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Quality Initial Teacher Education Review.

Prepared by:

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RE: There is a need to include specific preparation for teaching in rural, regional and remote schools in Initial Teacher Education.

1. The [Rural Educationa and Communities](#) research group, in the [Centre for Sustainable Communities](#) at the University of Canberra engages in research realting to education in non-metropolitan communities. In this submission we draw to the panels attention the **lack of preparation for teachers for rural, regional and remote communities**. A consistent theme emerging from our engagement with communities, school leaders and teachers in non-metropolitan communities is the differences of living and working in these places. While there is general agreement that elements of effective practice may exist across the profession, how these are enacted in different contexts is often overlooked. The communities, school leaders and teachers we work with consistently, and overwhelmingly, tell us that the way the generic practice ‘looks here’ is different to the city. This is why specific preparation is needed, just as exists for rural health.

Background:

2. Our use of ‘rurality’ here is based on the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ABS, 2011) for school geolocation - a geographically based definition that differentiates areas from major cities through to remote areas, based on distance, population density and access to services.
3. The recent Independent Review into Rural, Regional and Remote Education noted that 29.3 per cent of Australian students attend schools in ‘regional, rural or remote’ contexts are thinly spread – across 47 per cent of all schools. While there are large numbers of Independent and Catholic systemic schools in metropolitan areas, government or State Schools make up 84 per cent of all regional, rural and remote schools, and almost all schools in outer-regional or remote areas (IRRRRE 2018).
4. Staffing Australia’s rural, regional and remote schools remains a major challenge. This is true both for recruitment and retention of teachers and school leaders. This perennial problem also impacts student outcomes and post school pathways (IRRRRE 2018).
5. Despite their significant number, and perennial challenges, rural, regional and remote communities are ignored in the Professional Teaching Standards, and Initial Teacher Education program requirements. Neithr of these draw specific attention to the needs of rural, regional and remote students. Instead, we assume they are included in the few references to ‘diverse’ culturally and/or socio-economically. This is ambiguous and conflates the experience of being rural as one of socio-economic status or diversity. This is inaccurate and overlooks that rurality is a distinct way of being.



6. The [Rural Education and Communities](#) research group has a track record of significant research over the last 20 years. In addition to peer-reviewed research publications, the research group has produced numerous open access reports on the issue pertaining to the staffing of rural, regional and remote schools in Australia. Of note for this inquiry are:
 - [Researching the schoolhouse: Rethinking research on the staffing of rural, remote and isolated schools in Australia \(2000-2019\)](#).
 - [Incentivising the Profession: A national mapping of incentives to attract and retain staff in Australian non-metropolitan communities](#).
 - [Revisiting the schoolhouse: A literature review on staffing rural, remote and isolated schools in Australia 2004-2016](#).
 - In work in preparation we note that research on rural health workforce issues directly parallels rural education. However, rural health attracts specific attention and education does not.
7. The need to prepare teachers specifically for rural, regional and remote communities has been mentioned since Schools Commission report in 1988, the HREOC inquiry in 2000 through to the recent Independent Review into Rural, Regional and Remote Education.
8. Numerous state and federally funded research programs have consistently called for specific preparation for rural school. The most significant being 'Places and Spaces: The NSW Rural [Teacher] Education Project' (NSW DoE 2004-8); 'Renewing rural and regional teacher education curriculum' (Commonwealth 2008-11); 'TERRAnova: Renewing Rural teacher Education for Rural and Regional Australia' (ARC 2010-12)
9. In 1984, Rawlinson's NSW review into rural schooling found no specific rural preparation in pre-service education programs.
10. In 1998 another study by Watson found that 88% of pre-service teacher education graduates had received no preparation of any kind for working in rural schools in NSW, with a figure of 84% similarly reported in WA.
11. Boylan's examination of programs in NSW found that only three of 11 institutions provided any form of attention to rural education, and that in two of these three programs this was elective study only, a finding re-confirmed by White in 2008.
12. In 2010, with reference to all Australian undergraduate programs, Boylan, found only one university with a compulsory rural education unit, and only three with electives. The option for a rural professional experience placement was generally available, but not compulsory, or even an option within standard course structures.

2020 update:

13. In a recent paper (under review) our team has examined the current situation.
14. A total of 47 institutions was identified on the AITSL website in mid-2019, however at the time of data collection one was no longer offering ITE and so was excluded, resulting in a final number of 46. We searched the outline of every teacher education course as published on each university website, to produce a 'snapshot' study of the field as of February 2020 and confirmed our findings across the sample in early 2021. All the



selected unit text descriptions were screened using lexical content analysis to identify the presence of ‘rural’ or these related synonyms as evidence of engagement with rural issues in a unit.

15. In spite of explicit policy direction that government should “...work with initial teacher education providers to support them to include specific content relating to teaching in rural and remote schools in teacher education courses” (NSW DEC 2013, p. 12), it remains the case that very few teachers enter the profession having been prepared for teaching in a rural community. Table 1 provides a summary overview of our findings, which we go on to discuss and elaborate with examples from the data.

Table 1. Tally of Australian Higher Education institutions promoting rural teaching in Initial Teacher Education

STATE	No. of institutions offering Initial Teacher Ed.#	No. of institutions advertising rural focus in <i>Good Universities Guide</i> ¹ #	No. advertising rural teaching in top level Faculty or Course Overview##	No. advertising compulsory rural teaching units in academic curriculum #	No. of institutions offering compulsory units on social difference where rurality is named as an equity issue##	No. of institutions offering rural focus in elective academic unit (no. of units offered) #	No. of institutions advertising rural placement option for professional experience#
		Institutions (Courses)	U'grad and/or P'grad	U'grad and/or P'grad	Institutions (Units)	Institutions (Units)	U'grad and/or P'grad
ACT	1	-	-	-	1	1 (2)	1
NSW	14*	2 (4)	1	-	1	-	5
NT	1**	-	-	-	-	-	1
QLD	8	2 (5)	1	-	-	-	7
SA	4	-	1	-	1	1(1)	2
TAS	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
VIC	11	1 (1)	-	-	-	2(3)	5
WA	6***	2 (5)	-	-	-	-	4
TOTAL	46	7 (15)	3	0	3	4(6)	26

*Australian Catholic University, with campuses in Qld and Victoria, is included under NSW.

**Batchelor College is included with CDU as its education degrees are offered from there.

*** University of Notre Dame, with a campus in NSW, is included under WA.

This includes undergrad and postgrad teacher education courses for Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary sectors.

This refers to discrete subjects, see discussion below related to limits of subject availability offering across EC, Primary and Secondary, undergrad and postgrad courses.

16. We could not find *any* teacher education course in Australia with a *compulsory academic unit* dedicated to preparing teachers for rural or remote communities. Even though all states and significant numbers of institutions are promoting practicum and teaching placements in rural areas, this remains a significant omission. We argue that because the AITSL standards (2011, 2013) ignore rurality, it is not surprising that institutions seek only to minimally meet these standards in this regard without a regulatory environment that acknowledges rural and remote students.

¹ <https://www.gooduniversitiesguide.com.au/course-provider>



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