

National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy

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Introduction

James Cook University (JCU) supports the development of a National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy and welcomes the opportunity to put forward action-oriented and practical suggestions to address the six challenges under the consideration of the Expert Advisory Group. JCU also supports the submissions provided by the IRU and the Queensland Widening Tertiary Participation Consortium.

JCU recognises that there is extensive diversity within Regional, Rural and Remote (RRR) communities due to the population, demographic profile, dominant industries, economic prosperity and prevailing social and cultural values in each location, and this impacts on the personal and structural obstacles facing those living in RRR areas to participate in post-secondary education. It would be unwise to assume that all RRR communities exhibit the same characteristics and that everyone living outside of major metropolitan centres experience the same level of disadvantage in accessing post-secondary education opportunities.

Furthermore, it is simplistic to view the landscape as either metropolitan or RRR and infer that there is a deficit to living in RRR communities and a benefit in living in metropolitan areas. Regional, rural and remote areas offer an attractive value proposition and JCU attracts students from other country areas throughout Australia as well as metropolitan areas seeking a more relaxed lifestyle and authentic Australian experience.

JCU has identified three distinct groups living in RRR areas, on which we should focus in terms of access and participation rates and attainment levels. Each of these groups experiences different barriers to participation in post-secondary education:

1. *School students/leavers* – those currently at school or who have left within the last 2-3 years who would consider relocating to undertake further study;
2. *Non-School leavers* – those who have finished formal schooling more than three years ago who do not wish to, or are unable to, leave their community in order to study; and
3. *Professional workforce* – those currently working in RRR areas, or considering working in RRR areas, who require continued professional development and incentives to practice and deliver quality services in these communities.

James Cook University

JCU was established in 1970 to provide educational opportunities for the people of northern Queensland and in 2017, four out of every five domestic students studying at JCU were from a regional or remote area¹. JCU also has one of the highest proportions of Indigenous students at an Australian university with six per cent of domestic students identifying as Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

¹ 12,340 of 14,827 domestic students studying at JCU had a regional or remote first location listed as their permanent home address at the commencement of study. This represents 83 per cent of JCU's domestic student body. Data sourced from *Equity - Participation Numbers for Domestic Students at Table A and B Institutions, 2009 to 2017* accessed at <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/51366> on 28 January 2019.

JCU plays a vital role in the economic development of RRR communities throughout northern Queensland and beyond, by providing opportunities to participate in higher education as well as encouraging students to live and work in the region as part of the professional workforce. The University's intent is to develop graduates and discoveries that make a difference in the lives of those living in the tropics and has focused its course portfolio on responding to the workforce needs of the region and providing students with the skills to contribute and succeed in rural, remote and under-served communities. JCU is delivering on its mission and 75 per cent of our graduates' gain employment in the region north of Mackay following graduation².

However, we acknowledge that there is more work to be done in raising the access, participation and attainment rates of students from RRR areas in post-secondary education and look forward to working with the Expert Advisory Group and other educational providers to achieve this.

Challenge 1 - Fewer study options in RRR areas

Opportunities to work with other educational providers to expand offerings to RRR areas

Regional universities play a vital role in enabling access to tertiary study to those who wish to study locally and for those who cannot afford, or do not wish, to relocate to a metropolitan area. While regional universities have extensive campus networks and study centres (JCU's footprint includes more than 40 sites), low population density means it is financially unviable to offer a full portfolio of courses in each location.

JCU has worked extensively with TAFE Queensland, particularly TAFE North over several years to expand educational opportunities for those living in RRR communities. The most prominent exemplar of the success of this partnership is the [Remote Area Teacher Education Program \(RATEP\)](#) which enables Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students to become early childhood and primary school teachers while remaining in their home communities. JCU also has an extensive articulation agreement with TAFE Queensland, including both dual awards and credit transfer arrangements across areas such as business, social work, hospitality, law and nursing, and works closely with TAFE North to market these arrangements.

JCU agrees that there is potential to expand offerings to those living in RRR communities, particularly non-school leavers who do not wish to relocate, through an inter-governmental and community-based approach where providers work in partnership rather than competition to meet the varied educational needs of RRR communities. To this end, JCU is having exploratory discussions with other training providers (such as TAFE Queensland and Education Queensland), regional councils and authorities, and employers (such as the Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service) about working closer together to develop a joined-up approach to post-secondary education. One possible approach is:

1. Undertake a needs-based assessment of the capacity and capability of interested community members in order to understand the most appropriate pathways and delivery options for the target group;
2. Facilitate the development of Individual Learning Plans for community members which could be for a vocational or university pathway, or both;
3. Deliver face to face programs of foundational academic literacy, numeracy and digital skills (enabling programs) for those students interested in pursuing tertiary study, at times and places that facilitate student access;

² James Cook University, Facts and Figures 2017, page 15, accessed at https://www.jcu.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/492692/FINAL-Web-Version-JCU-Facts-and-Figures-2017-amended.pdf on 28 January 2019

4. Provide in-place tutoring or other types of supported learning opportunities to enable students to pursue their chosen course; and
5. Monitor progress of students toward achieving their career aspirations and provide counselling where required.

This approach to meeting the needs of the community fits with the policy intent of the Regional Study Hubs program but would be a fit-for-purpose response, recognising the diversity of RRR communities in northern Australia. The proposed model would contribute to an improved use of existing physical infrastructure such as schools, TAFE colleges, local government facilities and JCU study locations, while using tailored pedagogy and delivery modes, such as block mode and in-place tutorial assistance to meet the specific needs of students. To succeed, tailored support from funders and regulators is required to fund a comprehensive package that would include the conducting of a needs assessment, adequately funded places across enabling, sub-bachelor and undergraduate levels, and mechanisms to monitor progress. JCU would be prepared to participate in a pilot of this approach in RRR areas in northern Queensland.

The allocation and appropriate funding of Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP) to enable the delivery to small numbers of people living in RRR is crucial to the success of these initiatives. At the current time, enabling programs to develop the capability and capacity of students are delivered in regional centres such as Townsville and Cairns, where the critical mass of students makes them economically viable. This makes them less accessible to students living in RRR areas who cannot relocate to study. Institutions delivering to students in RRR areas must be funded adequately to allow programs to be offered to small numbers of students in each location.

As mentioned above, JCU has been working closely with the Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service to assist the organisation upskill its workforce. A draft concept framework has been developed to show the pathways for students and this is attached at Appendix A. This project will involve extensive collaboration with TAFE.

While the focus to date has been on providing access to undergraduate education, consideration should also be given to providing incentives to those already with a professional qualification living in RRR communities, or considering relocation to a RRR area, to access postgraduate programs to advance their specialist knowledge and contribute to equitable service delivery in RRR communities. This could be achieved through the allocation of Commonwealth Supported Places in postgraduate courses which focus on skills relevant to practicing in RRR communities.

JCU has also been a key partner in the [Allied Health Rural Generalist](#) program, a collaboration between the Queensland Department of Health and the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) which provides professional development to support early career allied health professionals working in rural and remote communities to improve their rural, generalist service and improve job satisfaction. The program is delivered in a modular format (not a complete subject) in an external mode and supported by work integrated learning. The modules can be credited toward a Graduate Diploma of Rural Generalist Practice but can also be viewed as micro-credentials which provide the training when and where required.

Key points and policy implications:

- Develop funding models that enable educational providers to undertake needs assessments and deliver tailored programs (industry and student focused) in RRR locations where the student numbers are small;
- Incentivise collaborations between educational institutions such as secondary schools, TAFE and universities so that those living in RRR areas have an integrated educational journey;
- Allocate adequate Commonwealth Supported Places from enabling through to postgraduate level to enable regional universities to deliver programs in RRR areas; and

- Consider innovative models and financial incentives to ensure that the professional workforce in RRR areas have access to continued professional development opportunities.

Challenge 2 - Relocation: financial, emotional and social challenges

What financial support works best for students from RRR backgrounds, including those who choose to relocate?

JCU supports the provision of adequate income support through Youth Allowance and Rental Assistance to enable students to undertake and complete post-secondary education.

JCU believes that scholarships are an effective supplementary mechanism to support individual students to attend university, but suggests the following:

- That dedicated scholarships targeted at students from RRR areas be introduced;
- That the application process and eligibility criteria are simple so that the scholarship can be awarded efficiently if the criteria are met;
- That scholarships are offered concurrently with the offer to study so that students know they have a place at university/TAFE and financial assistance;
- That scholarships include a relocation allowance that is paid on the acceptance of the offer to assist with the costs of relocating (this could be reimbursed if the student did not continue past census date); and
- Scholarship payments are made over the duration of the course to enable students to complete their study.

JCU argues that regional universities should have greater access to scholarship funds targeted at students from RRR areas on the basis that regional universities have less financial flexibility than large metropolitan universities to support scholarships and that students who leave regional areas to study are less likely to return. Our experience has been that metropolitan universities with large scholarship pools are able to scan northern Queensland for the highest achieving school leavers (low SES and otherwise) and provide scholarship incentives that JCU is unable to match. Whilst student mobility and choice play an important part in educational journeys, uneven university playing fields results in a form of market failure with a drain of talented students away from the region.

The Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships announced by the Coalition in June 2016 are being offered for the first time at JCU in 2019 and we hope that these will be successful in attracting and retaining RRR students in the STEM disciplines.

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

The proposed inter-governmental and community-based approach outlined above (under Challenge 1) provides a model that would allow those living in RRR areas, who cannot relocate to access further study due to family or employment commitments to access post-secondary education. This model would facilitate the delivery of tailored training and education in situ, through a combination of delivery modes and a partnership model with other providers. However, adequate funding and allocation of Commonwealth Supporting Places are required to achieve this.

Scholarships or grants to assist students undertake compulsory placements would also be beneficial to students, particularly those from RRR and low SES backgrounds. JCU prioritises hands-on, practical experiences for students, which is one of the ways we maintain a strong record in graduate employment and employer satisfaction. In serving our region JCU encourages rural, remote and community placements and more than 5000 students undertake placements and projects during their degrees. The cost, financially and practically, is too high for many students, particularly in degrees such as Social Work and Nursing which have significant practical requirements (for example, 1000 hours of placement/fieldwork in Social Work). Being unable to afford this valuable and necessary experience can affect progression. Previous experience in the sector has demonstrated that mobility scholarships ranging from \$1000 to \$5000 can improve completion rates for students, particularly those from low SES groups who may have compounding factors influencing their uptake of RRR placements, for example financial, family, housing or geographical remoteness.

How can universities assist RRR to feel like they belong on campus?

JCU acknowledges that students who relocate to study at the Townsville or Cairns campus often feel a lack of a sense of belonging to their new city, which can trigger feelings of isolation and disconnection. In addition to those relocating, more than half of our commencing domestic students each year are the first in their family to attend university and require support to transition to the university environment. The following initiatives are in place at JCU and have been successful in supporting commencing students:

- Pre-arrival information about what to expect at University so that students can be prepared and transition successfully. [getready4uni](#) is an online resource that provides essential information about commencing university study for both on campus and external students.;
- A well-established [student mentor program](#) that matches experienced, successful students (Mentors) with commencing undergraduate students from the same course of study during [Orientation Week](#) to assist in creating social and academic support networks for new students. Student mentors provide campus tours including of key student contact points, provide introductions to relevant service providers such as counselling and learning support and act as a buddy for the first study period;
- The provision of a suite of [pathways programs](#) that enable students to build their capacity for university study;
- The [Indigenous Education and Research Centre](#) has specialised education and socio-emotional support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These services are designed for special entry Indigenous students to increase their capacities to be successful in degree programs; and
- A range of [academic support services](#) including learning advisors to provide individual assistance, peer assisted learning groups and college support officers, all which enable early intervention if a student is struggling in adjusting to university life.

Planned initiatives include:

- The development of a JCU Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy (to be developed in 2019) to support the transition and retention of students from RRR locations;
- Development and delivery of an extra session as part of Orientation focused on 'Living Away From Home' (topics could include homesickness, culture shock, reducing social isolation and be targeted to students relocating to Townsville/Cairns for their studies). This session would be held before the existing Touring Townsville/Cairns trip, so students could receive an orientation to their new city of residence, identify key landmarks (medical, recreation and shopping centres, cafes etc), and connect with fellow newcomers to the region;
- Expand new Parents and Partners website to include 'Living away from home' advice for parents who are supporting students relocating from RRR areas and

- Enhance a sense of belonging through further investment in student life and social activities

The decline in Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) funding in recent years has impacted on our capacity to deliver comprehensive services to support transition into university and build the social and emotional supports that help students achieve success. Reductions in HEPPP funding have impacted the number and quality of supplementary social activities and outreach services that JCU can provide to students to achieve a sense of belonging. Furthermore, the uncertainty of annual HEPPP allocations has made it extremely difficult to retain quality staff in contract-based student support roles as many leave for more secure employment.

Summary points and policy implications:

- Introduce dedicated scholarships for students from RRR areas that can be awarded in a timely fashion to provide certainty for students commencing study;
- Prioritise scholarships for regional universities so that talented RRR students can be retained in the regions;
- Provide secure and long-term funding education providers to offer more programs at smaller sites with small intakes of students, essentially taking education to RRR communities rather than expecting them to relocate;
- Introduce a financial assistance scheme to assist students to complete mandatory clinical or work placements away from their normal place of residence to improve completion rates; and
- Provide secure and adequate HEPPP funding support for the delivery of quality programs to assist RRR students adapt to university life and create a sense of belonging.

Challenge 3 - Raising aspirations

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

A multi-pronged and long-term approach is required to raise aspirations and support career choices for students from RRR backgrounds. This includes on-campus experiential programs, outreach programs and providing students and graduates with the skills and competence to work and live in RRR communities.

As the Framing Paper indicates barriers include a lack of knowledge about universities and what they do, confidence of prospective students in their own ability to succeed at university, few role models who have attended university and a sense that university study is unaffordable. Furthermore, students in rural and remote areas may have limited access to high-level subjects such as Maths B, Maths C, Physics or Chemistry due to small class sizes or insufficient specialist teachers.

JCU has actively worked in RRR areas to raise aspirations and make university study an accessible option for students. Raising the aspirations of school students is potentially easier, however a gap exists in making tertiary study accessible for those who have left school and are now seeking other career options. An overview of JCU's programs and suggestions are provided below.

Experiential Programs

In 2016, JCU undertook a significant body of research to map the student journey, with a focus on school leavers. This work found that there was a need for contextualized student engagement activity across years 7-12, with opportunities to access on-campus university engagement activity to allow students and their parents to gain an understanding of the university environment and the career opportunities available

through tertiary study. This early exposure also encourages students to select appropriate level subjects in years 10, 11 and 12 to provide the foundational knowledge, and prerequisites required for their chosen university course. This is key to ensuring that students do not perceive they are “locked out” of university upon completion of secondary school because they don’t have the necessary pre-requisites.

JCU University Experience

JCU offers a Year 8, 10 and year 12 University Experience programs to all schools from Mackay North with the Year 12 program having a residential component for students from outside of Townsville or Cairns. While JCU subsidizes the programs as much as possible, financial constraints prevent some students from participating. Ensuring schools can send their students to these or other on-campus events is a key part of breaking down the barriers and perceptions of the accessibility of university and could be supported through the provision of financial support to schools to assist with the costs associated with attending such as transport and additional staffing.

Winter and Summer Schools

In 2018 JCU’s Indigenous Education and Research Centre delivered two specific programs targeted at raising aspiration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

- a 5-day [Winter School](#) program held during the July school holidays where school students in Years 10, 11 and 12 lived on campus and took part in academic lectures and team-building activities in an interactive program that enabled them to meet University staff and students and form bonds with other students in the program.
- a 3-week [Summer school pre-entry program](#) that provided intensive preparation for prospective Indigenous students who had completed Year 12 QCE or HSC requirements and were seeking to gain entry into a nursing, midwifery and medical programs at JCU. The Pre-Program also served as an alternative selection process for students who had not achieved the require entrance score for the course.

These programs were very successful and could be broadened to students from other disadvantaged backgrounds, if adequate funding was available.

Discipline specific partnership programs

JCU also partners with other private and public organisations to deliver programs targeted at raising the aspirations of students in regional and remote areas and Indigenous students including:

- Expanding Global Education Outcomes in Tropical and North Queensland – partnership with the Queensland Department of Education and Training that involves more than 200 students in Years 5-9 across 28 schools.
- [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Marine Science](#) – a collaboration with various government and private organisations encouraging students in Years 9 and 10 to consider a career in Marine Science. This program is also supported by the US Consulate’s office.
- CSIRO/BHP Year 10 Indigenous STEM national program.
- TAGAI State College P-12 Indigenous STEM program for remote students

Off Campus outreach programs

JCU is part of the Queensland Widening Participation Consortium targeted at raising aspiration levels of low SES students. As part of this consortia JCU conducts school visits to selected schools throughout north and far north Queensland, as well as schools in the Mount Isa and Gulf regions to raise awareness and aspiration to attend university. Trend data has demonstrated success in student applications to tertiary study where sustained engagement with universities is undertaken, for low SES and Indigenous students. Under the

consortia agreement, JCU serves the greatest number of RRR schools in Queensland and the high cost of travel and accommodation has significantly influenced the level of engagement. With the reduction in HEPPP funding there has been a significant impact on our ability to engage with our most rural and remote schools on a sustained basis. A consideration could be a RRR loading in HEPPP allocation for regional universities operating outreach with schools and communities.

Role Models

Student Ambassadors

JCU employs current students to assist with marketing and outreach activities to talk to school students about their own journey to university and experiences while at university. Where possible ambassadors are matched to the marketing activity, considering aspects such as social and cultural background. They are also employed as ambassadors to engage school students on our on-campus activities and residential programs.

Developing the Professional Workforce for RRR communities

As a regionally based tertiary institution, JCU places great emphasis on regional and cultural competency through our Indigenous Studies program that is available for all students to participate in as well the Bachelor of Education curriculum. JCU Education degrees include core subjects focussed on preparing teachers for living and working in regional, rural and remote schools and communities. JCU works with pre-placement teacher cohorts to enable students to see regional, rural and remote teaching as a specialist career, overcoming some of the perceptions of such postings as 'time served'. This educational focus, and our students' related preparedness, is reflected in the report of The Queensland Teachers College 2016 that found that 81.36 per cent of graduates from JCU go on to work in outer regional areas. Only 8.18 per cent of our graduates take up appointments in major Australian cities – the lowest of any Queensland university. JCU graduates are playing a vital role in providing enhanced educational opportunities in RRR areas by delivering quality teaching from early childhood through to senior secondary levels.

The same is true for other professions with the Graduate Destination Survey reporting consistently that 75 per cent of JCU graduates secure employment in northern Queensland (the area of north of Mackay). Perhaps JCU's most well-known strategy retaining students in the region is the undergraduate medicine program which has recruitment policies to address the health needs of regional Queensland, including selection policies favouring rural origin applicants and providing students with early and repeated exposure to rural experiences during training. This method has proven effective, with two thirds of JCU Medicine graduates going on to practice outside of major cities.

In short, students who train in the region, stay in the region and provide role models for those living in RRR communities to pursue post-secondary study.

Raising aspiration of non-school leavers

Raising the aspiration of those who have completed their schooling and are living in RRR areas is more challenging as these people will often have other responsibilities such as family and employment that prevent them leaving their community to study. The approach outlined under Challenge 1 provides an opportunity to achieve this.

Key points and policy implications:

- A combination of on-campus experiential and outreach programs delivered over the long-term are necessary to raise the aspiration level of school students living in RRR areas. JCU has initiated and delivered successful programs targeted at students from Years 5 to 12 (aged 10-17) which could be expanded. However, the high costs associated with travelling to and from geographically remote

schools and communities needs to be considered. Hence, additional and sustained funding is required to enable those from RRR communities to participate fully;

- Raising the aspiration of non-school leavers to participate in post-secondary education requires an approach as outlined under challenge 1 which considers that they often can't leave their location for extended periods of time due to family and work commitments; and
- Students who train in the region, stay in the region and regional universities should be supported to attract and retain students from regional areas.

Challenge 4 - Multiple disadvantage: regional, rural and remote

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

The suggestions listed above under challenge 2 and 3 provide practical steps and are applicable to students facing multiple disadvantage.

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

The JCU Indigenous Education and Research Centre has developed an evidence-based model under the leadership of the Pro Vice Chancellor, Indigenous Education and Strategy, Professor Martin Nakata. This model is designed to ensure students entering undergraduate programs are academically prepared to undertake study. An overview of the model is provided below:

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| Raising Aspiration | Community outreach activities, partnerships with other organisations for example ATSIMS, CSIRO, Talgai, Winter School to raise aspiration and provide role models for university study, |
| Academic Preparation | Activities with primary and secondary schools to assist students to select appropriate subjects at school which prepare them for university study. |
| Integrated Pathways | Students have a range of pathway options depending on their level of academic preparedness. Options include JCU enabling and diploma programs, TAFE certificates and diplomas, Summer Pre-Entry school. |
| Careers and Course Advice | Staff in the Indigenous Education and Research Centre assist students to complete the application and enrolment forms to ensure a smooth transition into university. |
| Timely financial assistance | Students are allocated a Commonwealth Scholarship upon enrolment if they meet the criteria. This automatic allocation enables students to gain financial assistance to relocate or settle into university. Students are also assisted to apply for ABSTUDY or other financial assistance they may be eligible for. |
| Welcoming and culturally safe environment | Dedicated Indigenous Centre with welcoming staff, dedicated computer laboratories and places for staff to interact with students, triage to other university services such as counselling and careers advice. |

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| Timely academic and tutorial support | Students are allocated to an Academic Support Officer who develops individual learning plan and ensures that students have access to tutorial assistance and learning support. Students' progress is monitored through a case management system so that timely interventions can be made if the student is identified at being at risk of failing or withdrawing. |
| Celebrating Success | An annual awards night is held each year to celebrate the achievements of students. This is attended by staff from across the University (including members of the University Executive) and members of the community. |

This is an intensive support model and must be implemented over the long term to achieve success. Although Professor Nakata has only been in the role for 3 years and has been rolling the program out incrementally, positive trends are emerging, for example in 2018 the Indigenous cohort at JCU grew to 814 students, attrition rates were halved, the progression rate reached its highest level (63%), targeted tutor support increased students' GPA levels, and 105 Indigenous students completed their degree programs (35 more students than any previous year). The success achieved in 2018 has encouraged 30 new Indigenous enrolments in postgraduate and Higher Degree Research (HDR) courses in 2019.

This model could be replicated in other locations across RRR Australia, but requires additional Commonwealth Supported Places (including at the enabling level) in addition to continued and sustained Indigenous Student Support Program (ISSP) funding that reflects the current number of students being supported. Currently the ISSP funding formula is based on student numbers two years prior and is out of alignment to the resourcing needed to support growth in current years.

Key points and policy implications:

- Improving the access, retention and completions of Indigenous students requires a long-term and sustainable strategy, underpinned by a capacity building agenda that enables students to achieve a level of resilience to persist with university studies, and funding levels that provides certainty for providers to pursue and adopt models for success;
- JCU has invested in a unique learning support agenda for Indigenous students in recent years that builds educational capacities required for successful completions of degree programs; and
- This proven success model can reach far more Indigenous students across RRR areas but is limited by the number of available CSP places and the University's ISSP allocation formula.

Challenge 5 - Attracting jobs and people to regional, rural and remote areas

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

Education providers can stimulate economic growth in RRR areas through the following initiatives:

- Embedding core competencies into degrees or courses that relate to practicing in RRR areas and exposing students to the benefits of working in these areas;
- Delivering more courses in rural and remote locations, thereby increasing the skills of the workforce and contributing to the vibrancy and social capital of rural and remote communities;
- Incentivising and supporting clinical and work placements for students in RRR locations so that students experience living in these communities and understand the benefits provided;

- Replicating a model such as the [Australian Rural Health Education Network](#) (ARHEN) across other industries. ARHEN is the national peak body for Australia's 15 University Departments of Rural Health (UDRHs) in every State and the Northern Territory and focuses on expanding and enhancing the rural and remote health workforce through multidisciplinary education and training, research, professional support and service development;
- Supporting the establishment of high-growth startups through working with the student startup community (school and higher education levels) and other community stakeholders; and
- Employing members of the local communities and purchasing locally where possible.

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

It is important that when advocating for study in the regions that the messaging is carefully constructed so as to promote study in regional areas as a genuine value proposition not just a deficit default option: i.e., the opportunity for real cultural immersion (because of the lack of a diaspora) and that regional Universities have the capacity to take more students into environmental settings that are generally welcoming and friendly.

The challenge is not to position this as a redirection of students from one location to another but to enhance the promotion of the genuine benefits a tertiary education in the regions can offer both domestic and international students, whilst ensuring all students can access the education option that best suits their needs and ambitions. This is about policy enhancement via a series of incentives that aim to attract genuine students into the regions and a more sophisticated, deliberate and appropriately funded approach to promoting the regions and the benefits they can offer to all students.

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

The promotion of the opportunities, advantages and benefits for international and domestic students of studying in the regions will be most effective if federal, state and local governments work in consultation and cooperation with industry peak bodies, employers and professional associations, education providers and community groups. Some examples of how a collective approach to study in regional areas include:

- Federal, State and local governments, peak bodies, professional associations and employer associations could conduct key forums in regional centres;
- Adopt a wider geographical distribution of new research infrastructure to ensure a broader distribution of the positive flow-on effects of infrastructure;
- Highlight the links between the natural environment and local industry and how they connect with global industry and opportunity;
- Act collectively to communicate a clear and united message of the special advantages of outback and rural experiences;
- Host community-based programs which connect existing community cultural groups to the international student body to foster engagement through regular, free, organised events;
- Provide support for employers, education providers and students to enhance work integrated learning opportunities, run industry and student events for all students (domestic and international) in the regions and support mentor schemes between employers and industry leaders and students;
- Provide employers with tax incentives to provide students with work integrated learning (WIL) and internships;
- Support education agent familiarisation tours which involve meaningful engagement with community leaders, education providers and students; and
- Support international student clubs.

Key points and policy implications:

- Joined up approaches to economic development and workforce structural readjustment that harness industry, government and the university (triple helix model), using students/ graduates/research as an engine of change will be the most effective in attracting students to regional universities.

Challenge 6 - Implementing and monitoring a National Strategy

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

There is an important need for the appointment of a champion of the RRR issues, and to be appointed at a high enough level to engage the State and Federal Ministers with responsibilities for relevant portfolios to ensure that the policy dimensions are in alignment to the national RRR strategy. This will ensure a concerted and coordinated national effort to be deployed across the states and territories. If there were to be a Commissioner appointed, their role could include:

- Promote awareness of RRR education needs and advocating for them to be addressed through funding and policy decisions at a national level;
- Promote public discussion and awareness of the challenges facing people in RRR areas, commission research and consult with people in RRR areas and representative organisations; and
- Ensure that the national strategy is appropriately resourced so that any identified goals and targets can be met

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

There is currently no nationally consistent data set on the outcomes post senior secondary schooling. Consideration could be given to establishing a unique student identification system to support the capture of data to better inform policy and funding initiatives where they are most likely to improve outcomes.

Summary of key points

1. RRR areas are diverse and the degree of disadvantage differs across communities. The degree of disadvantage facing those living in RRR areas is impacted by the community profile combined with individual socio-economic and cultural factors.
2. There are three distinct target audiences in RRR communities, each with different barriers to participating post-secondary education, which need to be considered:
 - *School students/leavers* – those currently at school or who have left within the last 2-3 years who would consider relocating to undertake further study;
 - *Non-School leavers* – those who have finished formal schooling more than three years ago who do not wish to, or are unable to, leave their community in order to study; and
 - *Professional workforce* – those currently working in RRR areas, or considering working in RRR areas, who require continued professional development and incentives to practice and deliver quality services in these communities.
3. There is potential to expand course offerings to those living in RRR communities, particularly non-school leavers who do not wish to relocate, through an inter-governmental and community-based approach where providers work in partnership to meet the varied educational needs of RRR communities.
4. To achieve point 3, secure and long-term funding, provided through adequate numbers of Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP) and additional resourcing for delivery in rural and remote

areas, is required to enable providers to undertake a needs assessment and deliver programs at smaller sites with small intakes of students. This would allow providers to take education to RRR communities rather than expecting those living in RRR areas to relocate to access post-secondary education.

5. Innovative delivery models (such as micro-credentials) and financial incentives (such as postgraduate CSP) should be utilised to ensure that the professional workforce in RRR areas have access to continued professional development opportunities.
6. Dedicated scholarships for students from RRR areas studying at regional universities should be introduced to assist students with the financial costs of studying and retain talented students in the regions.
7. The introduction of a financial assistance scheme to assist students to complete mandatory clinical or work placements may help to improve completion rates.
8. Secure and adequate HEPPP funding is essential to support the delivery of quality programs to assist RRR students adapt to university life and create a sense of belonging.
9. A combination of on-campus experiential and outreach programs delivered from Year 5 to Year 12 (children aged 10-18) are necessary to raise the aspiration level of school students living in RRR areas. However, the high costs associated with travelling to and from geographically remote schools and communities needs to be considered. Hence, additional funding is required to enable those from RRR communities to participate fully.
10. Regional universities play a vital role in preparing students to live and work in RRR areas through core subjects and work placements as part of degree programs. People who train in the region, stay in the region and graduates of regional universities not only contribute to the professional workforce of RRR communities but also act as role models, demonstrating the value of post-secondary education.
11. Improving the access, retention and completions of Indigenous students requires an intensive learning support agenda which builds the educational capacity required for successful completion. This requires a long-term investment on the behalf of the university, underpinned by an adequate number of CSP and access to ISSP funds which reflect current student numbers.
12. Joined up approaches to economic development and workforce structural readjustment that harness industry, government and the university (triple helix model), using students/ graduates/research as an engine of change will be the most effective in attracting students to regional universities.

Further information:

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Appendix 1 - DRAFT Concept Model of Pathways for Torres and Cape Health Service

