



# National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy

## Submission form

**Welcome to the submission process for the National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy (the Strategy).**

The Regional Education Expert Advisory Group invites all interested parties to put forward ideas on the [framing paper](#) released on 20 December 2018.

The Advisory Group is seeking action-orientated responses to the challenges and key questions identified in this paper. The paper outlines the background of the strategy formation, the problem facing regional, rural and remote education and the challenges faced by those communities.

Your responses to the Framing Paper should focus on practical steps the Government could take to improve tertiary education access and attainment for people from regional, rural and remote backgrounds.

The form can be submitted any time before public submissions close at **5:00pm (AEDT) on 1 February 2019**.

Please note that the fields in the form are text only and pictures cannot be included. To return your completed form or if you experience difficulties in completing the form, please contact the Strategy Secretariat at [RegionalStrategy@education.gov.au](mailto:RegionalStrategy@education.gov.au).

**Note:**

- information provided through the submission process may be published with your permission, including in the documentation relating to the Strategy and on the department's website
- questions marked with a \* require an answer to be provided.

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I agree to the Privacy Notice and Terms and Conditions of Submissions included at [Attachment A](#) to this document\*

Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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*Note: If you do not accept the Privacy Notice and Conditions of Submissions please do not complete or submit this form.*

I agree to have my submission published.\*

Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No <input type="checkbox"/>

## Your details

Title\*

Mr
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First name\*

Geoffrey
----------

Last name\*

Mitchell
----------

E-mail address\*

[REDACTED]
------------

State/Territory\*

Queensland
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Would you like to receive updates about the Strategy's process? \*

Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No <input type="checkbox"/>

## Submission details

I am making this submission as a: \*

Educator

parent/carer/guardian

Student / potential student

School

University

Training Provider

Employer

community organisation

government agency

peak body / Think Tank

academic person

Other

Are you submitting on behalf of an organisation (including a business, other body or agency)? \*

Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No <input type="checkbox"/>

Please specify the organisation on whose behalf you are submitting

Queensland Widening Tertiary Participation Consortium

I confirm that I have the organisation's agreement to make this submission. \*

Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No <input type="checkbox"/>

*Note: If you do not have the organisation's agreement, please go to the previous question and select "No" to confirm you are not submitting on behalf of an organisation.*

## Key Questions from the Framing Paper

The Regional Education Expert Advisory Group is seeking responses to the following key questions. Specifically, we are looking for practical steps to overcome the five challenges facing students from RRR backgrounds.

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

1. What opportunities exist to expand options for further study in RRR areas?
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?

### 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?
4. What forms of support might be useful in helping students from RRR backgrounds to continue with their tertiary study?
5. How can universities assist RRR students to feel like they belong on their campus?

### 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?

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

### Challenge E: Attracting people and jobs to RRR areas

9. How can tertiary education providers further stimulate economic growth in RRR areas?
10. What actions would further strengthen and increase the attractiveness of regional universities?
11. What policies would attract more metropolitan and international students to study at RRR areas, including regional universities and campuses?

### 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?
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?

## Please use the space provided below to respond to the questions above

The table cell will expand to accommodate your response. Please limit your response to 3000 words.

This response is made on behalf of the Queensland Widening Tertiary Participation Consortium representing equity, outreach and Indigenous engagement officers at CQUniversity, Griffith University, James Cook University, Queensland University of Technology, The University of Queensland, University of the Sunshine Coast and the multi-state Australian Catholic University.

### **About Queensland's Widening Tertiary Participation Consortium**

Queensland's Widening Tertiary Participation Consortium is Australia's largest and longest operating consortium of universities to focus on a strategic approach to improving the tertiary education participation of people from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people from regional, rural and remote (RRR) locations. The Consortium currently comprises seven universities operating in Queensland and is now in its tenth year of operation. It has taken a unique collaborative approach to maximise reach and efficacy of widening participation programs across Queensland including outreach focused on tertiary preparation activities in schools serving low SES communities, improving tertiary pathways for post-school-aged learners in low income communities, and engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to improve opportunities to access higher education. In 2017 the Consortium universities engaged with approximately 250 schools in Queensland of which almost 60% were in regional and remote locations.

As well as undertaking large-scale outreach and Indigenous engagement projects, Queensland Consortium members have collaborated on evaluation and monitoring of widening participation activities; organising best practice symposia; and undertaking national research and innovation projects. This has included a 2017-2018 collaboration with the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) to investigate the impact of widening participation activities in urban, rural and remote locations and understand the factors, both program related and external, that impact on students' decisions to pursue tertiary study. The final report of this research<sup>1</sup> is available on the NCSEHE website and informs this response as does the extensive experience of Consortium partners in working with students in RRR locations to improve participation in tertiary education.

### **Focus of this Response: Challenge B, C and D**

Based on the Consortium' experience and expertise in building interest in and understanding of post-secondary education, this response will focus on Challenge B: *financial, emotional and social challenges*, Challenge C: *Raising aspiration for tertiary education*, and Challenge D: *multiple forms of disadvantage*.

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<sup>1</sup> Zacharias, N., Mitchell, G., Raciti, M., Koshy, P., Li, I., Costello, D., & Trinidad, S. (2018). *Widening Regional and Remote Participation: Interrogating the impact of outreach programs across Queensland*. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/widening-regional-and-remote-participation-interrogating-the-impact-of-outreach-programs-across-queensland/>

**Challenge B: Financial, emotional and social challenges**

The NCSEHE research cited above found that while low SES students in urban and RRR locations faced similar challenges, the financial, emotional and social costs associated with having to relocate to undertake tertiary study combined with limited access to information and role models in more remote areas created hard barriers to university participation. Students, parents and educators interviewed for this research spoke of the importance of scholarships and financial support but also the need for this to be combined with ongoing engagement and support for students and their families to ensure effective transitions to post-secondary education. Some parents, both urban and rural, suggested that current family income thresholds for student income support needed to be increased to enable more students to access funding support.

The conversion of Student Start-up Scholarships to loans in 2016, has created a disincentive for low income students to access this support and a dangerous precedent that puts other support for low income and regional and remote students (such as Relocation Scholarships) at risk. Start-up Scholarships provided low income students with a small scholarship at the beginning of each semester to help defray the high costs of text-books and other equipment necessary for their studies. This is an important form of financial support for low income students, especially those relocating from rural and remote locations. Converting this scholarship to a loan, has increased the financial stress on these often debt-averse students.

The Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships scheme is a recent initiative which provides financial support to students from regional and remote locations to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics courses (including Health and Agriculture) at vocational, undergraduate or postgraduate level. Selection criteria include an appropriate balance of financial need, disadvantage and capacity. This scheme should be reviewed to ensure it aligns with other Centrelink based financial support and fields of study are broadened to meet the study needs of all RRR students. .

**Recommendations**

1. Ensure ongoing provision of scholarships and income support for low income families, especially for students from rural and remote locations who need to relocate to undertake post-secondary education.
2. Investigate income thresholds to ensure that families, both urban and rural, without adequate resources to support their children's post-secondary education can access adequate financial support.
3. Reinstate Student Start-up Scholarships for low income students.
4. Review the operation and efficiency of the Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships program including how to meet the support needs of RRR students who wish to pursue other fields of study.
5. Fund the development and maintenance of a regional and remote engagement strategy to provide ongoing engagement with students and families to build understanding about university life, costs, financial support, relocation options and availability of support to assist tertiary access, transition and success (this recommendation is elaborated on in Challenge C: recommendation 2).

**Challenge C: Raising aspirations for tertiary education**

Based on international and Australian research and the results of ongoing implementation and evaluation, Queensland Widening Tertiary Participation universities have been providing a range of programs to build awareness and preparation for tertiary study. This has included providing demystification experiences for first-in-family and other non-traditional students; providing encouragement and inspirations through role models and awards; value adding to learning achievement especially with discipline-specific connections; building career development skills; and providing advice about tertiary pathways, scholarships and financial support. Effective widening

participation activities involve early and ongoing engagement and robust tertiary preparation which is people rich and responsive to local context. Place-based interventions require depth and longevity, and involve community development, capacity building and partnerships with local stakeholders.

NCSEHE research cited above has confirmed that the Queensland Consortium approach has been successful in stimulating interest in tertiary study where widening participation programs have been fully implemented and sustained at the school level. However, insufficient resourcing and engagement levels have meant that many rural and remote locations have not received the depth or longevity of programs to effect positive behavioural change.

The Australian Government Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP) has made a valuable contribution to encouraging participation in higher education and supporting ongoing success for low SES background students including students from RRR locations. However reduced funding and the removal of dedicated partnership funding have put strains on universities delivering widening participation activities, especially in RRR location. There are currently no incentives for universities to undertake costly outreach activities in distant rural and remote locations resulting in greater concentration on urban and provincial centres. There is also no availability of funding to incentivise collaboration and development of new initiatives to engage with under-represented cohorts.

#### Recommendations

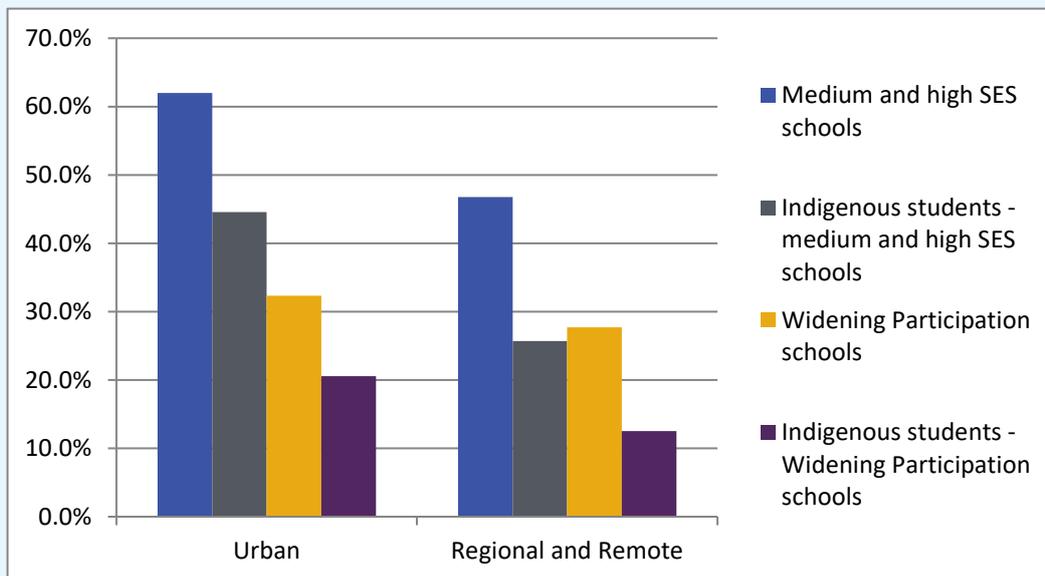
1. Maintain HEPPP with an expanded National Priority Pool with additional funding to support the higher cost of provision of outreach and engagement activities in RRR locations, and for ongoing collaborative projects to develop and trial new initiatives that enhance provision of outreach and engagement activities with under-represented cohorts.
2. Fund the development and long-term delivery of a RRR widening participation strategy that ensures students in these locations have access to tertiary awareness and preparation that is comparable to their urban counterparts. Funding should only be available to cooperating networks of providers who have an explicit plan to ensure each RRR area has a university partner, and who can identify which providers thus need the additional funds. Such a strategy requires dedicated funding that is adequate to meet the cost of delivery in RRR locations and is ongoing to build impact over time. This strategy should be informed by the significant research and expertise of universities and other stakeholders involved in delivering such activities and include:
  - Flexibility to meet the needs of diverse RRR contexts and school structures.
  - Exposure to a range of post-secondary options and career opportunities both within and outside local communities.
  - Experiential activities and involve exposure to vocational and higher education options and authentic sources of information including campus visits and information provided by enrolled tertiary students.
  - Support for students, families and communities at critical decision making points and transitions such as primary to secondary school, Year 10 and Year 12.

#### **Challenge D: Poverty and race significant factors in RRR disadvantage**

The Queensland Consortium has partnered with schools serving predominantly low SES communities in both urban and RRR locations where similar issues relating to limited financial and social resources, a lack of information and understanding about tertiary study, and the high opportunity cost of deferring entry into the workforce deter students from pursuing post-secondary education.

In some RRR locations, these issues are compounded by the social, emotional and financial costs associated with needing to relocate to undertake further education. Similarly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, more highly represented in low SES and RRR locations, face heightened barriers to participation, further exacerbated when relocation to study is their only option. Consortium data provided below displays the compounding impact of poverty and Indigeneity on interest in university study amongst Year 12 school leavers in urban and RRR locations.

Figure 1 compares the university application rates for Year 12 students in Queensland in 2017 showing the impact of attending a low SES school targeted by Queensland Widening Tertiary Participation programs, classification as urban or RRR location, and identification as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. In this data, schools are classified as medium and high SES where they serve predominantly middle and high SES communities and are not engaged in Widening Tertiary Participation programs, or Widening Participation schools which serve predominantly low SES communities and are engaged in activities to promote tertiary participation. While 47% of students in medium and high SES RRR schools applied for a university place in 2017, only 28% of RRR students who attended a Widening Participation target school submitted an application. Clearly rurality is not the only factor affecting participation for these students whose application rate is closer to urban low SES students than to their RRR peers in more affluent schools. Application rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were lower again with just 12.5% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in RRR Widening Participation schools seeking university admission. While some improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student participation in higher education have occurred in recent years, this data highlights the enormity of the issues facing low SES background, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in RRR location. This data highlights the important need for the Expert Advisory Group to address the needs of low SES and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as a priority for improving RRR participation.



**Figure 1:** University application rates for Year 12 students (number of QTAC university applications/number of Year 12 completions as a percentage) in urban and regional locations showing impact of attending a school engaged by Widening Participation programs, and identifying as and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, 2017.

**Recommendations:**

1. Ensure RRR strategies include specific targeting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people from low socio-economic status backgrounds.

2. Include specific engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities that affirms cultural identity and inclusion and builds pathways to quality tertiary education.

## Please provide a short summary of the key points in your submission

Please limit your response to 300 words— **note:** any text above 300 words will be excluded from your submission. The table cell will expand to accommodate your response.

### **Challenge B: Financial, emotional and social challenges**

A fair and equitable system of scholarships and income support is required that meets the needs of low income students and families, especially where relocation to study is necessary.

#### Recommendations

1. Ensure ongoing provision of scholarships and income support for low income families.
2. Investigate income thresholds to ensure that families can access adequate financial support.
3. Reinstate Student Start-up Scholarships for low income students.
4. Review the operation and efficiency of the Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships program.
5. Fund the development and maintenance of a regional and remote engagement strategy to provide ongoing engagement with students and families.

### **Challenge C: Raising aspirations for tertiary education**

Early and ongoing engagement with students and communities has proven effective in stimulating interest in tertiary study. However the high cost and logistical challenges of reaching distant RRR communities have led to inadequate provision.

#### Recommendations

1. Maintain HEPPP with an expanded National Priority Pool to support the higher cost of provision of outreach in RRR locations, and for ongoing collaborative projects to develop and trial new initiatives.
2. Fund the development and long-term delivery of a RRR widening participation strategy that ensures communities in these locations have access to adequate tertiary awareness and preparation.

### **Challenge D: Poverty and race significant factors in RRR disadvantage**

Poverty and race have a compounding negative effect on tertiary participation, and should be addressed as a priority in the RRR education strategy.

Recommendations:

3. Ensure RRR strategies include specific targeting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people from low SES backgrounds.
4. Include specific engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities that affirms cultural identity and inclusion and builds pathways to quality tertiary education.

# Privacy Notice and Terms and Conditions for Submissions

## Purpose for collection of information relating to submissions, and the use and disclosure of that information

The Australian Government Department of Education and Training (the department) invites you to make a submission in relation to the development of the National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy (the Strategy).

Through the submission process, the department will be collecting certain information, including personal information. The information collected may include your name, your email address, the organisation you represent (if applicable) and any other information that is included in your submission.

The department may use and disclose this information for the purposes of informing or contributing to the Strategy, policy development related to the subject of the Strategy, publishing submissions (including by making submissions publicly available), and providing feedback to the department's Minister about the Strategy and submission process.

The department may also contact you to provide updates on the progress of the Strategy, if you have indicated in your submission response that you would like to receive such updates.

## Publishing submissions

The department reserves the right to publish any submissions, including only a sample of submissions, made in relation to the Strategy. This includes by making those submissions publicly available on the department's website, or through any report/s arising from the Strategy.

You may elect **not** to have your submission published. If you do not want to have your submission published, **do not check** the relevant box on this document.

Before publication, your email address, if provided with your submission, will be removed. **However, your name will be published with your submission.**

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The department also reserves the right to modify or adapt submissions for the purposes of web accessibility and any publishing formatting requirements.

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If you are making a submission on behalf of an organisation, or represent that you are, you must ensure that you have that organisation's agreement prior to making the submission. By making a submission, you represent to the department that you have such agreement.

If there is information in your submission referencing an individual, which is not otherwise publicly available, you must ensure that you have the consent of the individual to whom the information relates to include it in the submission. By making a submission, you represent to the department that you have such consent.

By making a submission, you further represent to the department that your submission does not contain any confidential information about any individual or organisation.

## **Privacy policy and contact**

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For any queries relating to this Privacy Notice and Terms and Conditions for Submissions, the Strategy or your submission please contact the Regional Education Strategy Taskforce via email on: [RegionalStrategy@education.gov.au](mailto:RegionalStrategy@education.gov.au)