to return to RR&R settings once qualified combined with HECS incentives and taxation breaks to justify the take up of RRR positions.
- Invest, develop and expand ICT accessibility and affordability in RR&R WA areas.
- Aiming policy to attract (via \$ incentives and benefits formulated by longevity of stay and including living costs) highly skilled and multi-talented people who are seeking tree-changes.
- Support local regionally based staff and university teaching degree educators – ensure students are exposed to regions in their teaching degree.
- Direct funds into educational programs and content that have long-terms impact in regional, remote and rural regions in WA and reduce infrastructure costs by ensuring that there economies of scale created by government departments sharing as much common infrastructure where possible. This includes breaking silo's E.g. Increased cooperation across government departments to expand the footprint of secure optical fiber traversing common transport corridors that all departments share – thus individual government departments would not need to operate their own independent communication network: Other benefits aside from reduced infrastructure costs include:
 - Network security increase

- Increased reliability
- Speed and capacity improvement
- Train and employ regionally based IT technicians, in build local ICT into schools or deploy a flying squad of ICT specialists. This can be done in partnership with other organisations who require the service (i.e. regionally based hospitals, local governments etc.)
- Cost effectively build or extend common user infrastructure (examples) reducing costs on “last-mile” networks.
- Offer an increased HECS incentive break to educators taking on RR&R teaching roles.
- Commonwealth teaching scholarships that have specific focus upon outer RR&R students enrolled in tertiary studies to mentor, support these students from inception thus encouraging greater take up and retainment of these people in RR&R areas.
- Commonwealth assisted or part/ fully funded Masters degrees for educators committing their expertise and fixed term employ in outer RR&R locations.
- Incorporate the diversity and knowledge of many different Aboriginal languages into establishing purpose and connection as to why people are being taught, or learning English. Establish jobs for traditional language speakers within the school systems encouraging and facilitating greater family, community engagement and providing real sense of purpose.
- Review educational best practice principles from educationally successful countries such as Denmark, Finland and Norway.
- Support other projects such as the expansion (proposed) of Geraldton Universities Centre (GUC) campus into the Pilbara to raise aspirations, relationships, networks, values and reasons for hope.
- Deploy a full-time regional psychologist in every Rural and Remote region to overcome social issues and encourage academic performance, attendance and standards OR facilitate psychologist regional visits to RR&R students more frequently enabling relationships to be formed that will engender long term change.
- Development of Mentoring programs (e.g. as done in Bruce Rock, in the Wheatbelt region of WA).
- Increased use of School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) accommodation facilities (in Perth) extended to students to provide cost effective access to the wider world.
- Establish ‘sister schools’ to create a strong network and school culture of virtual programs – including country/ city school partnership to allow term long exchange programs.
- Encourage regional teaching practice for university students studying teaching & consultation with RR&R schools to provide feedback of how Universities can produce better teachers including real school experiences to develop creative on ground solutions.
- Graduate program to use university students to visit regional areas throughout their study to troubleshoot and provide units with solutions to issues being faces at RR&R sites.

- Centrally fund (rather than locally) permanent relief at SHS sites and allocated VET and Workplace Coordinator time.
- Invest in fit for purpose infrastructure (i.e. E-learning and hard and soft infrastructure).
- Review the current operation of SIDE and develop a more appropriate RR&R model in conjunction with RR&R schools, parents and communities.
- A possible 2-3 (preferably 3) year one-line budget to 'even-out' fluctuations and work positively towards quality and specialist teacher retention.
- Promote regional learning through marketing as education AND 'experience' to convey regional advantage – can also market schools on school visions/ 'daunting big city experience for year 7s'.
- Rather than pay qualified teachers to conduct 'supervisory' rather than 'teaching' roles or 'fly in fly out' services, an innovative model demonstrated by a regional Wheatbelt school is to employ an on-site SIDE 'supervisor'. This is a more cost effective solution, which would free up funding allocated to the abovementioned ILS and RLS 'teacher' roles to keep courses and teachers in place for the additional years and for RR&R schools in crisis.
- Introduce the concept of RR&R Community Learning Hubs which enable more local decision making for regionally based government funded organisations. This could facilitate joint program development and scheduling, cost saving and sharing underutilised regional facilities. Investigate where possible the inclusion of RTO's, Universities and TAFE level activities into these community learning centres.
- Increased engagement between all levels of DoE and parent groups.
- Create a central funding pool to deal with the cost of SIDE and TAFE courses (rather than individual schools bearing the cost burden).
- Increased local decision making authority for government funded organisations.
- Employ social service investments through schools (e.g. School safe zones, Clontarf and 'Keys for Life' programs).
- Supply regional accommodation for student teachers on practical placements, relief staff and university students under taking regional units as part of their degrees.
- Support early childhood centres.
- Identify WHO/WHICH Department/s or Agency/ies should be leading the Early Years engagement and proactive programs to ensure children are ready for school at age 4 years to avoid or prevent the cyclical repetition of lesser outcomes, poor investment at the wrong end of the Edu process.

Key Recommendations

Geraldton University Centre (GUC) model of training local students to become qualified teachers has worked with almost all student graduates electing to stay regional with most graduates being offered regional teaching placement positions.

Another University delivery model more relevant to regions without regional centres might include the establishment of community learning centres through potential out of school hours access to District High and Primary School buildings, leveraging existing Government infrastructure assets to more flexible and alternate post-secondary education uses.

Department of Education (DoE) to create a dedicated Regional & Rural Directorate with core focus to implement and deliver education improvement outcomes in RR&R areas. Resourcing this directorate to include both professional educators and innovative regional operators.

Dedicated career officers established in RR&R schools with inter-school mobility to focus on every student's unique strengths and capabilities to create a student specific education, training and career pathways at the earliest age possible.

Embed regional innovation options (i.e. Coder Dojo) within the education curriculum, utilising student creativity at a young age and nurturing this broadness of thinking attributes in areas of R&D, new product testing/development (i.e. IT) – school incubators.

Dedicated special established support school for disconnected students/individuals with major social/emotional challenges, behavioral issues, requiring extension support around reconnection, focus and wellbeing – leading to skills/social development, training and employment.

'Toe by Toe' type of program embedded in all RR&R schools. Taking struggling students out of the classroom for one on one tuition in basic reading, writing, maths, etc. Also allows mainstream teachers to provide more focused support and maximise effort for remaining students in the classroom.

Trial and adopt Aboriginal specific programs tailored for Aboriginal family groups & students, outside of the traditional English classroom setting, reconnecting to culture, environment and land. Teach maths, english, writing, etc in this reconnecting to land environment and using traditional Aboriginal language i.e. Aboriginal Biodiversity Conservation (ABC) program.

In summary, the educational challenge in RR&R areas is significant. The proposed pathway forward must establish region specific solutions to these challenges. These solutions must focus on the key changes required to improve education outcomes in RR&R areas by empowering regional education communities and ensuring accountability in performance by these communities to achievable State-based targets.

Yours sincerely



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