



Dear Expert Advisory Group,

Please find answers from Wodonga Institute of TAFE - the Australian Large Training Provider of the Year - from regional Australia 😊

Challenge A: There are fewer study options available in RRR areas

1. What opportunities exist to expand options for further study in RRR areas?
 - Making provisions for the lifting/guaranteeing of CSP caps for regional university campuses and encouraging TAFEs to work with Regional Universities to deliver diploma to degree pathways.
 - Genuine commitment to the regions by TAFE (needs Government support) to address the costs of running a great TAFE in the regions, under thin market delivery and investment to ensure TAFEs keep up with schools in terms of technology and facilities.
 - Cease funding that is based on politics and provide equitable funding for all students in all states.
 - Support the development of new industry led diplomas in areas such as Applied Agriculture or Engineering Technology.
2. What potential is there for universities, vocational training providers and other service providers to better work together in RRR areas, including opportunities to expand service offerings and better support articulation between VET and higher education?

We had a fabulous model called D2D (Diploma to Degree) that guaranteed regional students a pathway from TAFE to University – CSP caps caused our regional University partner (LTU) to close the program and remove the guarantee. We still have sound articulation pathways in place for LTU and CSU but these are not as effective as a guaranteed pathway. We even sought to build the first ‘student hub’ that formally linked Wodonga TAFE to La Trobe University Wodonga campus and provided a ‘one stop’ shop for assessment of all students for all tertiary pathways, in a non-competitive space where the students best individual pathway took priority. Look at the attached brief – this has many of the answers, but the D2D program collapsed when the CSP caps were introduced and the business case to integrate the TAFE and Uni (via a new student hub) wasn’t funded by State government in the last budget.

Challenge B: Relocating RRR students face significant financial, emotional and social challenges.

3. What financial supports work best for students from RRR backgrounds, including those who choose to relocate?
 - Regional students need to be able to access HE in the cities, due to a lack of adequate provision in the RRR areas – students and their parents are financially punished for living away from a University – why ‘means test’ parents – RRR students (or parents) shouldn’t face additional costs of University study simply because of where they live. Funding should

be provided for all RRR students, irrespective of parental means, for the additional costs of study away from home – ie actual accommodation costs and travel costs to study.

- Free TAFE in Victoria is helping to make VET affordable and accessible for all – but the challenges of cross-border and the different State TAFE policies make for an unfair and inequitable solution for students and businesses operating in a cross border setting such as Albury Wodonga. Commonwealth and State Governments need to work together on education – create zones around major regional cities where TAFEs can take students, trainees and apprentices based upon quality and free choice. The State borders and different policies support anti-competitive behaviour and create artificial barriers to educational participation that are quite ridiculous for students and industry.

4. What forms of support might be useful in helping students from RRR backgrounds to continue with their tertiary study?

I think we need to explore innovative options to test what works, tuition scholarships are OK but sometimes we need to help with more specific individual needs such as childcare support, transport support, ICT and NBN connectivity, even accommodation.

5. How can universities assist RRR students to feel like they belong on their campus?

It's not all about Universities! Enable your TAFEs as this will attract a whole new cohort, then support students through TAFE to University, through dedicated support programs that introduce them to the different style of learning they will face – build their confidence and self-belief, hold joint functions, share facilities and venues, minimise the risk of losing someone on the pathway. We can do this – we just need support!

Challenge C: Raising aspirations for tertiary education

6. What actions would help to raise aspirations and support informed career choices for students from RRR backgrounds?

We need to work together to help shape the influencers and the students – it needs an investment in schools to properly fund professional careers advisors, not teacher without a portfolio doing their best. Career advice must be linked to jobs and we need to expose students to all tertiary options in a balanced way – raising the profile of VET and making it a viable first choice option alongside University, rather than a perceived second or last choice. Universities, TAFEs and Schools need to work together and closer with Industry to provide career and employment tasters – we need to expose young folk to all their options and then support an informed decision. We need to commence career advice sooner in Years 8 and 9.

Challenge D: RRR often experience multiple forms of disadvantage

7. What practical steps can be taken to support RRR students who experience multiple forms of disadvantage?

This needs a number of targeted flexible solutions such as work based training, mentoring, scholarships, childcare, travel support, purchase of texts and materials support etc – we need to

research the barriers and test solutions to see what actually makes a difference.

8. How can we better support Indigenous people from RRR areas to access and succeed in tertiary education?

We find inclusion and immersion into courses a better way than dedicated indigenous courses but again we need a flexible set of golf clubs that we can draw upon to meet an individual need.

Challenge E: Attracting people and jobs to RRR areas

9. How can tertiary education providers further stimulate economic growth in RRR areas?

We need to promote further government decentralisation at State and Federal level to support regional growth, linked to this I see a role in the area of Applied Research (as is the case in Canada and Europe) where tertiary institutes have industry within their campus locations bringing education and industry together with government support to work on problems and solutions. This can be linked to specialist capabilities such as agriculture.

10. What actions would further strengthen and increase the attractiveness of regional universities?

Regional Universities need to offer full courses and manage thin market delivery, via technology and smart classrooms – the same is true for TAFEs – no need for a RRR TAFE to run Cyber courses – just connect via smart technology to allow for delivery remotely.

11. What policies would attract more metropolitan and international students to study at RRR areas, including regional universities and campuses?

I am very keen to promote RRR areas to international and metropolitan students. For international students, in particular, regional cities offer many advantages:

- Our cities are overcrowded and expensive.
- Many students in the cities don't get a full immersion into Australian community life.
- Opportunities to speak English are greater noting many international students, in the cities, live with other international students in a very multi-cultural environment.
- Regional TAFEs offer much cheaper accommodation, home stay and study costs.
- International students help with community diversity and support businesses through part time work.
- Regional areas can specialise in particular niche capabilities such as agriculture, horticulture, transport and logistics.

Challenge F: Implementing and monitoring a national strategy

12. Would there be value in establishing a National Regional Education Commissioner to oversee the Strategy and, if so, what should their role be?

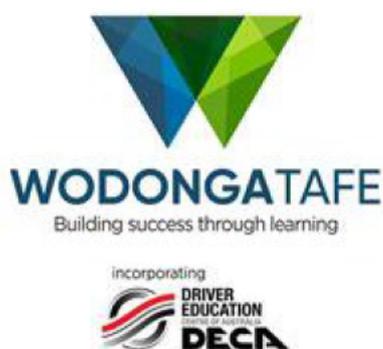
Sadly I fear this would be a waste of time, unless they were empowered to fix the vagaries of the different State and Federal educational policies and the legacy issues that surround the lack of

equity and balance between University and TAFE pathways in each State – the system is already over complicated and overly bureaucratic for a relatively small national population. The different State and Federal policies around TAFE and Universities hinder our country's educational progress and equitable outcomes for RRR students – we should seek for education to be a bi-partisan priority and reduce the bureaucracy. Many of our providers are motivated by money rather than social responsibility. Servicing the needs of RRR areas and helping to address regional disadvantage, and very poor RRR tertiary participation rates, requires a strong bi-partisan approach that acknowledges that remote delivery needs better funding support to deliver a positive and equitable outcome. The regional educational strategy needs aligning with a more general regional strategy that supports specific to area applied research (creating eco-systems between industry, education and community) and the further decentralisation of government agencies to support those specialist areas and create regional sustainable growth. With the right mandate and the support of State and Federal politics, the commissioner's role could be a game changer but we don't want to create a white elephant or toothless tiger.

13. How should success be measured? What goals and targets, including for tertiary education attainment, should be considered both at a national and individual community level?

An impossible question to answer well – success can be measured by participations rates, student satisfaction, employer satisfaction, job outcomes, community feedback etc. RRR areas are very well connected with their communities and each has its own unique challenges, so no 'one cap' fits all approach would work – just a genuine commitment to increase participation with a variety of tools to help deliver and the ability to be flexible in support and delivery mechanisms.

kind regards Mark



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Wodonga Institute of TAFE acknowledges all the Traditional Owners and custodians of the lands on which we stand and pays respect to their Ancestors and Elders, past, present and future.

