

Recipient Details

Name of organisation or individual: [O] The University of Sydney (submission authorised by Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education))

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Responses

Curriculum and assessment

Globally, economies and the nature of work are undergoing profound change due to the combined forces of globalisation, technological advancement, population growth and climate change. As Philip Lowe, Governor of the Reserve Bank argued recently, Australia's future competitiveness and prosperity will depend largely on:

- our national capacity for high-level cognitive skills and the ability to understand and solve complex problems;
- having people who are curious, able to grasp new opportunities, and able to transform and interpret information in new ways using new technology;
- the strength of our workforce's interpersonal skills to provide the premium services that will attract premium prices in the global marketplace; and
- on our national capacity to develop a culture that promotes and rewards creativity, flexibility, innovation, excellence, entrepreneurship and risk taking.

With predictions that many millions of existing Australian jobs will be made obsolete within the next 20 years, Australian students (regardless of where they grow up) will need sound educational fundamentals (literacy, numeracy and subject content). However, their long-term capacity to contribute and succeed in life and work will depend increasingly on their capacity for critical thinking, problem solving, communication and teamwork. Personal attributes of persistence, adaptability, flexibility, resilience and entrepreneurship will also become increasingly important.

The Australian Curriculum needs to retain a strong focus on the fundamentals, but with flexibility built in to allow it to be adapted to respond to local needs and capabilities. Access to high quality teaching remains key challenge in regional communities, particularly in STEM disciplines. There is much more that could be done to leverage the capability present in Australia's regional and metropolitan-based universities, particularly utilising technology and the NBN. The main impediment remains the availability of adequate and stable funding to support deeper levels of engagement.

Here are links to two innovations from the University of Sydney providing innovative STEM education experiences to students in regional areas:

Madmaker Regional Tours: <https://madmaker.com.au/>

Spectacular Science: <http://sydney.edu.au/science/outreach/high-school/spectacular-science.shtml>

Further examples are included in our separate covering letter submitted by email.

Rating: 6

Teachers and teaching

Teacher quality is absolutely critical. Our experience providing pre-registration education and training for students in many professions suggests that the key to addressing regional workforce shortages requires a long-term holistic approach, which includes:

- maximising the recruitment of students who come from regional areas themselves;
- recruiting students who demonstrate a commitment to regional communities;
- providing students with strong opportunities for long-term rural placements during the pre-registration phase of their training;
- ensuring attractive remuneration packages and opportunities for advancement and promotion;
- the availability of mentoring and support, particularly in the early phase of a new teacher's career; and
- providing access to post-registration training and professional development.

Our School of Education and Social Work provides an extensive range of Continuing Professional Development Courses. These include major events, face-to-face sessions at university campuses or in schools tailored to their needs, and online forums.

Details are available here:

http://sydney.edu.au/education_social_work/professional_learning/index.shtml.

With the advent of the NBN and other advances in technology, there is significant potential for teachers and students in regional areas to be linked more seamlessly with experts based in metropolitan universities. The main impediment to the University of Sydney doing more in relation to ongoing teacher professional development for teachers based outside of the metropolitan basin, remains the availability of adequate and stable funding to support expansion.

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

See our response to the previous question regarding the recruitment and retention of high quality teachers to regional communities.

Our School of Education and Social Work offers professional development and networking opportunities for school principals through its Office of Professional Learning, which has an international reputation for providing quality professional development for teachers. In addition to its regular in-school, online and on-campus programs, the office organises special conferences and events, the most well-known of these being the annual Successful Learning Conference, which attracts international speakers as well as education professionals intent upon learning the latest techniques for teaching students K–12 who experience difficulties learning in mainstream classroom settings.

The school has staff with significant expertise and experience in international school education systems, who would be pleased to discuss with the review innovative approaches to supporting high quality leadership in regional schools.

Rating: 7

School and Community

The University of Sydney is involved with many innovative projects that are improving connections between schools and the broader community in regional, rural and remote communities. Two examples are our mOTor Skills program and the work of our Poche Centre for Indigenous Health in improving dental health in Aboriginal communities:

<http://sydney.edu.au/wpo/primary/regional/index.shtml>

<http://sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2016/09/23/grinners-are-school-winners.html>

<http://sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2017/02/21/water-flowing-into-remote-schools-and-parks-.html>

<http://sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2015/11/20/school-water-program-to-brighten-smiles-in-remote-nsw.html>

Our experience is that access to quality careers advice and sound information about post-school training/study options (including about non-traditional pathways) is critical in motivating students to succeed. We have recently developed two pre-tertiary outreach apps to assist students obtain the information they need to match their interests with university courses:

Subject Finder for students in year 10 trying to work out what they need to study in years 11 and 12 in order to pursue their preferred tertiary studies; and

Career Finder for students from year 7-10 designed to help them determine the types of jobs and industries for which they might be best suited.

Philanthropy can play a significant role in improving outcomes for regional, rural and remote students in relation to school achievement and post-school transition. As an example, our Poche Centre was made possible by philanthropy: <http://inspired.sydney.edu.au/dr-steven-naoum/>

We would be happy to speak with the review about other examples and opportunities for philanthropy to do more directly, and indirectly, to help lift educational aspirations and outcomes in regional, rural and remote Australia.

Rating: 0

Information and Communication Technology

There is great potential for ICT to be used more effectively to link schools and students in regional, rural and remote Australia with universities, other schools and organisations in metropolitan areas.

The global phenomenon of University of Sydney alumnus Eddie Woo's streaming of his mathematics classes on YouTube is one example of how technology can be used to help make learning more accessible, interesting, connected, and fun for students regardless of their geographic location:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/misterwootube>.

As noted above, we are developing apps to help students make informed decisions about their study and career choices: Subject Finder and Career Finder.

We see significant potential for the development of apps that also help students navigate universities' admissions centres, scholarship and income support rules and processes.

The key barriers to regional, rural and remote schools (and universities) realising the full potential benefits of ICT remain:

1. funding to meet establishment, operating and replacement costs;
2. expertise to maintain and operate the technology, and funding to cover these costs;
3. access to high quality teaching and support staff with strong ICT and engineering knowledge, skills, and interest;
4. funding for universities to support their academic engagement activities with regional schools and communities; and
5. ongoing professional development opportunities, mentoring and networks for teachers.

We would be pleased to discuss key challenges and opportunities further with the review.

Rating: 6

Entrepreneurship and schools

Many Australian universities, including the University of Sydney, offer significant formal and informal education and opportunities to enhance students' skills in entrepreneurship. See below for some two weblink examples of a student competition and academic program respectively:

<https://incubate.org.au/>

http://sydney.edu.au/business/entrepreneurship_and_innovation

We are also a partner in the Sydney School of Entrepreneurship established recently by the NSW Government, and involving many other NSW universities.

Providing opportunities for students to tackle open challenges focused on locally meaningful problems, issues and opportunities could be a good way to encourage the development of skills necessary for entrepreneurship. Experience in implementing proposed solutions would also be invaluable in building the skill set for entrepreneurship.

As suggested in other responses, significant potential exists to improve linkages between schools and students in regional, rural and remote Australia with expertise about entrepreneurship that exists and is growing in many Australian universities. The key barriers to greater levels of collaboration are financial, time and personnel-based.

We would be pleased to discuss these issues further with the review.

Rating: 5

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding

As noted in our responses to various other questions, there is significant potential to improve regional students' access to high quality education by increasing levels of engagement and collaboration between regional schools and metropolitan-based universities. We have provided

many examples of initiatives that are adding significant value in terms of contributing to curriculum content, but also in relation to raising students' levels of awareness about tertiary education pathway, and their preparedness for post-school study. The main impediments are the lack of available funding, time constraints on already stretched staff, poor ICT connectivity in some instances, and incentive structure that do not always promote increased levels of collaboration of this type.

Rating for enrolments: 6

Rating for clusters: 5

Rating for distance education: 5

Rating for boarding: 4

Diversity

We have a significant presence and/or involvement with various remote communities and would be happy to put the review in contact with staff who are leading some of these education, research and outreach initiatives.

There are many examples where country and city universities do collaborate to give students outstanding educational experiences in regional and remote areas. See for example, the work of our Broken Hill and Lismore Departments of Rural Health:

Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health: <http://sydney.edu.au/medicine/drh/>

University Centre for Rural Health North Coast: <http://www.ucrh.edu.au/>

Such multi-disciplinary and multi-university models have potential to be applied in fields beyond health, and we encourage the review to visit these sites to learn first-hand about their work and achievements.

We are working hard to make the University of Sydney a more culturally diverse institution, both in the make-up of our staff and student bodies. Our integrated Wingara Mura-Bunga Barrabugu strategy to boost Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and participation is one good example.

The directional flow of regional, rural and remote students towards the cities will be difficult to stem so long as educational, employment and other opportunities remain greater in the cities than in remote areas. Reversing this trend will be challenging, but a starting point is for policy and funding drivers to support collaboration, rather than competition, between regional and metropolitan-based tertiary education providers.

Internationally, universities have and continue to play a vital role in helping to develop and support regional economic development. There is great potential for federal, state, local government, business, and education providers (including country and metropolitan universities) to work together strategically in partnership to help build economic opportunities in regional Australia.

Rating: 7

Transitioning beyond school

Increasing levels of student income support

Improving the adequacy of student income support payments is a key area where action is needed to increase levels of Yr 12 completion and subsequent progression to tertiary education by students from regional, rural and remote areas.

A key aim of the 'demand-driven' funding and associated reforms to university funding and student incomes support introduced from 2010-12 was to improve the participation of people from Low SES, Regional and Remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. While the numbers of students from these groups has increased significantly, their share of total enrolments has not. In fact, the share of rural and remote students was less in 2014 than it was in 2008.

While domestic Commonwealth-supported students do not face upfront tuition fees for their initial degrees due to the continuation of the Higher Education Loan Program (formerly HECS), rates of student income support are well below an adequate level for students to meet basic living costs, especially if the student needs to move away from home for their studies.

A student needs around \$1500 a month just to meet basic living costs in Sydney today. The poverty line for a single adult with no dependants is currently around \$430 a week or \$1,850 a month - yet a student in receipt of maximum Youth Allowance and \$100 a fortnight in Rent Assistance would have a disposable income of around \$1,075 a month – putting university study in this city beyond them unless they work long hours or study part time.

Australia's system of student income support has not been reviewed closely for five years. We need to look again at how policy and scarce available public funds can be improved and better targeted to lift levels of post-school education – particularly by students from regional, rural and remote backgrounds.

Every five years Universities Australia conducts a comprehensive survey of student finances. The latest of these is occurring this year, and should provide useful up-to-date information about the levels of financial stress that students from different regions are experiencing.

Rating: 7

Additional Comments

Encouraging cooperation between regional and metropolitan universities

Regionally-based universities, TAFEs and other tertiary education providers play vital roles in providing local access to post-school education for students who grow up in regional, rural and remote communities. Unfortunately, current funding and policy settings encourage metropolitan universities to compete with their regional counterparts when it comes to recruiting talented students from regional areas, and from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. While such competition can be highly beneficial for the relatively small number of students involved, it does little to boost overall levels of participation by students from the region. Moreover, it often also results in the targeting of scarce available funding to students who may be from relatively socio-economically advantaged backgrounds compared to their region's broader population. Policy settings could usefully be adjusted to provide financial incentives for universities to collaborate with each other to boost overall levels of educational attainment from target groups in a region or State, rather than at each individual university.

Please see the separate written submission provided by our Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor Pip Pattison, which includes an overview of the University of Sydney's education, research and outreach activities relevant to the review's areas of interest.

