



UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

UOW submission to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

AUGUST 2017



INTRODUCTION

The University of Wollongong (UOW) welcomes this opportunity to provide input into the Federal Government's Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education.

Students should be provided with quality education and given opportunity to achieve equitable learning outcomes regardless of where they live. Despite existing efforts of schools, government and other contributing factors to achieve this equity, research indicates that there remains an ongoing gap in educational achievement between regional, rural and remote student compared to metropolitan students.

UOW is an international multi-campus university. With its main campus located in Wollongong, it also has a number of other campus locations, including three Sydney campuses (at Loftus, Liverpool and Sydney CBD), Shoalhaven, Batemans Bay, Bega, and the Southern Highlands. The University also has campuses in Hong Kong and Dubai.

UOW is committed to delivering high quality education through its Regional Campuses across New South Wales (NSW) to strengthen teaching and learning, outreach, community engagement, social inclusion and indigenous education activities. It also undertakes a range of activities and initiatives aimed at working with students in regional and remote parts of NSW and broader Australia aimed at raising the aspirations, awareness and attainment of individuals from underrepresented backgrounds in higher education from UOW's communities.

The Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education's states that the purpose of its Discussion Paper is to:

- Stimulate thinking what needs to be done to increase and expand the aspirations, achievements and opportunities of regional, rural and remote students.
- Encourage submissions about innovative and fresh approaches that are improve or could improve student achievements and their transition to further study, training and employment.

Rather than address the numerous individual questions raised throughout the Review Discussion Paper, this UOW Submission addresses a number of the major themes and ideas of the Terms of Reference of the Review based on the operations and experiences of UOW.

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

UOW is a research intensive university that has built a strong international reputation for world-class research and exceptional teaching quality, and is ranked amongst the top 2% of Universities worldwide. In 2016 UOW had over 33,900 total student enrolments across its global campus network and more than 2,400 staff (FTE¹).

The University offers more than 400 undergraduate/postgraduate courses and research degrees across a wide range of disciplines through the five broad faculties of:

- Business
- Engineering and Information Sciences
- Law, Humanities and the Arts

¹ Full time equivalent



- Science, Medicine and Health
- Social Sciences

Since gaining independence from UNSW in 1975, UOW has undergone massive expansion growing from around 12,700 student enrolments in 1998 to 33,900 in 2016 (onshore and offshore combined), which represents around 8.4% average annual growth over this period. UOW is now an international multi-campus university, with three Sydney campuses (at Loftus, Liverpool and Sydney CBD), Wollongong, Shoalhaven, Batemans Bay, Bega, and the Southern Highlands. The University also has campuses in Hong Kong and Dubai.

Our most recent facility is the new South West Sydney Campus in the Liverpool City Centre. This campus started operations in February 2017, to better service the rapidly expanding population of South West Sydney and growing demand for higher education in the region.

UOW has developed the Innovation Campus in Wollongong (with assistance from the NSW Government) which is an education, research and related business precinct. This state of the art facility provides strong linkages between business and research, and complements the University’s leading research and innovation institutes, which include:

- iAccelerate (an incubator for new business start-ups)
- Sustainable Buildings Research Centre (which focuses on retrofit technologies)
- Australian Institute for Innovative Materials (a key national laboratory for medical and energy materials)
- Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute (a joint venture with the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District)
- SMART Infrastructure Facility (a key national laboratory for research on infrastructure)
- Early Start (focusing on early childhood development)

A recent economic impact assessment, estimated the total value-add contribution of UOW to Australia’s Gross Domestic Product in 2015 was \$1.2 billion, with \$815 million in value add to the local Illawarra economy, as summarised in Table 1 below. The total direct, indirect and induced job creation for the Illawarra region is 7,195 FTE, which increases to 7,794 FTE across NSW.

UOW also generated \$557.9 million in research and innovation income between 2006 and 2015, and has incubated over 65 start-up businesses through its iAccelerate facility since 2012.

Table 1: UOW total economic contribution (2015)

	Illawarra	NSW	Australia
Gross Output	\$1,393M	\$1,545M	\$2,161M
Value Added	\$815M	\$886M	\$1,210M
Jobs (FTE)	7,195	7,794	10,169

REVIEW TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Review Terms of Reference are identified as:

- the gap in educational achievement between regional, rural and remote students and metropolitan students



- the key barriers and challenges that impact on the educational outcomes of regional, rural and remote students, including aspirations and access issues
- 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
- the effectiveness of public policies and programs that have been implemented to bridge the divide
- the gaps and opportunities to help students successfully transition from school to further study, training and employment
- innovative approaches that support regional, rural and remote students to succeed in school and in their transition to further study, training and employment.

As previously noted, rather than address the numerous individual questions raised throughout the Review Discussion Paper, this Submission addresses the above Terms of Reference of the Review more broadly as they relate to UOW. By doing so, it is hoped that the University can assist to identify some of the key issues, challenges and barriers currently impacting the learning outcomes of regional, rural and remote students and, provide ideas of methods which are already assisting, or could assist to help this cohort of students improve their educational outcomes and transition to further student, training and employment.

ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS IMPACTING THE LEARNING OUTCOMES OF REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE STUDENTS

It is noted that students from remote areas typically experience more disadvantage than students from rural areas in terms of their success and progression through education, and students from rural areas typically experience more disadvantage than regional students. The Review Discussion Paper, for example, notes that the general trend of students' results from the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) indicates a decreasing attainment of students learning outcomes with increasing remoteness.² It is important that, when considering the learning barriers and challenges that impact on the educational outcomes of regional, rural and remote students, including aspirations and access issues, that this group of students face varying degrees of disadvantage based on their geographical location to each other. Different mechanisms to support these students may therefore be appropriate.

Improving student achievements and opportunities in early childhood education

Whilst not within the specific scope of this Review, it should be highlighted that there is a perceived absence of consideration around improving student achievements and opportunities in early childhood education within the context of regional, rural and remote settings.

Support for the learning of individuals should be life-long and not just start when children commence formal schooling. International research evidence has pointed for some time at the critical importance of early childhood education and care for preparing children for their subsequent engagement with the education system, as well as their broader social engagement, high quality

² Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education, Discussion Paper, July 2017, page 15



early childhood provision would seem to be uniquely well placed in regional, rural and remote contexts to support improved access and achievement of students and their transition to further study.

UOW is home to EarlyStart, a transformational project which aims to create and enrich life opportunities for young Australians from birth to 12 years. It includes specialist teaching and research spaces, a Children's Discovery Centre and is the hub for 41 Early Start Engagement Centres which are based in rural and remote areas across NSW and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

Early Start combines research, teaching and community engagement in the earliest years of life with the aim to help children flourish and realise their potential, particularly those from vulnerable or disadvantaged backgrounds and living in regional, rural, remote communities.

Initiatives such as Early Start which target children from their early childhood may be of assistance in further helping to bridge the gap in educational achievement of students from regional, rural and remote areas of Australia.

UOW Outreach and Pathways Programs

To date, Australian Federal Government policy has had a strong focus on increasing the participation of students from under-represented backgrounds in higher education. This has resulted in Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) funding being distributed to universities to implement outreach programs with schools and community groups that aim to increase aspirations, attainment and access to higher education. These programs are of high value to school students, particularly those from equity groups, including students from rural and remote areas, to help increase awareness of their post-school options and their aspirations towards higher education.

HEPPP funding also supports students within University to successfully complete their chosen area of study and make successful transitions into the workforce. UOW emphasises the ongoing need for HEPPP funding to ensure the ongoing delivery of the various programs supported by these programs. Examples of ways in which HEPPP funding is utilised by UOW to deliver important programs to students from regional, rural and remote areas are outlined below.

UOW Outreach and Pathways activities work closely with targeted Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers and sponsored schools in the Batemans Bay, Bega, Illawarra, Shoalhaven and Southern Highlands regions to deliver a range of programs to students in these regions. Programs are delivered to students and individuals from Year 1 to Year 12 and post-school, in targeted schools and communities to build their awareness of higher education, and to help provide participants with the motivation, knowledge and skills to get there.

Programs are refined to meet the diverse needs of learners with varying levels of awareness and aspirations towards higher education. Amongst these programs is the Rural In2Uni Project, which is currently being piloted by UOW after it was awarded a National Priority Pool grant, funded through the 2016 HEPPP.

The Program involves three schools from NSW and Victoria from areas experiencing high levels of social and educational disadvantage. The Program recognises that schools in rural locations such as these have high numbers of disadvantaged students and only minimal resources to cover the costs associated with sending students away to attend on-campus programs. The Rural In2Uni Program



will identify and address the specific needs in each community through mentor delivered outreach workshops held both within the school environment and on the Bega and Batemans Bay Campuses throughout 2017.

Students in the Program will receive vital resources and information through interactive sessions designed to increase learners' awareness and confidence towards higher education, while also building the bridges to help them get into university. The outcome of the program is to develop a resource package that is transferable to other schools which high numbers of disadvantaged students in regional and remote areas. The development of such packages will change the focus of university outreach in target areas, empowering rural schools to lead such initiatives in partnership with a university.

Another HEPPP funded program which has proven effective in lifting the number of school students from rural and remote areas that go on to study at tertiary level is the In2Uni Regional Outreach Program. In 2014 UOW's Batemans Bay and Bega campuses won an Australian Rural Education Award for their In2Uni Regional Outreach Program, in recognition of projects that build links between schools and the rural community. This was the result of contributions by UOW's Bega and Batemans Bay campuses to the success of In2Uni's Rural Outreach efforts on the New South Wales South Coast region.

The program helped build awareness and aspirations toward higher education and supported students when they arrived at university. Through the Program, in 2014, the In2Uni program reached 33 schools in the Bega and Batemans Bay regions, engaging with more than 1700 students across eight programs. In addition, more than 30 UOW students from the Bega and Eurobodalla areas volunteered to be mentors in their former high schools.

It is noted that the recommendations under the new HEPPP arrangements announced in the Higher Education Reform Package place individuals from low SES and Indigenous backgrounds as the primary focus on the funding model. The funding will still be directed to Low SES and Indigenous students in rural, remote and regional areas, however this does not address the broader under representation of rural, regional and remote students in higher education. It is recommended that consideration be given for a different funding stream which targets this broader group of students, or possible that the target audiences under HEPPP be revised so that they are adequately addressed.

Inspiring students, education students about their options, and supporting student transition beyond school

As acknowledged in the previous Federal Government's National Career Development Strategy³ individuals require the skills to understand themselves, investigate career options, make decisions about education. Quality career advice can motivate students toward successful further education, training or employment and enables them to make well informed career decisions. It gives them invaluable insights into the world of work and what education and training paths they need to undertake to achieve their career goals.⁴ As part of this issue, it is noted that increased work

³ Australian Government, National Career Development Strategy:
https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/national_career_development_strategy.pdf

⁴ Career Industry Council of Australia, Media Release: Equipping the Next Generation in an increasingly complex environment, 3 May 2017, www.cica.org.au



placements and traineeships during school can broaden students' local opportunities as well as help them explore future career options. There is opportunity to adopt a more coherent approach to career development, and information services that help Australians build more productive and rewarding careers.

Career advisors, both at school and university, can help individuals transition from school to further education or work. It is important to recognise that some individuals and regions are more likely to need and benefit from more targeted career development services. UOW would welcome a career development strategy which focuses on greater integration between universities, the VET sector, high schools and industry across all regions of Australia in order to provide improved support to high school students.

Further education in regional, rural and remote areas

Access to universities, VET and other higher education facilities in regions is important to ensure students from regional, rural and remote areas are given opportunity to undertake further education beyond school.

UOW acknowledges and welcomes the Federal Government's commitment of \$15 million over four years in the Higher Education Reform Package to assist in the establishment and maintenance of up to eight community-owned, regional study hubs across mainland Australia, and looks forward to seeing further details of this initiative once criteria are released. Expansion of this Regional University Hub model has good opportunity to increase student attendance at University, overcoming the difficulties students faced when the various challenges of moving away from home to study, or having difficulty engaging effectively in online learning.

As previously noted, UOW has a number of regional campuses across NSW, including at the Shoalhaven, Southern Highlands, Batemans Bay and Bega.

Regional campuses play a significant role in strengthening teaching and learning, outreach, community engagement, social inclusion and indigenous participation. The presence of having a higher education provider in regions is also of great economic and cultural value to communities.

UOW's regional campuses aim to deliver programs with particular relevance to the employment needs of their region and its students, such as social work, allied health and education. UOW's regional campuses are typically well integrated within their region, and provide a valuable link to students and the communities in which they exist, including schools and businesses.

These campuses are primarily attended by students from surrounding regions who are not mobile, for a variety of reasons including employment, carer and other extended family commitments and financial capacity. Face to face interaction with tutors is highly valued and considered an important factor in attracting and retaining students at these regional campuses, particularly in their early years of higher education study.

Students from UOW's regional campuses typically perform well as a cohort despite a high proportion of students being from a combination of equity groups, such as low socioeconomic status backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, first in family (to attend University) and, entering with a lower average school leaver ATAR.

Whilst the delivery of programs at these campuses includes valuable face to face learning for students, these campuses are also dependent on technology and eLearning as an enabler of flexible



program delivery. It is noted that many regional students have limited, if any, access to quality internet access. This is typically more acute the more remote a student's geographical location. It is important that continued investment in IT be made to enable all students' opportunity to access to online learning.

VET providers also have an important role to play in providing further learning opportunities to students. Whilst there are a number of VET and Registered Training Organisation (RTO) providers across NSW, many rural TAFES and RTO's provide Certificate III but not Certificate IV programs. As Certificate IV qualifications are often a minimum entry requirement for entry level university courses, this creates a gap for students from such areas wanting to further their study at university level, thereby limiting the opportunity progression opportunities available to these students without the need to move away from home.

It is also noted that Certificate IV qualifications are generally significantly more expensive than Certificate III qualifications, which can be also be more prohibitive for regional students than students from urban areas.

To help address such issues, it is recommended that consideration be given to provide a greater range of Certificate IV level qualifications available to students from more remote areas and, that models where students can undertake Certificate III, Certificate IV and higher education pathways studies whilst still at school be explored. It is suggested that the Five Island Secondary School model may be applied more widely as an effective and possible more cost-effective means of achieving this, thereby improving the opportunities to students from regional, rural and remote areas.

Given the fewer number of students attending regional education centres there are typically reduced economies of scale and therefore more financial risks associated with operating such centres. It is important that Government recognise the benefits these centres provide to students and the broader economies in regional, remote and rural areas and provide appropriate support to allow them to continue to operate.

Access to quality information technology and online learning opportunities

The continued improvement of information technology across Australia provides opportunity for students from rural, regional and remote areas to access learning support and access to an increasing range of online learning opportunities, including those offered by universities.

Whilst the delivery of programs at UOW's regional campuses includes valuable face to face learning for students, these campuses are also heavily dependent on technology and eLearning as an enabler of flexible program delivery. It is noted that many regional students have limited, if any, access to quality internet access. This is typically more acute the more remote a student's geographical location.

It is important that continued efforts and resources are committed to ensure that quality, reliable and affordable information technology infrastructure is provided to all areas of Australia to enable students from regional, rural and remote areas to have access to these learning opportunities.

Whilst distance education, including online study, provides opportunity to expand the learning horizons of many students who are unable to attend higher education due to financial, social or other reasons, it is acknowledged that distance and/or online study is often considered too difficult



and ineffective for many students. Therefore, it is important that efforts are made to provide face-to-face opportunities for students from regional areas to be supported in their learning, such as the provision of regional education centres, which has already been addressed in this Submission..

Financial support to students from regional, rural and remote areas

As acknowledged in the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education Discussion Paper, many students from regional, rural and remote areas have to leave their community after completing school if they wish to undertake further education or gain employment. Anecdotal evidence strongly indicates that cost of accommodation is a major concern for potential students and their families from such areas wishing to attend University. Often, the price of at University residences or other accommodation is a barrier for these potential students.

UOW offers a number of residential scholarships to assist students from regional, rural and remote areas with the cost of their accommodation to help alleviate the financial burden for some these students who are able and elect to move away from home to undertake tertiary education,

For example, for students commencing study at UOW in 2018, the Early Admissions Accommodation Bursaries will be offered for the first time. There will be 60 \$5,000 accommodation bursaries, which are UOW funded, available to year 12 students who have received a successful early admission offer and are from regional and remote areas and 20 \$5000 accommodation bursaries available to year 12 students who have received a successful early admission offer and are from the ACT region. These scholarships provide funding towards the students first year at UOW accommodation.

There are also a number of other scholarships for students living in accommodation available, which are awarded based on both equity and excellence. Some are funded by UOW, whilst some are funded by an external sponsor. Historically, UOW's accommodation scholarships are highly sought after.

The Indigenous Student Success Programme (ISSP) scholarships are another funding mechanism useful to support selected students moving to attended higher education. These scholarships are funded by the Federal Government. Traditionally students with a location disadvantage would qualify for a lump sum to contribute to relocation costs. Prior to 2017 UOW returned a proportion of the government funding for this particular program, however in 2017 institutions are being given more flexibility on the awarding amounts, so it is anticipated that these scholarships will be able to be utilised more effectively into the future.

Whilst there are other elements of financial support, such as Austudy, available to eligible students from regional, remote and rural areas, consideration of further financial support from Government to assist students from more isolated regions would alleviate the financial burden students face when considering moving away to attend higher education, and may expand the opportunity of this group of students.



Support at UOW for students from rural and remote locations

Students from rural and remote locations are typically recognised, among other equity groups as more likely to consider leaving university prior to completion of their studies than non-equity students.

UOW offers a range of opportunities aimed at helping commencing students become accustomed to university life, to transition beyond school, build social and support networks, develop essential academic skills, and orientate themselves to available services such as the library and key staff. This includes on campus services, orientation days, the need for all students to undertake StartSmart, a compulsory subject for all UOW undergraduate students which provides Essential Academic Information Skills during the early stage of their degree.

The University offers a range of other services to students designed to support students, including:

- Career Ready Learning - a subject which offers students the opportunity to look at the labour market and potential study and career pathways. This subject is available to undergraduate students from all disciplines, and is particularly relevant for first year students from non-vocational degrees who are seeking greater clarity about career and course options.
- Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) - a free academic assistance program that utilises peer-led group study to help students succeed. The sessions are facilitated by PASS Leaders, current UOW students who have already successfully completed the subject. Sessions are designed to improve students' understanding of the subject. The sessions integrate study tools and successful exam techniques specific to that course.
- The ZOOM Mentoring program is a HEPPP funded activity currently being piloted at UOW's Shoalhaven campus to mentor and support 1st year students' transition to higher education and study. Students apply to be Mentors in the ZOOM mentoring program. They are trained, coached and supported to assist fellow students in their transition to higher education. This is done by assisting these students to navigate the complexities of being a university student and understand and respond to academic demands. Mentors encourage these students to build capacity and succeed in higher education. Anecdotal evidence from the induction workshop has been that it is proving to be worthwhile to both the students as well as mentors.

ZOOM mentors build skills in leadership, rapport building, collegiality, collaboration and networking. They are given the opportunity to identify their own communication style and learn to communicate more effectively with others through experiential learning. Another benefit includes the opportunity for reflection on their practice and professional development as a mentor, which in turn supports their career awareness and readiness to transition into the workforce. Whilst currently a pilot program, it is hoped this program will become an ongoing program which can be offered at other UOW regional campuses.

UOW is constantly striving to help increase the range of opportunities available to help increase opportunity for students from regional, rural and remote areas. It also encourages the generating of new opportunities within communities which provide support to students from these areas.

For example, UOW Cares provides opportunities for staff at UOW to make a real difference by making regular donations to charitable organisations. By giving through their pay, staff at UOW are



providing a regular funding stream for a range of community and humanitarian organisations who are focused on helping communities and individuals reach their full potential. One of the charities which UOW staff can choose to donate to is the Learning and Development Scholarship Fund. This Fund provides funding to students to undertake opportunities related to their education and reach their full potential who may otherwise be unable due to financial constraints.

Within the Shoalhaven, the Shoalhaven Education Fund provides annual grants to Shoalhaven youth aged 17 to 21 providing them greater opportunity to pursue their new careers or studies after leaving school. The fund is open to all senior high school students regardless of whether they plan on going to university, a traineeship or changing careers.

Funding is awarded by a special Committee who are comprised of individuals from the local Shoalhaven community who formed an affiliation with the Country Education Foundation of Australia to establish the Shoalhaven Education Fund in 2012.

Funds are raised within the community and donations from industry. Many UOW Shoalhaven students have been recipients. Just one example which comes to mind is a 2nd year Bachelor of Nursing student who was able to utilise her scholarship to pay for a laptop, textbooks transport and accommodation costs whilst on placements. She was awarded a scholarship during her 2nd and 3rd years of study at UOW's Shoalhaven campus.

SUMMARY

In summary, UOW emphasises the need to ensure that all students be provided with quality education and given opportunity to achieve equitable learning outcomes regardless of where they live. Key issues raised throughout this Submission for consideration as part of this Review include:

- The importance of HEPPP funding, and the need for its continuation to ensure the ongoing delivery its associated programs.
- The importance of well integrated career development and support at schools to motivate students towards further education, training or employment, and enable them to make well informed career decisions.
- Emphasis of the importance of regional educational facilities, such as university and VET to enable regional, rural and remote students' greater opportunity to directly access further education opportunities.
- The need to ensure the provision of high quality and affordable information technology to all Australians to provide opportunity to access online education and learning opportunities.
- The importance of the provision of adequate financial assistance to students from regional, rural and remote areas to support them with the cost of relocating and living should they move to undertake appropriate further education.
- Opportunity exists to explore ways to develop scholarships and other development opportunities through the assistance of local industry and other philanthropic support to assist students from regional, rural and remote areas undertake further study.



FURTHER INFORMATION

The University would welcome further opportunities to elaborate upon, or further clarify, the matters raised within this submission, as may be required by the Committee. Please do not hesitate to contact the UOW Director, Government Relations (Mr Canio Fierravanti) on 42215931 or via canio_fierravanti@uow.edu.au.

