

CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY

Submission

Australian Government

Independent Review

Regional, Rural and Remote Education

29 August 2017

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29 August 2017

Emeritus Professor John Halsey
Chair, Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education
Department of Education and Training
50 Marcus Clarke Street
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Professor Halsey

INDEPENDENT REVIEW INTO REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION

On behalf of Charles Sturt University, I am pleased to provide this submission to the Independent Review of Regional, Rural and Remote Education.

We have provided detailed commentary and opinion, based on an extensive review of Australian and international literature, as well as our own comprehensive research across regional, rural and remote south-eastern Australia with regards education in non-metropolitan Australia. Our commentary and opinion addresses:

- 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; and,
- innovative approaches that support regional, rural and remote students to succeed in school and in their transition to further study, training and employment.

Furthermore, Charles Sturt University's submission to your Independent Review of Regional, Rural and Remote Education provides an extensive and detailed range of recommendations that we believe would greatly strengthen Australia's regional, rural and remote education system for better economic, social and environmental outcomes for



students and our communities across New South Wales and Victoria, as well as the rest of non-metropolitan Australia.

We believe that it is critical that governments, both Federal and State invest in the future of our regions. Our regions are vital contributors to our national success and we must ensure that all Australians no matter where they live or work, have access to educational opportunities.

Education is a driver of economic growth and it provides the opportunity for our citizens to create wealth, employment, and contribute to the nation's future prosperity. To this end, our recommendations are designed to ensure that Australia has the ability to build a strong and sustainable education sector that delivers access and equity.

I would be delighted to provide further information to the Independent Review and would be available to provide evidence at any proposed hearings that you may undertake in relation to considering the merits of the strengthening Australia's regional, rural and remote education system.

Yours sincerely

Professor Toni Downes
Acting Vice-Chancellor

Terms of Reference

Purpose of the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education

The Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education will consider the key issues, challenges and barriers that impact on the learning outcomes of regional, rural and remote students. It will provide recommendations on innovative and fresh approaches to support improved access and achievement of these students in school and their transition to further study, training and employment.

Scope of the Review

The Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education will investigate:

- 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; and,
- innovative approaches that support regional, rural and remote students to succeed in school and in their transition to further study, training and employment.

Consultations will occur through a call for submissions from interested parties and face-to-face consultations with key stakeholders, including representatives from the education community, families, employers and employer groups, relevant government agencies and the philanthropic sector. Schools, communities and individuals will be consulted on what is working and has worked in relation to raising student aspirations and achievements.

A final report will be submitted to the Australian Government Minister for Education and Training by the end of 2017.

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education are provided at Page 53 of the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education – Discussion Paper*, of July 2017 which was obtained from the Commonwealth [Department of Education and Training's website](#) at and is provided for reference at Attachment I.

Recommendations

Charles Sturt University recommends the following with regard strengthening Australia's regional, rural and remote education system for better economic, social and environmental outcomes for students and our communities across Australia:

1.1 The gap in educational achievement between regional, rural and remote students and metropolitan students

Charles Sturt University makes the following recommendations:

- ***That student aspiration and capability built in and through schools be recognised as essential for regional, rural and remote educational outcomes and that governments directly invest in this area of comparative market failure (when compared to metropolitan outcomes).***
- ***That educational pathway options for regional, rural and remote students be greatly expanded to materially deliver access and equity gains for non-metropolitan Australians. Refer to recommendations provided by Charles Sturt University in submission to the Senate Education and Training Committee Inquiry of 7 July 2017 regarding the proposed Higher Education Support Legislation Amendment (A More Sustainable, Responsive and Transparent Higher Education System) Bill 2017).***
- ***The design, development and delivery by higher education training providers of a greater range of Bachelor programs that articulate from vocational education and training (VET) diplomas and Certificate 4s, including greater integration between levels 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF), including amendment of National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011 (NVR) and Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) regulations to enable nesting of VET and higher education qualifications and vice versa.***
- ***That Government, Schools and tertiary education continue to focus and investment in participation and success programs by government, schools and tertiary education and training providers, including continuation and expansion of HEPPP, particularly in regional, rural and remote Australia.***
- ***Again refer recommendations provided by Charles Sturt University in submission to the Senate Education and Training Committee Inquiry of 7 July 2017 regarding the proposed Higher Education Support Legislation Amendment (A More Sustainable, Responsive and Transparent Higher Education System) Bill 2017).***

1.2 The key barriers and challenges that impact on the educational outcomes of regional, rural and remote students, including aspirations and access issues

Charles Sturt University makes the following recommendations:

- ***That governments design and implement funded programs that support pathways for non-traditional students in regional, rural and remote Australia, building on the successful interventions and learnings of the University.***

- *That governments design and implement pathway programs that build on the regional retention results of the Graduate Outcomes Survey and the crucial role the University plays in developing and securing skills for the regional workforce, which in turn supports the viability of regional businesses and communities.*
- *That governments provide additional funding for the University to work with schools and their communities in promoting the benefits of, and developing aspiration for, higher education across non-metropolitan Australia. This work has been demonstrated to be a prime influence in the increasing number of university enrolments by regional, rural and remote students reported in the national data.*
- *That governments provide additional support and funding to enable higher education to provide role models (for example, university academics, graduates working in the community, and non-metropolitan focused teaching, learning and research institutes such as the proposed Murray Darling Medical School), noting that for universities to be able to continue to influence regional secondary students in this crucial area public funding will be required.*
- *That to provide an appropriate evidence base, government support and expand Charles Sturt University's pilot research into the barriers and challenges that impact on the educational outcomes of regional, rural and remote students (CIN Educational Consulting & Charles Sturt University, Office of Indigenous Affairs). This work would include aspirations and access issues to address this as a first step to enabling all regional, rural, remote school leaders, onsite access to contextually relevant, face-to-face professional learning and on-going support.*
- *That governments, collectively utilise individual rural and remote schools as the contextual centre for professional development for principals and school executives. Such work would include ongoing and professional support, delivered by experienced rural and remote education experts insitu.*
- *That State governments partner with universities, such as Charles Sturt, to prepare and accredit professional development for educators specifically for rural and remote school leadership in rural and remote communities throughout Australia, this would include pre-teaching appointment and on-going insitu professional development and mentoring.*
- *The Review team examine Charles Sturt University's early research findings referred to herein and conduct consultations within the pilot communities that this nascent work is being undertaken in, as well as request the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training to partner with the University to progress this research enquiry for tailored, contextualised and insitu professional development of rural and remote educators for improvement of student learning outcomes (CIN Educational Consulting & Charles Sturt University, Office of Indigenous Affairs).*

- 1.3 **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**

Charles Sturt University makes the following recommendations:

- *That the Commonwealth Government, as a matter of national urgency, immediately review, refine and revise its information technology and communications policies, to ensure that all Australians, including those in regional, rural and remote Australia have world's-best access to the internet.*
- *To this end, the Commonwealth Government's national broadband network initiative be expanded to provide full fibre (or equivalent) to the home for all regional, rural and remote Australians, noting that failure to do so will consign non-metropolitan Australia to great education disadvantage and irrelevance in the digital century.*
- *That technology and communications related initiatives in the Commonwealth Government's Regions 2030 Unlocking Opportunity policy statement be revised to reflect the two recommendations above, and that following revision of the policy statement and our two recommendations above be funded in full and implemented as a matter of priority to ensure a viable future for regional, rural and remote Australia.*
- *That technology and communications related initiatives in the Commonwealth Government's Regions 2030 Unlocking Opportunity policy statement be revised to reflect the two recommendations above, and that follow revision the policy statement and our two recommendations above be funded in full and implemented as a matter of priority to ensure a viable future for regional, rural and remote Australia.*
- *That government devise new and effective ways of financing information technology and communications access, hardware and software for regional, rural and remote students and their family's that consider the often very short life spans of technology products, noting that current public funding models to do not take into account the useful life of technology, and therefore subject regional, rural and remote students to additional disadvantage over their metropolitan peers.*
- *Finally, Charles Sturt University supports the recommendations provided by Mr Craig Petersen, the Principal of Denison College of Secondary Education and Deputy President of the New South Wales Secondary Principal's Council, in his submission to the Independent Review of Regional, Rural and Remote Education.*

Also, refer to recommendations in Section 1.5 below.

1.4 The effectiveness of public policies and programs that have been implemented to bridge the divide

Charles Sturt University supports the recommendations provided by Mr Craig Petersen, the Principal of Denison College of Secondary Education and Deputy President of the New South Wales Secondary Principals' Council, in his submission to the Independent Review of Regional, Rural and Remote Education.

Charles Sturt University has made a number of other recommendations in Section 4.5, that we believe would strengthen effectiveness of public policies and programs that have been implemented to bridge the divide between regional, rural and remote education outcomes and those of metropolitan Australia.

1.5 The gaps and opportunities to help students successfully transition from school to further study, training and employment

Charles Sturt University makes the following recommendations:

1. *Development of complementary investment in soft resources that leverage the use of existing hard resource facilities in regional Australia.*
2. *An agile funding model that removes barriers to cross-sector collaboration and rewards engagement with community and industry. In particular, a dedicated strategy to enable education providers to develop seamless transitions between Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education providers (Acer: [credit based pathways in tertiary education](#)) (NCVER; a half-open door: pathways for VET award holders into Australian universities 2013), including:
 - *a continuing focus on implementing the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) operational guidelines for pathways, in particular working towards guaranteed entry into Higher Education courses for VET award holders;*
 - *combined educational leadership from all three sectors, with dedicated, senior roles that hold responsibility for collaboration and education pathways;*
 - *investment in systems to monitor student progress and achievements within and between all three sectors (enabled through the Universal Student Identifier (USI)); and,*
 - *accessible, well-structured information about pathway options for students and key influencers (including parents and careers counsellors).**
3. *A model that has a core function of maximising the use of technology and capacity building around digital service delivery in a way that addresses disparities in regional capacity and ability (Morgan, 2016) and addresses substantial growth in regional to metropolitan migration for Higher Education*

study (a 75 per cent increase between 2008 – 2014) (National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education; Regional Student Participation and Migration 2017).

- 4. Education pathways that address existing and emerging workforce needs, customised for regional communities. The pathways should have a focus on digital ability, critical thinking and entrepreneurship and critically, expose students to industry and vice versa.*
- 5. Incentives for earlier and deeper collaboration between both the schools and VET sectors, and the Higher Education sector. This would include more opportunities for schools and VET students (and key influencers such as parents) to engage with their local education providers both within the school, VET campus and on Higher Education campuses.*
- 6. More coordination around pathway promotions within schools, between Higher Education and Vocational education providers, with the intent of reducing duplication and triplication activities (and to ensure that no school misses out).*
- 7. A continuing focus on the professional development of community and industry leaders within regional Australia, alongside and in collaboration with educational leaders. This professional development should focus on building an advanced capability for collaboration in complex and changing environments, managing ambiguity and stakeholder engagement.*
- 8. A core requirement, for digital ability and capacity be raised. Digital inclusion research indicates that regional Australians are 20 per cent less likely to use online technologies to manage their work and personal lives than the national average (Roy Morgan, Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2016). With technological impacts cited as one of five disruptive megatrends for the next 10 years by Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC: [what is a megatrend and why do they matter?](#)), a dedicated focus will help to bridge this gap.*
- 9. A broader definition of information and communications technology (ICT) investment within education sectors. While Professor Halsey's Discussion Paper touches on the need for innovation in the use of ICT (Pages 33 & 34), it does not address regional disparities associated with community ability in the use of ICT. Specific investment is required to ensure that once technologies are accessible, teachers and educational leaders can make the best use of this technology. This would include investment in best practice use of videoconferencing and collaboration between networks of connected education providers.*
- 10. A continued focus on providing opportunities for students to access education and training in the regional areas that they reside. Students who study in regional areas tend to remain in regional areas after graduation and provide a ready supply of professionals to fill critical regional roles (Acer: [Credit based pathway in tertiary education](#)).*

1.6 **Innovative approaches that support regional, rural and remote students to succeed in school and in their transition to further study, training and employment**

Charles Sturt University makes the following recommendations:

- *that the Aspiration and Outreach agenda be continued;*
- *that university school zones for partnership activity between universities be established to allow for greater collaboration between institutions;*
- *ongoing targeted support tailored to address access, participation and success issues faced by Indigenous peoples who reside in regional, rural and remote areas; and,*
- *strategies to enhance Indigenous participation should be designed in conjunction with local communities and embrace a whole of university approach.*

Furthermore, in this respect, Charles Sturt University recommends ongoing targeted support tailored to address access, participation and success issues faced by Indigenous peoples who reside in regional, rural and remote areas.

We also recommend that strategies used should be designed in conjunction with local communities and embrace a whole of university approach. That is, success in this area will not be enhanced by central, standardised approaches. For example, Charles Sturt University's Strong Moves mentoring program, links to Future Moves and to the Indigenous Student Centres at the University. This mentoring program was built in consultation with parents and students from our local communities and provides a seamless relationship for school students with staff and students in the University.

1.7 **Charles Sturt University - Learnings from regional New South Wales and Victoria and potential intervention strategies to boost regional, rural and remote educational outcomes.**

Charles Sturt University makes the following recommendations:

- *that the Aspiration and Outreach agenda be continued;*
- *the proposed budget reforms that remove enabling funding to be rejected;*
- *that consideration is given to the need for additional strategies to effectively support and engage regional rural and remote students who study by distance education; and,*
- *that three-year funding streams for outreach funding are established.*

Furthermore, Charles Sturt University supports a minimum three-year HEPPP funding stream to encourage schools' continued partnerships and participation, as per the August 2017 EPHEA statement:

This three-year funding stream would mean that equity practitioners can coordinate widening participation and retention programs, resources and partnerships more effectively and sustainably.

(EPHEA 2017, Information to Government Representatives regarding the Higher Education Support Legislation Amendment [A More Sustainable, Responsive and Transparent Higher Education System] Bill 2017.)

We also recommend that the Independent Review into Regional Rural and Remote Education examine the early research findings from work currently underway, including that of Charles Sturt University. In particular, we recommend that the Review consult face-to-face with the pilot schools and communities and drive a partnership with the University to progress the pilot and research enquiry.

Finally, we recommend that the Review team consider the early trends emerging from this research and partner with Charles Sturt University for further development of the model.

Introduction

1.8 Background

Country students are the focus of an independent review by the Australian Government into regional, rural and remote education. The Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education is part of the Turnbull Government's election commitment to improve the education and preparation of country youth to develop into their best selves and fully participate in the 21st century economy.

The Review is considering the key challenges and barriers that impact on students' learning outcomes, including transitions toward, and success regarding, further study, training and employment. The Review is examining the educational outcomes of regional, rural and remote students and recommend new, different and innovative ways in which the Government can support these students to succeed in school and in their transition to further study, training and employment.

On 2 March 2017, the Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, announced the appointment of Emeritus Professor John Halsey of Flinders University to lead the Review. The final report and recommendations will be provided to the Government by the end of 2017.

1.9 Discussion Paper

Emeritus Professor John Halsey has prepared a discussion paper on key educational challenges and issues that impact on the learning outcomes of students in regional, rural and remote communities. It also poses questions to stimulate ideas about how education outcomes for these students could be improved.

The discussion paper highlights key educational challenges and issues that impact on the learning outcomes of regional, rural and remote students. It aims to create a springboard for fresh ideas to improve outcomes for these students. Independent reviewer Emeritus Professor John Halsey has prepared the discussion paper based on an extensive literature review. The paper outlines nine themes that impact significantly on student learning outcomes:

- Curriculum and assessment.
- Teachers and teaching.
- Leaders and leadership
- School and community.
- Information and communication technology.
- Entrepreneurship and schools.
- Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding.
- Diversity.
- Transitioning beyond school.

Emeritus Professor Halsey's *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education – Discussion Paper*, of July 2017 which was obtained from the Commonwealth [Department of Education and Training's](#) website at is provided for reference at Attachment I.

1.10 Consultation

As part of the Independent Review, the Australian Government is particularly keen to examine fresh ideas for solutions and share information about innovative approaches that benefit regional, rural and remote students.

Consultations will occur through a call for submissions from interested parties and face-to-face consultations with key stakeholders, including representatives from the education community, families, employers/employer groups, relevant government agencies and the philanthropic sector.

Building on the findings of the public submissions, Professor Halsey will lead face-to-face consultations during July and October 2017 with the breadth of organizations, institutions and people passionate about regional, rural and remote education. These will include representatives from the education community, families, employer groups and the philanthropic sector. Schools, communities and individuals will be consulted on what is working and has worked in relation to raising student aspirations and achievements.

1.11 Submission – Charles Sturt University

Charles Sturt University is pleased to provide a submission to the Australian Government's Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education that Emeritus Professor John Halsey was commissioned by the Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham to undertake on 2 March 2017. We have prepared a comprehensive and detailed submission containing commentary of our view and position of research, analysis and findings of Emeritus Professor Halsey's *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education – Discussion Paper*, of July 2017 (Attachment I).

Drawing on our century-plus, second to none, hands-on experience in regional, rural and remote education, as well as building on our commentary, view and position of Emeritus Professor Halsey's Discussion Paper, Charles Sturt University also proposes a range of recommendations that we believe would strengthen regional, rural and remote education. Adopting our recommendations would strengthen the growth and the development of regional, rural and remote education capability and capacity for the benefit of non-metropolitan Australians.

Over position and recommendations address:

1. The gap in educational achievement between regional, rural and remote students and metropolitan students.
2. The key barriers and challenges that impact on the educational outcomes of regional, rural and remote students, including aspirations and access issues.
3. 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.

4. The effectiveness of public policies and programs that have been implemented to bridge the divide.
5. The gaps and opportunities to help students successfully transition from school to further study, training and employment.
6. Innovative approaches that support regional, rural and remote students to succeed in school and in their transition to further study, training and employment.
7. Charles Sturt University - Learnings from regional New South Wales and Victoria and potential intervention strategies to boost regional, rural and remote educational outcomes.

Charles Sturt University

Charles Sturt University is Australia's largest regional university, with more than 43,000 students and approximately 2,000 FTE staff. Established in 1989, the University traces its origins to the formation of the Bathurst Experimental Farm and Wagga Wagga Experimental Farm in the 1890s. In one form or another, research, innovation and education has been integral to the University's character and mission for more than a century.

Charles Sturt University is a unique multi-campus institution with campuses at Albury-Wodonga, Bathurst, Canberra, Dubbo, Goulburn, Manly, Orange, Parramatta, Port Macquarie and Wagga Wagga, as well as various study centres located throughout regional and rural south-eastern Australia.

The University's commitment to the development and sustainability of rural and regional Australia is informed by the unique research focus undertaken, and the partnerships it has formed with each of its campus' local communities, local industry, and with the broader regions it serves.

CSU offers a comprehensive suite of research and academic training programs that focus on addressing rural and regional labour market needs, growing regional economies, and preparing students for the jobs of the new economy through rural and regional Australia.

Particularly in health and medical related disciplines, Charles Sturt University seeks to address key training and equality of access issues across our rural and regional footprint, ensuring the critical supply of health professionals into local markets.

As one of Australia's largest online and distance education providers Charles Sturt University has been able to leverage its course profile and specialist expertise in education provision for the delivery of nationally available study programs. These programs support labour market skills development regardless of student location.

Our rural and regional focuses, as well as strength in online and distance education, position's Charles Sturt University as a leading institution in providing higher education opportunities to first-in-family applicants, mature-aged students, as well as those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Increasing participation of Indigenous Australians in higher education has been a key focus area of the University's mission and ethos. Charles Sturt University consistently works in collaboration with Indigenous communities across our footprint to ensure access and develop links into the University. Our position as one of the top Australian universities for Indigenous participation is proof of our strong background in this regard.

The success of the University is demonstrated by its sector-leading performance in work-integrated learning, graduate employment and graduate incomes. Underpinning this success is the close links that the University has forged with industry, both regionally and nationally.

For example, the University is internationally recognised as a leader in work-integrated learning with students spending extended periods in employment with our industry partners as part of their degree learning and applying their knowledge in practice.

Research excellence, with a strong commitment to addressing the complex regional needs through innovation, has long been at the centre of Charles Sturt University's mission.

As evidenced by the recent Excellence in Research for Australia results (ERA 2015), Charles Sturt University is recognised internationally for competitive research strengths in agricultural science, horticultural production, food and wine sciences, crop and pasture production, veterinary science, animal production, education, curriculum and pedagogy, environmental science, applied ethics, philosophy, religious studies, criminology, nursing and marketing.

Charles Sturt University has a proud tradition of delivering high-quality research that creates new knowledge, benefits people's lives, enhances the profitability of regional industries and helps communities grow and flourish. Through its Higher Degree by Research programs, Charles Sturt University is training the next generation of researchers and professionals who use critical thinking and seek to influence the world for the better.

The recently announced AgriSciences Research and Business Park, to be located on the Wagga Wagga campus exemplifies our industry focus. The AgriSciences Research and Business Park will facilitate industry engagement and collaboration, economic growth, wealth creation, employment and skills development. Success will be evidenced by the recognition of Wagga Wagga as a world-standard centre for agricultural innovation, research and development, extension, education and training.

Today, Charles Sturt University continues a 100-year tradition of engagement and leadership with our local communities, of research and innovation in collaboration with industry, expansion in the educational opportunities offered to our diverse student body, and preparing students for employment markets emerging with the evolution of regional and the national economy.

Submission to Independent Review

Charles Sturt University is pleased to provide a submission to the Australian Government's Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education that Emeritus Professor John Halsey was commissioned by the Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham to undertake on 2 March 2017. We have prepared a comprehensive and detailed submission containing commentary of our view and position of research, analysis and findings of Emeritus Professor Halsey's *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education – Discussion Paper*, of July 2017 (Attachment I).

Drawing on our century-plus, second to none, hands-on experience in regional, rural and remote education, as well as building on our commentary, view and position of Emeritus Professor Halsey's Discussion Paper, Charles Sturt University also proposes a range of recommendations that we believe would strengthen the regional, rural and remote education. Adopting our recommendations would strengthen the growth and the development of regional, rural and remote education capability and capacity for the benefit of non-metropolitan Australians.

Over position and recommendations address:

1. The gap in educational achievement between regional, rural and remote students and metropolitan students.
2. The key barriers and challenges that impact on the educational outcomes of regional, rural and remote students, including aspirations and access issues.
3. 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.
4. The effectiveness of public policies and programs that have been implemented to bridge the divide.
5. The gaps and opportunities to help students successfully transition from school to further study, training and employment.
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7. Charles Sturt University - Learnings from regional New South Wales and Victoria and potential intervention strategies to boost regional, rural and remote educational outcomes.

Charles Sturt University's submission has been prepared based on Emeritus Professor Halsey's *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education – Discussion Paper*, of July 2017 which was obtained from the [Commonwealth Department of Education and Training's](#) website.

1.12 The gap in educational achievement between regional, rural and remote students and metropolitan students

Contemporary research illustrates that as a nation there can be some pride in Australia's education system. In 1990 the Minister for Employment, Education and Training, John Dawkins wrote that,

"... all Australian's have the right to access the services and benefits our society offers and to contribute to our social, cultural and industrial endeavors" (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1990).

Moving on over a decade, equity and access are no longer a problem for many disadvantaged groups. The same though cannot be said for those people who are from low socio-economic backgrounds and rural or isolated areas.

The system is underperforming for some of the rapidly growing populations and many of our rural remote areas. Since there is very wide variance of achievement in schools, the fundamental challenge for education leaders is to raise achievement and reduce disparity in ways that prepare all students for the future.

This is an issue of concern to Charles Sturt University and the rural remote region in which we operate and provide tertiary education services. Our vision of Yindyamurra Winhanganha (the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in) demands we address it.

Approximately one in four students in New South Wales attend non-metropolitan schools. This highlights the importance of an effort to understand and improve rural and remote education outcomes nationally and is something that Charles Sturt University is committed to.

Rural and remote education has been the subject of many government and nongovernment reports including; the Commonwealth Schools Commission's report on Schooling in rural Australia (1998); the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's National inquiry into rural and remote education (2000); the NSW Teachers' Federation's report, Staffing an empty schoolhouse: Attracting and retaining teachers in rural, remote and isolated communities (2004); the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport's report on Rural and regional access to secondary and tertiary education opportunities (2009) and the 2017 Australian Government Independent review into regional, rural and remote education.

There is an achievement gap on all education indicators, in rural and remote areas of New South Wales where students under-perform, when compared to metropolitan locations. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds (low socio-economic households, regional and/or Indigenous communities) are more likely to begin secondary school below international benchmarks. This gap is a problem in New South Wales, and disturbingly, between 2008 and 2012 it widened by as much as 62 per cent (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2013). Social and economic effects are significant.

The urgency of the challenge is due to evidence of declining achievement levels in Australian schools. The period 2000 to 2012 witnessed a significant decline in the national reading and mathematical literacy levels of 15-year-olds as measured by (OECD PISA). Australia was the only high-performing country to see a significant

decrease in performance over this period (Thomson, De Bortoli, & Buckley, 2013). This decline occurred at a time of unprecedented national effort to raise literacy and numeracy levels in Australia. At the same time, despite significant efforts on the part of governments and education systems to address educational disadvantage and to achieve more equitable schooling outcomes in Australia, the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous 15-year-olds and between students from lower and higher socio-economic backgrounds, as measured by PISA, were unchanged between 2000 and 2012 (Thomson, De Bortoli, & Buckley, 2013).

The Australian economy and the regions, which contribute more than 40 per cent of Australia's GDP, are dependent on workforce participation and productivity and employ over one third of Australia's working population. It is dependent on the quality of the education system.

That the disproportions are still present after more than a decade of initiatives, should be of concern to all Australians on economic, social and community levels. As the National Farmers' Federation (1997) put it:

"Young people who are not able to overcome the significant barriers they face are not able to fully realise the benefits that education brings for personal development; participation in cultural, recreational activities and community life; career prospects, employment; and maintaining a livelihood. Their contributions to society are constrained" (Harrison, 1997, p. 41).

The importance of regional Australia to the national economy means that the potential of our regions is critical to future prosperity, as is the diversity that it brings to the national picture and the scope of its opportunity to drive prosperity.

While regional Australia is the major source of employment for agriculture and mining industries, our regions have also seen an increase in the diversity of employment across a wide range of occupations. Our regions have become increasingly services-diverse, even during the mining boom - not only has output per worker in regional Australia increased, but output per worker in regional Australia has gained on metropolitan areas in practically every industry. So, our regions are dynamic and growing, they are an important source of prosperity, and employment. (Talking Point, Regional Australia Institute, Canberra).

It is then a national challenge educationally, economically and morally, requiring an evidence base to understand the causes of the widening educational disparity between rural remote and metropolitan areas and to develop innovative means to address it, urgently.

That there is a gap in educational achievement between regional, rural and remote students and metropolitan students is well understood.

The Regional Australia Institute [In]sight series report – Human Capital Index: Developing Human Capital Across Australia (Regional Australia Institute, 2016), highlights the disparities across key indicators of educational achievement:

- Completion of Year 12 or equivalent in secondary school is much lower across regional Australia than in metropolitan Australia (40.2 per cent compared to 59.2 per cent respectively) (Regional Australia Institute, 2016, p. 20).

- Secondary school literacy and numeracy as identified through NAPLAN results, is poorer on average across regional Australia than metropolitan Australia (Year 9 average 560.6 compared to 585.8 respectively) (Regional Australia Institute, 2016, p. 17).
- University qualification rates are significantly lower across the regions than metropolitan areas (9.6 per cent compared to 18.7 per cent respectively) (Regional Australia Institute, 2016, p. 28).

Much of Charles Sturt University's footprint reports below average educational outcomes.

The recent report *Regional Student Participation and Migration* (Cardak, et al., 2017), which examines a range of factors associated with regional participation in higher education and regional student mobility finds:

... regional and remote students are, on average:

- *10 percent less likely to plan to attend university than metropolitan students (after controlling for socio-economic status);*
- *7 percent less likely to complete high school than metropolitan students (after controlling for socio-economic status);*
- *4.7 percent less likely to attend university than metropolitan students; and,*
- *5.8 percent less likely to graduate from university than metropolitan students. (Cardak, et al., 2017, p. v)*

Notwithstanding the findings above, the report's study of student migration patterns finds that there has been significant growth in participation in higher education from regional students. An analysis of Department of Education and Training data between 2008 and 2014 which examined commencing permanent home addresses of students, found that there had been a 39% growth in higher education participation by regional students, however, much of this has translated into enrolments in metropolitan institutes (Cardak, et al., 2017, p. vi).

(1) **Position of Charles Sturt University**

Detailed data from the ABS Census of Population and Housing conducted in 2011 and 2016 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017) highlights the following:

High school completion rates (Census 2016)

Average Year 12 (or equivalent) completion across the Charles Sturt University's footprint¹ is 35 per cent, compared to 60 per cent for Greater Sydney (Greater Capital City Statistical Area), based on persons aged 15 years and over, and place of usual residence.

¹ CSU footprint defined as the SA4 regions: Central West; Far West and Orana; Murray; Mid North Coast; Riverina; Hume.

Participation in post-school education (Census 2016)

Attendance at university by those aged 15-24 years, is much lower across the University's footprint (8.4%) than in Greater Sydney (28.9%). For the same group however, attendance at technical or further education institutes is higher across the University's footprint than in Greater Sydney.

Attendance at university by those aged 25 years and over is higher in Greater Sydney (3.4 per cent) than across the University's footprint (1.9 per cent). For the same age group however, attendance at technical or further education institutes, is higher across the University's footprint than in Greater Sydney (7.7 per cent compared to 5.9 per cent).

Note: participation rates are affected by student residential location at the time of the Census, and in the case of regional students, are likely to lead to an understatement of participation. Cardak et al. conducted an alternate analysis of student origin, based on regional commencing permanent home address, and derived growth in regional student participation in higher education of 38.8% between 2008 and 2014 (Cardak, et al., 2017, p. iv).

Participation of Indigenous peoples in higher education is lower across Charles Sturt's footprint than in Greater Sydney (2.5% of the Indigenous population aged 15 years and above compared to 5.5% respectively).

Level of qualifications (2011 Census)

The level of University qualification completion is much lower across the CSU Footprint, on average, compared to in Greater Sydney:

- Postgraduate Degree Level – 3 per cent compared to 7 per cent.
- Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate Level – 2 per cent compared to 3 per cent.
- Bachelor Degree Level – 16 per cent compared to 25 per cent.

Conversely, the level of technical qualification completion is similar for diploma level courses and is higher for certificate level courses across the University's footprint, on average, compared to greater Sydney:

- Advanced Diploma and Diploma Level – 13 per cent compared to 14 per cent.
- Certificate Level – 43 per cent compared to 31 per cent.

Workforce skills (2011 Census)

The proportion of the workforce employed as Managers, Professionals and Technicians and Trades Workers provides an indication of overall skill level. Comparisons as at the 2011 Census are outlined in the table below.

| | Charles Sturt University footprint. | Greater Sydney. |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Managers. | 16% | 1% |
| Professionals. | 15% | 26% |
| Technicians and Trades Workers. | 15% | 12% |

Note that the Manager category includes Farm managers which in 2011 for the CSU Footprint, accounted for over 40% of managers.

Unpublished research and analysis of Charles Sturt University, with various data inputs available from the Charles Sturt University Website (Charles Sturt University, 2017) for domestic, undergraduate students highlights the University's purpose and mission to provide access to non-traditional university students across a range of equity groups. In 2016:

- 68.3 per cent of students were the first in their family to attend university.
- 23.7 per cent of students were from a low socio-economic status background.
- 3.3 per cent of students identified as Australian Indigenous status.
- 5.2 per cent of students identified as having some form of disability.
- 59.0 per cent of commencing students were from regional locations².
- Only 9.3 per cent of students were admitted based on secondary education. Other bases of admission included: 30.1 per cent admitted based on prior study at TAFE; 7.5 per cent admitted based on mature age or principals' recommendation scheme and 22.4 per cent admitted on the basis of prior university study (complete or incomplete).

An analysis of national enrolment data between 2012 and 2015 (Charles Sturt University, 2017), shows a seven percent increase in commencing university students (headcount) with a home location in the University's footprint.

Participation of Indigenous peoples in higher education warrants specific attention. Between 2012 and 2015, the Indigenous student cohort at Charles Sturt University grew by 31 per cent, however, the participation rate across the University's footprint is still lower than in Greater Sydney (2.5 per cent of the Indigenous population aged 15 years and above compared to 5.5 per cent respectively).

² Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia – categories: Inner Regional Australia; Outer Regional Australia; Remote Australia; Very Remote Australia.

(2) **Charles Sturt University's Recommendations**

Charles Sturt University makes the following recommendations:

- That student aspiration and capability built in and through schools be recognised as essential for regional, rural and remote educational outcomes and that governments directly invest in this area of comparative market failure (when compared to metropolitan outcomes).
- That educational pathway options for regional, rural and remote students be greatly expanded to materially deliver access and equity gains for non-metropolitan Australians. Refer recommendations provided by Charles Sturt University in submission to the Senate Education and Training Committee Inquiry of 7 July 2017 regarding the proposed Higher Education Support Legislation Amendment (A More Sustainable, Responsive and Transparent Higher Education System) Bill 2017).
- The design, development and delivery by higher education training providers of a greater range of Bachelor programs that articulate from vocational education and training (VET) diplomas and Certificate 4s, including greater integration between levels 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF), including amendment of National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011 (NVR) and Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) regulations to enable nesting of VET and higher education qualifications and vice versa.
- That Government, Schools and tertiary education continue to focus and investment in participation and success programs by government, schools and tertiary education and training providers, including continuation and expansion of HEPPP, particularly in regional, rural and remote Australia.
- Again refer recommendations provided by Charles Sturt University in submission to the Senate Education and Training Committee Inquiry of 7 July 2017 regarding the proposed Higher Education Support Legislation Amendment (A More Sustainable, Responsive and Transparent Higher Education System) Bill 2017).

1.13 **Key barriers and challenges that impact on the educational outcomes of regional, rural and remote students, including aspirations and access issues**

Cardak et al. (2017) identified four key factors that influence regional participation in higher education:

- Financial and non-financial costs.
- High school outcomes.
- Personal characteristics and motivations.
- Awareness of educational opportunities and pathways.

Rural and remote schools find it difficult to attract and retain experienced leaders and teachers. Turnover is high. In many isolated areas where large numbers of Aboriginal and low SES students live, school leaders are inexperienced and rarely supported, with little access to professional development. Principal classifications are based on student numbers and do not reflect the school complexity found in rural remote areas.

The NSW Department of Education requires a mandatory 50 hours per annum of professional development for all educators. The cost of travel, little access to and expense of relief staff in remote areas and the short course nature of existing professional development offerings delivered in metropolitan areas, continue to be major barriers to remote education leadership development.

Educators rarely get the opportunity to work with colleagues and reflect on their work and how they might improve. Many kinds of incentives have been used. All of them are of a compensatory nature and appear to have had little impact on improved student learning and teacher confidence. The specialist demands of educators in rural remote areas where the need is the greatest, is not recognised.

A feature of modern school leadership is heightened responsibility, pressure, professional isolation and high expectations for good decision making. In NSW, the Local Schools Local Decisions reform gives greater autonomy at the local school level. Luke et al., (2013) in *The Stronger Smarter Learning Communities Evaluation Report* point to a risk of skewed and idiosyncratic patterns of achievement, if increased Principal autonomy continues without improved training in instructional/curricular leadership.

Early career education leaders in rural remote settings are demanding relevant support and professional development for the situation in which they find themselves. Distributive leadership underpins this research and will identify and highlight where school leaders, through distributive processes, should direct their energy to gain the greatest leverage for enhancing student outcomes.

Elmore (2004) defines educational leadership as the guidance and direction of instructional improvement suggesting that the purpose of educational leadership is not only to develop a cohesive culture, have good communication with staff and students, and evaluate instruction—it is all of this, in a way that improves teaching and learning (Elmore, 2004, p. 14).

This research pilot builds in a leadership succession framework. Principal and Executive succession in rural remote areas is concerning, and is a common source of adverse effects on school performance, and student and community relations (CIN Educational Consulting & Charles Sturt University, Office of Indigenous Affairs). The NSW Connected Communities Interim Evaluation report identifies it was unable to fill 10 of the 15 Executive Principal positions for those communities for over 12 months. There are devastating effects of rapid Principal and Executive succession and vacancies, especially on initiatives intended to increase student learning, and is very common in rural remote areas (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2015).

It has equally harmful impacts on relationships across the school community, with students and importantly parents and community. Critically, it also has highly damaging impacts upon the capacity of individuals to effectively engage in higher levels of secondary as well as tertiary education programs. Such long-term effects

seriously impact the capacity of individuals to build a fulfilling adult life as a responsible parent and respected member of a thriving community.

Clearly, leadership matters, as does sustainability of the culture of leadership. In the four pilot NSW remote schools in the University research, of approximately 100 teachers, almost 50 per cent are in their first three years teaching and are still on probation (CIN Educational Consulting & Charles Sturt University, Office of Indigenous Affairs). All Principals in the four pilot schools are in their first three years, the Executive Principal is also in the first year. Nearly 83 per cent of all the Executive staff in the four schools are in the first three years.

(1) **Position of Charles Sturt University**

Financial and non-financial costs

Whilst Cardak et al. found that regional students likely to face credit constraints do not appear to be discouraged from making plans to attend, attending or completing university, relative to their metropolitan counterparts (Cardak, et al., 2017, p. 37), primary survey based research conducted by Charles Sturt University indicates that financial considerations are a significant concern for regional students.

The study Understanding the Charles Sturt University First in Family Student (Western Research Institute, 2014), which conducted a survey with Charles Sturt University's first-in-family cohort (across students of both regional and metropolitan origin), found that:

- Financial considerations are of greater concern to regional students.
- Students living in regional areas needed more support in managing finances and living away from home support – compared to students living in metropolitan areas.

Other significant costs reported by first-in-family students included the costs of relocating and the social and emotional cost of being away from home. Regional students also reported a greater need for motivational support and advice throughout their studies (Western Research Institute, 2014, pp. 25-28). Summary results are included in the following table.

| | |
|--|---|
| Main concern before starting university. | Coping financially while studying (29% for regional students, whereas 14% for metropolitan students). |
| Advice needed most in the first year of study. | Financial (24% for regional students, whereas 17% for metropolitan students). |
| Advice needed most in the middle years of study. | Study skills advice (35% for regional students, whereas 31% for metropolitan students); motivational support and advice (40% for regional students, whereas 33% metropolitan students); and, financial advice (22% for regional students, whereas 15% for metropolitan students). |
| Advice needed most in the final years of study. | Motivational support and advice (37% for regional students, whereas 31% for metropolitan students); |

| | |
|--|--|
| Main concern before starting university. | Coping financially while studying (29% for regional students, whereas 14% for metropolitan students). |
| | financial advice (21% for regional students, whereas 6% for metropolitan students); careers advice (51% for regional students, whereas 46% metro students); and, transitioning out of university study (42% for regional students, whereas 32% for metropolitan students). |

A recent (and yet to be published) national study conducted by Charles Sturt University with parents of school aged children found that regional parents were less aware than metropolitan parents of the range of financial assistance available to support study at university.

On average, regional incomes are lower than metropolitan incomes. Household income data collected from the ABS Census of Population and Housing in 2016 finds the average household income for the University's footprint to be \$1,448 compared to \$2,170 for Greater Sydney.

High school outcomes

The Regional Student Participation and Migration study finds that high school achievement is a strong predictor of university admission and university outcomes (Regional Australia Institute, 2016, p. 30). As mentioned above, the RAI report on Human Capital highlights lower than average educational performance across secondary school and university indicators. In addition, the outcomes for primary school literacy and numeracy are also poorer, on average, across the Charles Sturt University's footprint compared to metropolitan areas (Year 5 average 480.1 compared to 504.6 respectively) (Regional Australia Institute, 2016, p. 16).

Educational outcomes in regional Australia are likely to be impacted by lower levels of access to the Internet from students' homes. Data from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing shows that only 60 per cent of households in the University's footprint had access to the Internet compared to 75% in Greater Sydney (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

Another factor impacting educational outcomes is the level of resourcing of regional schools. Data from the 2011 Census shows that the school teachers across the Charles Sturt University footprint are responsible for 15.2 students (on average), compared to 10.1 students (on average) for teachers in the Greater Sydney statistical area³ (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

In recent years, Charles Sturt University has only admitted a small proportion of students based on their secondary education (9.3 per cent in 2016) (Charles Sturt University, 2017). Regardless of entry pathway, Charles Sturt

³ School teacher occupations include Early Childhood (Pre-primary School) Teachers; Primary School Teachers; Middle School Teachers (Aus) / Intermediate School Teachers (NZ); Secondary School Teachers; Special Education Teachers; and School Teachers nfd. The school aged population has been defined as children 0-18 years of age.

University strive to achieve the lowest possible attrition rate. Despite concerns about academic success and retention of students admitted on other bases, first year attrition rates averaged over five years by basis of admission show that, apart from the cohort admitted based on previous TAFE study, most other cohorts are performing equally as well if not better than the cohort admitted based on secondary education:

| Entry Pathway | Attrition Rate |
|---------------------|----------------|
| Secondary education | 15.4%. |
| TAFE | 21.5%. |
| Higher education | 15.0%. |
| Special entry | 14.6%. |
| Other | 17.9%. |

* based on domestic students studying an undergraduate degree (Bachelor level) via internal mode, including enrolments in Charles Sturt University's highly successful Constable Education Program (CEP) for the NSW Police.

Other ways of looking at student attrition including:

| | |
|---|--|
| Domestic Australian students studying all undergraduate degrees via internal mode, including CEP students. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher education – 14.0%. • Other – 16.9%. • Secondary education – 15.1%. • Special entry – 14.6%. • TAFE – 15.5%. |
| Domestic Australian students studying all undergraduate degrees via internal mode, excluding CEP students. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher education – 16.3%. • Other – 18.4%. • Secondary education – 16.0%. • Special entry – 14.6%. • TAFE – 21.6%. |
| Domestic Australian students studying an undergraduate degree (Bachelor level) via internal mode, excluding CEP students. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher education – 15.0%. • Other – 17.9%. • Secondary education – 15.4%. • Special entry – 14.6%. • TAFE – 21.5%. |

Personal characteristics and motivations

An unpublished study by Charles Sturt University, Understanding Perceptions of Further Education and Online Learning Among Australia's Youth (Attachment II), provides an insight into the personal perceptions and motivations as well as the influences on decision making around careers and post school study.

The report found significant aspirational differences between regional and metropolitan youth:

- Target youth from metropolitan areas were mostly concerned about what they were going to do when they finished school and achieving the marks needed to succeed at school (44 percent each). In comparison, target youth from regional areas were more concerned about getting a full time or part time job (47 percent) and assignments and exams coming up (42 percent), see page 24.
- 42 percent of target youth from metropolitan areas were concerned about going to University compared to 25 percent of the target youth from regional areas, see page 24.
- 71 percent of the target youth from metropolitan areas had the long-term goal to attend university compared to 52 percent of regionally based target youth, see Page 24.

With regards to influences on decisions about their future, the report found that:

- A greater proportion of the target youth from regional areas did not have a parent or guardian who had previously attended university compared to target youth from metropolitan areas (63 percent and 48 percent respectively), see page 20.
- The target youth from a metropolitan area were more likely to be influenced by their family compared to the target youth from regional areas (80 percent compared to 74 percent). School based work experience or work placement was slightly more influential for the target youth from regional areas compared to metropolitan target youth (75 percent compared to 68 percent), see page 31.
- Almost two thirds of the target youth from metropolitan regions thought that a university degree would be required to achieve their career goals (65 percent) compared to 43 percent of the target youth from regional areas, see page 27.

Cardak et al. discuss the fact that there are often fewer role models available in the regions, from whom students can develop an awareness of the opportunities stemming from higher education, and in turn develop aspirations to study (Cardak, et al., 2017, pp. 8-9). Role models exist in the family unit, at school, in social and community networks and in employing businesses. An analysis of the top employing industry sectors across the Charles Sturt University's footprint compared to Greater Sydney highlights the difference in qualification levels present⁴ (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, *Census of Population and Housing 2011*, TableBuilder. Findings based on use of ABS TableBuilder data.

| Top employing sectors across Charles Sturt University's footprint. | Proportion of employment. | Proportion of employees with University qualifications. | |
|--|---------------------------|---|-----------------|
| | | Charles Sturt University footprint. | Greater Sydney. |
| Health Care and Social Assistance. | 13% | 30% | 45% |
| Retail Trade. | 11% | 5% | 18% |
| Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing. | 9% | 9% | 15% |
| Manufacturing. | 9% | 7% | 20% |
| Education and Training. | 8% | 55% | 64% |
| Construction. | 7% | 3% | 12% |
| Accommodation and Food Services. | 7% | 4% | 14% |
| Public Administration and Safety. | 7% | 20 % | 37% |
| Transport, Postal and Warehousing. | 4% | 4% | 17% |
| Other Services. | 4% | 6% | 17% |
| Professional, Scientific and Technical Services. | 3% | 37% | 59% |
| Wholesale Trade. | 3% | 6% | 29% |
| Administrative and Support Services. | 3% | 6% | 26% |
| Mining. | 2% | 9% | 35% |

Charles Sturt University's recent (and yet to be published) national survey of parents of school aged children may provide some useful commentary in this area. The survey found:

- Regional parents considering university study to be less important than metropolitan parents.
- A larger proportion of regional parents suggesting that their children could find a job without a university qualification.
- A larger proportion of regional parents considering the value proposition of studying at university, given increasing costs associated with study.

Other questions in the survey touched on expectations of university and what kind of people go to university that may highlight some embedded preconceptions that need to be addressed, however, there was little statistical difference between the perceptions of regional and metropolitan parents.

The Regional Student Participation and Migration study refers to known issues around regional student awareness of career options and post school education options (Cardak, et al., 2017, p. 10).

Charles Sturt University's study - Understanding perceptions of further education and online learning among Australia's youth, found that, to learn about careers options, students were most likely to:

- Use the Internet or a computer program (60 per cent).
- Talk to parents or other family members (54 per cent).
- Talk to friends or other students (52 per cent).
- Attend a university or attend a university session at school (37 per cent).

A larger proportion of the target youth from metropolitan areas had attended a university or had someone from a university attend their school (41 percent) compared to only 34 percent of the target youth from regional areas (Cardak, et al., 2017, p. 29).

The pilot research acknowledges that rural remote education leadership needs to be highly fluid, contingent and embedded in everyday tasks and situations, including by those without positional authority, particularly in the challenging rural environment with inexperienced leaders and high turnover (CIN Educational Consulting & Charles Sturt University, Office of Indigenous Affairs). School leadership can be very direct, but it needs the capacity to contribute to teaching and learning in indirect ways by creating the conditions that enable others to do things that they would not have otherwise had the capacity or the will to do in less remote settings. The leadership philosophy underpinning the pilot is positional, but is also highly distributed leadership due to its context.

This is a unique pilot because Charles Sturt University partnerships are endeavouring through co-development with the schools, to provide a tool and process for empowerment. Hence school leaders learn to guide and direct, empowering themselves and the Executive team then cascading throughout whole school. It is a clear Industry engagement and partnership strategy bringing together theory and practice.

(2) **Charles Sturt University's recommendations**

Charles Sturt University makes the following recommendations:

- That governments design and implement funded programs that support pathways for non-traditional students in regional, rural and remote Australia, building on the successful interventions and learnings of the University.
- That governments design and implement pathway programs that build on the regional retention results of the Graduate Outcomes Survey and the crucial role the University plays in developing and securing skills for the regional workforce, which in turn supports the viability of regional businesses and communities.
- That governments provide additional funding for the University to work with schools and their communities in promoting the benefits of, and developing aspiration for, higher education across non-metropolitan Australia. This work has been demonstrated to be a prime influence in the increasing number of university enrolments by regional, rural and remote students reported in the national data.

- That governments provide additional support and funding to enable higher education to provide role models (for example, university academics, graduates working in the community, and non-metropolitan focused teaching, learning and research institutes such as the proposed Murray Darling Medical School), noting that for universities to be able to continue to influence regional secondary students in this crucial area public funding will be required.
- That to provide an appropriate evidence base, government support and expand Charles Sturt University's pilot research into the barriers and challenges that impact on the educational outcomes of regional, rural and remote students (CIN Educational Consulting & Charles Sturt University, Office of Indigenous Affairs).
This work would include aspirations and access issues to address this as a first step to enabling all regional, rural, remote school leaders, onsite access to contextually relevant, face-to-face professional learning and on-going support.
- That governments, collectively utilise individual rural and remote schools as the contextual centre for professional development for principals and school executives. Such work would include ongoing and professional support, delivered by experienced rural and remote education experts insitu.
- That State governments partner with universities, such as Charles Sturt, to prepare and accredit professional development for educators specifically for rural and remote school leadership in rural and remote communities throughout Australia, this would include pre-teaching appointment and on-going insitu professional development and mentoring.
- The Review team examine Charles Sturt University's early research findings referred to herein and conduct consultations within the pilot communities that this nascent work is being undertaken in, as well as request the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training to partner with the University to progress this research enquiry for tailored, contextualised and insitu professional development of rural and remote educators for improvement of student learning outcomes (CIN Educational Consulting & Charles Sturt University, Office of Indigenous Affairs).

1.14 **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 appropriateness and effectiveness of current modes of education delivered to students in non-metropolitan Australia, including the use of information and communications technology has been the focus of extensive research in schools located in the more remote areas of NSW, SW Queensland and central Australia (Mr Craig Peterson, Personal Communication). The capacity to access and or utilise cutting edge information and communications technology is often not possible over long periods of time due to the current capacity of learners, communications infrastructure or equipment.

Yet, it is accepted that it is a necessity of modern life that all our educational institutions should have the capacity to effectively deliver regional, rural and remote education programs that enable learners to effectively progress into vocational and or higher education programs that will prepare them for lives as responsible parents and citizens, wherever they choose to live. This is a fundamental right of all Australians.

The initiative outlined in this submission will ensure the Australian Government is enabling the development and delivery of a unique program that will, ultimately realise the dream of equitable education delivery for all Australians.

(a) **Position of Charles Sturt University**

Charles Sturt University agrees with and generally supports the findings of research undertaken on the appropriateness and effectiveness of current modes of education delivered to students in non-metropolitan Australia, including the use of information and communications technology which has been the focus of extensive research in schools located in the more remote areas of NSW, SW Queensland and central Australia. To this end, Charles Sturt University, supports the Government's existing technology policy outcomes and program objectives with regards technology access and equity for regional, rural and remote Australia.

As outlined in the Commonwealth Government's *Regions 2030: Unlocking Opportunity*:

“Communications and connectivity are vital for people living, working and travelling in regional Australia. The ability to connect brings regional Australia closer to the rest of the world and unlocks opportunities for students, farmers, families, health care providers and business owners. Connected communities are strong and stable communities, both socially and economically.

Access to world class information technology and internet connections are vital for Australians in rural, regional and remote areas. It is critical for those undertaking study at both school and university level (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017)”.

Charles Sturt University acknowledges the challenges of Australia's vast geography and dispersed population density make it harder to deliver telecommunications services to rural and regional areas. However, reliable telecommunications services are essential for rural and regional communities to thrive.

(b) **Charles Sturt University's Recommendations**

Charles Sturt University makes the following recommendations:

- that the Commonwealth Government, as a matter of national urgency, immediately review, refine and revise its information technology and communications policies, to ensure that all Australians, including those in regional, rural and remote Australia have world's-best access to the internet;
- to this end, the Commonwealth Government's national broadband network initiative be expanded to provide full fibre (or equivalent) to the home for all regional, rural and remote Australians, noting that failure to do so will consign non-metropolitan Australia to great education disadvantage and irrelevance in the digital century;

- That technology and communications related initiatives in the Commonwealth Government's Regions 2030 Unlocking Opportunity policy statement be revised to reflect the two recommendations above, and that following revision of the policy statement and our two recommendations above be funded in full and implemented as a matter of priority to ensure a viable future for regional, rural and remote Australia;
- that government devise new and effective ways of financing information technology and communications access, hardware and software for regional, rural and remote students and their family's that consider the often very short life spans of technology products, noting that current public funding models do not take into account the useful life of technology, and therefore subject regional, rural and remote students to additional disadvantage over their metropolitan peers; and,
- finally, Charles Sturt University supports the recommendations provided by Mr Craig Petersen, the Principal of Denison College of Secondary Education and Deputy President of the New South Wales Secondary Principals' Council, in his submission to the Independent Review of Regional, Rural and Remote Education.

1.15 **The effectiveness of public policies and programs that have been implemented to bridge the divide**

Charles Sturt University has a close connection to its regions which comprise most rural remote students with complex needs. There has been a trend for governments to apply a universal policy objective across all schools with complex needs.

The University's ongoing engagement and community and school feedback from its regions would suggest a need for a more tailored and sustained approach to improving student outcomes under these conditions. Various strategies have been commenced across the education environment to ameliorate the identified gap.

In essence, they are centrally driven universal policies or frameworks that simply do not fit the remote and rural contexts of this region. They impede the shaping of a tailored approach or appropriate response by educators to the complex community issues impacting on schooling and education in rural remote areas and create an aversion to risk of innovation that constrains those who are best placed to craft appropriate contextualised responses. They are resource rich, short lived and do not give rural remote schools and communities the leverage to collaboratively respond locally to individual situations.

There is sufficient research that now points to the school community and broader community needing to invest and own the valuing of education within their own communities if we hope to have an impact (Mr Craig Peterson, Personal Communication). One size fits all objectives crafted within a policy context that is not tailored to and by individual community and its' local education leaders has clearly not succeeded.

Principal - teacher relationships, education department interactions with principals, and policy decisions at the state level all are mixed into a complex environment. Principals are the leaders closest to the classroom and the community, and can be effective when they see themselves as working collaboratively towards and supported by clear, common goals with the Department, other principals, and teachers. These leaders are more confident in their leadership and can experience greater effect. In addition, Departmental license and support for the contingent leadership at the school level is necessary to enable innovation as a response to the situation.

Higher-performing schools generally ask for more input and engagement from a wider variety of stakeholders and provide more opportunities for influence by teacher teams, parents, and students – which may not fit the universal policy approach but can affect student outcomes.

(a) **Position of Charles Sturt University**

As well as the commentary provide throughout our submission based on the Australian and international literature and our own research into regional, rural and remote education, Charles Sturt University supports the work of Denison College of Secondary Education and the New South Wales Secondary Principal's Council in this space. Please refer submission provided by Mr Craig Petersen, the Principal of Denison College of Secondary Education and Deputy President of the New South Wales Secondary Principal's Council, to the Independent Review of Regional, Rural and Remote Education.

(b) **Charles Sturt University's Recommendations**

Charles Sturt University supports the recommendations provided by Mr Craig Petersen, the Principal of Denison College of Secondary Education and Deputy President of the New South Wales Secondary Principal's Council, in his submission to the Independent Review of Regional, Rural and Remote Education.

Charles Sturt University has made a number of other recommendations in Section 4.5, that we believe would strengthen effectiveness of public policies and programs that have been implemented to bridge the divide between regional, rural and remote education outcomes and those of metropolitan Australia.

1.16 The gaps and opportunities to help students successfully transition from school to further study, training and employment

As Australia's largest regional university, Charles Sturt University is passionate about improving further study and employment opportunities in regional, rural and remote communities.

Operating in a context of regional disparities associated with access, affordability and ability (Morgan, 2016), education providers must work with a broad range of stakeholders covering community, industry and education providers from all sectors in order to address trends of student migration from regional areas to urban centres, persistent trends of lower engagement in higher education, under qualification, and high unemployment (Cardak, et al., 2017).

There are many opportunities to improve regional educational outcomes with innovative pathways from schools and VET into Higher Education. Further, through the engagement of industry in the design of these pathways, many opportunities exist to engage, skill up and retain regional populations to meet current and future workforce needs.

(a) **Position of Charles Sturt University**

Charles Sturt University believes transition and retention rates from schools into further study and local employment can be lifted by taking a strategic and collaborative view of education service delivery and asset requirements in regional, rural and remote communities.

This specifically calls for a focus on:

- customised development of training and education content that aligns with gaps in regional skills and knowledge;
- reimagining the concept of place based education services with a view to increase collaboration between a broad range of regional stakeholders;
- policy and funding incentives for regional stakeholders to work together around learning design and integrated support services; and,
- investment in the development and use of soft resources as well as hard resources that capitalise on the large growth in multi-mode and part-time study options (Cardak, et al., 2017).

Global trends in education have seen a rapid expansion in digital learning and more flexible place-based services (Ernst and Young, 2017). Communities must invest in and harness these delivery modes, and then customise education services to meet identified regional needs. In doing so, communities will be able to capitalise on the large growth in student demand for multi-mode and part-time study options (Cardak, et al., 2017) establish a shared vision for all regional stakeholders to work towards, and ultimately, maximise regional retention of students.

To arrive at this clear vision for all stakeholders, significant engagement must take place with industry representatives, employers, community organisations and education leaders from public, private and independent schools, vocational education and training (VET) providers and the Higher Education sector. By way of example, regional work placements are typically very low in regional Australia (only 4 in 10 employers participate, on average, in regional NSW) (Department of Employment, 2017).

Thus, the nine key themes outlined in Professor Halsey's Discussion Paper (outlined on page nine) should contain a more explicit reference to the role of industry and local employers given their interest in finding and retaining high quality graduates for employment.

Ideally, this type of cross-sector engagement would be incentivised through a policy and funding model that leverages existing educational services within regions and allows for more agility. Such a shift would reward collaboration with industry and business, the use of soft resources that maximise the capacity of existing hard resources; and innovation in pathway design between education sectors (taking account of the disproportionate cost burden for regional universities supporting VET pathways into Higher Education) (Watson, Hagel, & Chesters, 2013).

(b) **Charles Sturt University's Recommendations**

With the above rationale in mind, Charles Sturt University recommends the following:

1. Development of complementary investment in soft resources that leverage the use of existing hard resource facilities in regional Australia.
2. An agile funding model that removes barriers to cross-sector collaboration and rewards engagement with community and industry. In particular, a dedicated strategy to enable education providers to develop seamless transitions between Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education providers (Acer: [credit based pathways in tertiary education](#)) (Watson, Hagel, & Chesters, 2013) including:
 - a continuing focus on implementing the AQF operational guidelines for pathways, in particular working towards guaranteed entry into Higher Education courses for VET award holders;
 - combined educational leadership from all three sectors, with dedicated, senior roles that hold responsibility for collaboration and education pathways;
 - investment in systems to monitor student progress and achievements within and between all three sectors (enabled through the Universal Student Identifier (USI); and,
 - accessible, well-structured information about pathway options for students and key influencers (including parents and careers counsellors).
3. A model that has a core function of maximising the use of technology and capacity building around digital service delivery in a way that addresses disparities in regional capacity and ability (Morgan, 2016) and addresses substantial growth in regional to metropolitan migration for Higher Education study (a 75 per cent increase between 2008 – 2014) (Cardak, et al., 2017).

4. Education pathways that address existing and emerging workforce needs, customised for regional communities. The pathways should have a focus on digital ability, critical thinking and entrepreneurship and critically, expose students to industry and vice versa.
5. Incentives for earlier and deeper collaboration between both the schools and VET sectors, and the Higher Education sector. This would include more opportunities for schools and VET students (and key influencers such as parents) to engage with their local education providers both within the school, VET campus and on Higher Education campuses.
6. More coordination around pathway promotions within schools, between Higher Education and Vocational education providers, with the intent of reducing duplication and triplication activities (and to ensure that no school misses out).
7. A continuing focus on the professional development of community and industry leaders within regional Australia, alongside and in collaboration with educational leaders. This professional development should focus on building an advanced capability for collaboration in complex and changing environments, managing ambiguity and stakeholder engagement.
8. A core requirement, for digital ability and capacity be raised. Digital inclusion research indicates that regional Australians are 20 per cent less likely to use online technologies to manage their work and personal lives than the national average (Morgan, 2016). With technological impacts cited as one of five disruptive megatrends for the next ten years by Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC: [what is a megatrend and why do they matter?](#)), a dedicated focus will help to bridge this gap.
9. A broader definition of information and communications technology (ICT) investment within education sectors. While Professor Halsey's Discussion Paper touches on the need for innovation in the use of ICT (Pages 33 & 34), it does not address regional disparities associated with community ability in the use of ICT. Specific investment is required to ensure that once technologies are accessible, teachers and educational leaders can make the best use of this technology. This would include investment in best practice use of videoconferencing and collaboration between networks of connected education providers.
10. A continued focus on providing opportunities for students to access education and training in the regional areas that they reside. Students who study in regional areas tend to remain in regional areas after graduation and provide a ready supply of professionals to fill critical regional roles (Acer: [Credit based pathway in tertiary education](#)).

1.17 Innovative approaches that support regional, rural and remote students to succeed in school and in their transition to further study, training and employment

Charles Sturt University strives for a robust culture of inclusion and participation. To this end, we invest in innovative programs that support our students throughout the regional, rural and remote parts of New South Wales and Victoria in which we operate. In addition, our student support programs also provide customised and tailored support services for the families of our students.

With regional students continuing to be underrepresented in Higher Education, the complex interplay of factors has led to regional students being:

- 10.0 per cent less likely to have plans to attend university than metropolitan students, after controlling for socio-economic status (SES);
- 7.0 per cent less likely to complete secondary school than their metropolitan counterparts after controlling for SES;
- 4.7 per cent less likely to attend university than their metropolitan counterparts after controlling for Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER); and,
- 5.8 per cent less likely than metropolitan students to graduate from university.

See, Cardak, B., Brett, M., Bowden, M., Vecci, J., Barry, P., Bahtsevanoglou, J., & McAllister, R. (2017). Analysis of factors influencing regional student participation and internal migration in Australia higher education. *Regional Student Participation and Migration*, 1-74.

It is clearly time to invest in what works. There is now an urgent challenge to promote high quality teaching in every Australian classroom, to ensure that every teacher is doing what the best teachers already do and appropriate to context. Although leadership is widely thought to be a powerful force for school effectiveness, this popular belief needs to be justified by empirical evidence such as the research currently underway (CIN Educational Consulting & Charles Sturt University, Office of Indigenous Affairs).

The New Zealand Ministry of Education, Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration uncovered, that leading teacher learning and development is twice as powerful as any other factor in affecting student outcomes; and that leaders affect student learning indirectly (through teachers), but nonetheless explicitly (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2015).

This pilot co-develops and supports four western NSW School Principals, Executive and head teachers to practice, reflect and embed sustainable leadership throughout all levels of the school. It will be led by experienced executive education leaders who have extensive remote and Indigenous education capability (CIN Educational Consulting & Charles Sturt University, Office of Indigenous Affairs). It will be supported by CSU research. In working together with the school leadership to generate information to refine and improve it progressively, the partnership will document the impact the project has had on the capacity of the school leaders to improve student learning. In so doing it will create an applicable, accessible and

affordable capacity building program, directly related to rural remote education leadership's impact on improved student outcomes that in time may be expanded to other industry sectors in rural remote areas as well as a suit of rural remote teacher education specialist instruction and accreditation.

The first stage will be focused on four designated schools sourced through a volunteer Expression of Interest process. Due to the State, mandatory requirement for professional development and the need for it to be relevant to the situations in which they find themselves, rural remote schools are actively seeking cost effective, in situ sustained support, delivered by those with the experience that they can have confidence in. In 2017 Moree, Wee Waa, Nyngan and Bourke were the successful applicants. Further stages with additional schools have already been requested.

The research joint project will focus on schools which share a similar profile including the following features:

- High percentage of students who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (>25%).
- High percentage of students from low SES backgrounds.
- Principals in their first three years.
- Inexperienced executive and/or teaching staff.
- High staff turnover.
- Rural and/or remote locations.

It focuses on;

- Intensive capacity building for Executive and teaching staff focused on improving student learning.
- Effective collaborative and repeatable cycle of improvement focused on effective teams.
- Evidence based classroom practice which will help improve student learning.
- Collaborative leadership processes which build a sense of ownership and common understandings.
- Initial, mid and culminating evidence gathering and reports enabling a voice for all stakeholders and the tracking of the project's impact and effectiveness in building staff capacity and improving student learning

1. Identification and selection of schools:

- i. Identification of explicit eligibility criteria for rural and remote schools.
- ii. Meeting with school leaders from eligible schools who are expressing interest.

- iii. Seeking formal expressions of interest, subsequent selection processes and signed agreements.
- iv. Orientation of the Principal and school leadership team.

2. Data gathering and analysis processes:

- i. The initial external eye process, which gathers feedback from stakeholders regarding the way forward for each school over the next three years.
- ii. The fact that all stakeholders have an authentic voice, builds a deeper understanding and stronger sense of ownership of the subsequent professional learning program.
- iii. Use of valid methodologies and associated materials including interviews, focus groups, surveys, document analysis and standards referenced continuums.
- iv. Evidence based report writing – initial EEP Report and a Culminating Report for each school.
- v. Unpacking the report with senior leaders, executive and staff on-site.
- vi. Initial, mid-year and culminating data gathering and analysis to monitor and evaluate the impact of the professional learning program.

3. In-school support for executive staff provided by highly experienced ex-school leaders in consultancy blocks involving team based professional learning ('reflect a bit, share a bit, learn a bit, do a bit'- school and faculty leaders map out explicit collaborative processes they will implement with their teams over 5 to 10-week blocks). These consultancy blocks, which occur twice per term, focus on Collaborative Leadership Processes (CLPs) and Evidence Based Classroom Practices (EBCPs) and involve capacity building forums for all executive staff:

- i. Principal as the leading learner.
- ii. Senior Leadership Team (SLT).
- iii. Executive team.
- iv. Head Teacher pairs.
- v. Head teacher and Deputy Principal one on ones.

Note that, data from these schools has shown that senior leaders and middle executive express a strong desire to help improve student learning, however, report they lack the understanding, training and skills to do so.

Each forum builds on the reflection and learning that occurs in the other forums and culminates in one on one coaching with head teachers as they specifically focus on how they will support their teachers, their classes and their students.

4. **Evidence Based Classroom Practices (EBCPs)** to help improve student performance (faculties collaboratively choose one EBCP from i-iv below to focus upon during semester two 2017). Then over 2018-9 identify other EBCPs or other key aspects of the original EBCP to focus on:

- i. High expectations.
- ii. Classroom routines.
- iii. Explicit teaching practices.
- iv. Effective feedback.
- v. Positive teacher-student relationships.
- vi. Individual and collaborative use of data.

A fundamental component of the program is each faculty team choosing one EBCP which is most relevant to their current circumstances therefore enhancing staff engagement, ownership and commitment.

5. **Collaborative Leadership Processes (CLPs)** are practical, high leverage activities focused on building executive staff confidence and capacity to lead sustainable, team based change which helps improve student learning. The CLPs set school leaders and faculty leaders up for success. The activities include:

- i. 'Building and sustaining highly effective teams'.
- ii. 'Building team effectiveness through excelling team meetings' (SLT, executive and faculty meetings).
- iii. 'Setting team members up for success'.
- iv. 'How do team leaders, largely through team based practices, know about and support what is happening in all classrooms?'
- v. 'Planned sharing and checking-in' and 'Transparent, team based support, feedback and follow-up'.
- vi. 'Providing growth feedback' and 'Courageous conversations'.

6. **Applied Learning Project (ALP)** involving application, within teams, of the collaborative leadership processes and implementation of evidence based classroom practices to help improve student learning and performance:

- i. Collaborative implementation of an ongoing, faculty based, cycle of improvement.
- ii. Each faculty focusing on one of the EBCPs to help improve student learning and performance.
- iii. Specifically, the professional learning program includes each faculty team:

- Building deep understandings regarding four evidence based classroom practices.
 - The team collaboratively selects one EBCP most relevant to their current context.
 - Identifies key focus area or chunk within the selected EBCP.
 - Develops explicit, agreed descriptors of excelling teacher practice which all team members will strive to implement in the first phase of a three-year cycle of improvement.
- iv. ALP related support for HTs and faculties will include:
- executive team and HT paired sessions using a largely team based professional learning model involving 'reflect a bit, share a bit, learn a bit, do a bit' approaches.
 - one on one forums focusing on supporting HTs and faculties implement, support and track progress in implementing their agreed excelling teacher classroom practices.
 - ALP planning and reporting scaffolds and templates.
 - ALP sharing and check-ins in executive meetings in terms 3 and 4.
- v. During term 4 each faculty will gather data from teachers and students and report on the:
- progress made by all team members in implementing the agreed descriptors of excelling practice in all their classrooms (in their focus EBCP).
 - areas for ongoing support and tracking.
 - the initial impact of these improved teacher practices on students' perceptions, learning and performance.
- vi. ALP Journal – each faculty leader maintains a journal which includes:
- successful collaborative processes used with their team
 - points for future reference.
 - staff and student data which tracks the implementation and impact of the evidence based classroom practices.
 - future directions.

Some schools and teachers are much more effective than others in promoting student learning and achievement. It has been found that when principals and teachers share collaborative leadership, the teachers working relationships with one another are stronger and student achievement is higher. Several researchers have found that where teachers feel attached to a collaborative professional community they are more likely to use practices that are linked to improved student learning (Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010).

They also found that expectations and accountability measures were a major focus for leadership which created a school culture of high expectations; setting an explicit and shared school improvement agenda; creating opportunities for teachers to collaborate and reflect; providing professional learning focused on improved teaching practices; identifying and addressing the needs of individual learners; and monitoring student progress and providing feedback in forms that guide next steps in learning.

Education systems and governments are in a strong position to support all schools in their use of evidence-based practices of these kinds to improve student outcomes.

Please see a quote below from early testimonials of a Western NSW School Principal involved in the pilot research with Charles Sturt University with regards education leadership development in regional, rural and remote education:

“Even at this early stage it is apparent that this is probably the best leadership development program any member of the Executive has participated in. To have regular, intensive and ongoing support, both individually and in teams, from experienced school leaders, is absolutely invaluable and previously unheard of. We feel particularly lucky that our executive staff members are able to have experienced education leaders working directly with them for two whole days, twice per term. They cannot learn the skills or develop their leadership capacity to anywhere near the same degree by individually attending courses. The strong focus on teamwork and collaboration and the demonstration that this results in strong decisions and real improvements in practice are powerful and we are excited at the potential real growth in our leadership team, our classroom practice across the school and our students’ educational outcomes.”

(a) **Position of Charles Sturt University**

Future Moves is Charles Sturt University’s aspiration and outreach program and raises awareness of university as a realistic and achievable post school option for regional students (K-12) in low socio-economic areas and for Indigenous school students. Since 2014, Future Moves has delivered over 1,000 on campus events and in school workshops and had over 54,000 interactions with primary and secondary school students in regional and remote schools in New South Wales and north-east Victoria.

Future Moves works closely with over 80 partner schools within 200 km of Charles Sturt University’s six non-metropolitan campuses.

Each year partnership agreements with schools are negotiated and signed by partner schools, providing clear information about mutual

responsibilities. With 2016 school partnerships continuing into 2017, with more schools on a waiting list to be part of the program.

Working to Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP) guidelines, Future Moves works with schools that have an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) score of 900 or less and at least 10 per cent Indigenous enrolments. Students targeted within schools are identified as most able, least likely to attend university and most of these students would be first in their family to attend university (28 per cent of parents of Future Moves participants have attended university and 17 per cent of parents of Indigenous students have attended university⁵.)

Charles Sturt University has also developed an innovative pathway program in collaboration with TAFE (Diploma of General Studies) that provides an alternate guaranteed entry pathway to students who are academically ineligible. Since its inception, 671 students have enrolled in the Diploma, with 328 entering university degrees because of their successful completion.

Regional, Rural and Remote Indigenous peoples' engagement in higher education warrants additional specific attention. Nationally, the participation rate for Indigenous students in higher education rose by 93 per cent (compared with 47 per cent growth for all domestic students), from 8,330 in 2005 to 16,062 in 2015 (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017). In 2015 Indigenous students represented 1.5 per cent of domestic students in higher education, up from 1.2 per cent in 2005. Although this is a noteworthy improvement, National data also shows that Indigenous students are more than twice as likely to leave their studies, with 44 per cent citing financial difficulties as the key driver for their decision (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017).

This is important for Indigenous communities and Australian society in the knowledge that Indigenous University graduates have very high levels of employment, and that Indigenous commencing salaries are, on average, higher than for non-Indigenous graduates (2016 Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT).

Although the Indigenous participation rate has increased, it remains significantly below the level needed to achieve parity. Key reports have identified the parity rate to be 2.2 per cent, based upon the proportion of Indigenous people in the population that is aged between 15 and 64 years (Behrendt et al, 2015; Bradley et al, 2008).

In their comprehensive review of participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in higher education, Wilks and Wilson (2015), highlight the need to approach parity from both levels of participation, and levels of success. This is a key element as the most recent Higher Education data released by the government,

⁵ As reported by students on pre-activity questionnaires.

shows award course completions for all domestic students in 2015 was 217,928, and award course completions for Indigenous students in 2015 was 2,190 (Wilks & Wilson, 2015). That is, while 1.5 per cent of domestic students are Indigenous, only 1 per cent of award completions are Indigenous.

Charles Sturt University's Indigenous student access, participation and success has been reported in detail in the publicly available Charles Sturt University Indigenous Education Statements (most recent three years available [here](#)). The statement for 2016 reports the following enrolment data.

| | 2015 | 2016 |
|--|--------|--------|
| Charles Sturt University - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: | 904 | 1121 |
| Charles Sturt University – Australian domestic Non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: | 32,688 | 34,266 |
| Percentage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students | 2.8% | 3.3% |

A core element of Charles Sturt University's Future Moves Program is Danygamalanha. This innovative program, designed and implemented in conjunction with parents and key community groups includes 'Strong Moves' mentoring.

Danygamalanha specifically targets Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with an aim to building aspiration for tertiary study. The program focuses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from Future Moves partner schools to build confidence and provide options toward further study and raise expectations that tertiary study is a realistic goal. Over 19 per cent of the 13,000 points of contact Future Moves had with high school students identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

More than one fifth of participants recorded an immediate positive shift in aspiration (23 per cent) and perceived likelihood of entry into university (28 per cent). Since Future Moves' inception in 2012, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from Future Moves and Danygamalanha partner schools enrolling at Charles Sturt through UAC and VTAC has nearly doubled (17 to 35).

We believe that an integrated approach that includes aspiration transition and success strategies coupled with an inclusive culture that encompasses curricula is critical to Indigenous Peoples' engagement in higher education. Charles Sturt University operates with multiple Indigenous teams centred on the six Indigenous Student Centres, including:

- Danygamalanha component of the Future Moves team;
- Strong Moves (school student mentoring) component of the Future Moves team;

- Indigenous Access Program in collaboration with Faculty teams;
- Indigenous Student Success team (Tutoring and learning advice);
- Away From Base team; and,
- Indigenous Student Centre team.

These teams, which are all staffed by people who identify as Indigenous Australians, work across the range of programs in operation at Charles Sturt, providing input and expertise as relevant to their roles. As well this is complemented by a whole of University approach to Indigenous student access, participation and success.

Charles Sturt University runs a range of other activities for students in rural, regional and remote areas that promote the accessibility and do-ability of university for them. This suite of events assists students in decision making and transition into tertiary level study, offering a range of different formats and channels to increase the accessibility of information for students and their parents about this level study.

These events address known barriers that can prevent students from going on to tertiary level study. These include days where students from years 10, 11 and 12 come onto campus such as University Days and My Days.

- University Days are events held on the university campus events each November for regional students in Years 10 and 11. These events aim to convey that university is accessible and supportive through a series of workshops which help students build study skills in preparation for the HSC as well as for researching post school career and study options.
- My Day events are run throughout the year provide Year 10 – 12 students opportunities to experience different career disciplines through a range of hands on activities which emulate university study experiences. This aims to broaden knowledge and insights into the possibilities for future careers open to students as well as helping them to make a more informed decision about tertiary study options.

Charles Sturt University also considers it important to engage with parents of students and as such holds Parent Information Sessions. These are sessions held in regional towns to provide parents with the opportunity to find out about tertiary options available to their child. Parents and current students also share their experiences. Topics covered include the benefits of a tertiary education, application process, key dates, affordability and how they can support their child through the HSC.

Charles Sturt's Division of Library Services supports regional engagement by offering teaching staff and Year 11 and 12 students free access to Library services. Individual agreements are created with local secondary schools to facilitate this.

To help ensure the success of students who have entered university, Charles Sturt has implemented a range of programs within its Hall of Residence (on-campus accommodation) which provides mechanisms specifically aimed at supporting first year students in making the transition to university study.

A 76-room facility has been set for first year students with access to residential support programs to assist with transition to university life, tertiary study and independent living. A program offering intensive one on one meetings designed at mentoring new students, guiding their transition to university life and study and ensuring that they are aware of all services and support available to them is another way of supporting retention and success of students in their first year of university. Residential Advisors undertake rigorous training which allows them to discuss issues with student residents and refer them to appropriate services to enhance their experience and enable success.

Charles Sturt University has worked with many regional Councils to establish scholarships specifically for students from rural and remote areas. Up to six places at Wagga Wagga campus are available for students from rural and remote areas to apply for which covers all their accommodation expenses for the academic year. In addition, Residence Life, (the office established to manage residences) makes further scholarships available to students from rural and remote areas who are experiencing financial hardship with over \$20,000 expended on this provision in 2017.

The Outreach Program is a core component of Charles Sturt University's intent to ensure that online students have an opportunity to be successful regardless of their educational background or location. This is especially pertinent for students from equity groups, such as low SES students and students with a disability, where needing to attend on-campus locations to study can preclude them from participation in higher education. The Outreach Program comprises three teams that work together to deliver services to students studying online:

- Outreach Team – staff members who travel to over 60 locations Australia-wide to provide face-to-face appointments and support to students studying online;
- Student Outreach Team – a team of specially trained students who make telephone calls to students when they commence study and when they show signs of disengaging from their study (that is, lack of interaction with online systems); and,

- Study Coaches – weekly, telephone-based coaching offered to students identified as at risk of disengaging through our bespoke multi-source data system.

Since the pilot in 2012, the Outreach Team has travelled to cities and towns in every Australian state and territory, making almost 8,000 interactions with students studying online. The Student Outreach Team has supplemented these face-to-face opportunities with telephone calls to over 27,000 students. Study Coaches have provided specialist ongoing support to 243 of our highest risk students.

(b) **Charles Sturt University's Recommendations**

Charles Sturt University recommends:

- that the Aspiration and Outreach agenda be continued;
- that university school zones for partnership activity between universities be established to allow for greater collaboration between institutions;
- ongoing targeted support tailored to address access, participation and success issues faced by Indigenous peoples who reside in regional, rural and remote areas; and,
- strategies to enhance Indigenous participation should be designed in conjunction with local communities and embrace a whole of university approach.

Furthermore, in this respect, Charles Sturt University recommends ongoing targeted support tailored to address access, participation and success issues faced by Indigenous peoples who reside in regional, rural and remote areas.

We also recommend, that strategies used should be designed in conjunction with local communities and embrace a whole of university approach. That is, success in this area will not be enhanced by central, standardised approaches. For example, Charles Sturt University's Strong Moves mentoring program, links to Future Moves and to the Indigenous Student Centres at the University. This mentoring program was built in consultation with parents and students from our local communities and provides a seamless relationship for school students with staff and students in the University. The proposed the Higher Education Support Legislation Amendment (A More Sustainable, Responsive and Transparent Higher Education System) Bill 2017 Bill currently before Parliament would be a threat to this work. Refer to Charles Sturt University submission to the Senate Education and Training Committee Inquiry of 7 July 2017).

1.18 **Charles Sturt University - Learnings from regional New South Wales and Victoria and potential intervention strategies to boost regional, rural and remote educational outcomes**

Charles Sturt University's range of aspirational and outreach programs which started as small pilots with the assistance of enabling funding to have proven to be successful in increasing student's aspirations and belief in their chance of success at tertiary level study of students from rural, regional and remote locations. These programs have continued to grow in demand since their inception in 2012 and improved understanding of these students' needs for successful participation in university study has been gained during this time.

(a) **Position of Charles Sturt University**

Charles Sturt University is firmly committed to the provision of outreach and aspiration raising work in regional schools and communities.

There is strong evidence of increased university participation from Future Moves partner schools, with UAC and VTAC enrolment data showing an increase in enrolments to Charles Sturt from Future Moves schools, while figures among non-Future Moves schools have shown a general decline since 2010. Onwards from 2012 has seen an upward trend among Future Moves schools from 369 enrolments to 527 in 2016. Enrolments to Charles Sturt University by Indigenous students (approximately 20 per cent of Future Moves participants) from Future Moves schools have more than doubled from 2012 to 2016.

Charles Sturt University's position is that the Futures Moves Regional Aspiration and Outreach program is effective in increasing higher education participation among regional and remote and Indigenous school students and should be continued.

A challenge in the competitive space of Aspiration and Outreach in helping students successfully transition has been the undefined areas of outreach which results in many universities targeting the same schools. If geographic areas were defined, as recommended by Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia (EPHEA), universities could collaborate more efficiently and effectively, knowing their boundaries, preventing duplication.

A review of the support provided by the largest online university providers (n=10) indicates that the Charles Sturt University's Outreach Program is the only program that provides both data-driven contact coupled with face-to-face support over such a large geographic footprint.

Since its foundation the Charles Sturt University Outreach Program has contributed to a positive effect on attrition rates for students studying online, for regional rural and remote students. Attrition rates have reduced by 2.29 per cent for students who come from metropolitan areas and 5.55 per cent for students located in regional, rural and remote areas. Essentially students who interacted with the Charles Sturt's Outreach team in 2012, are by now less likely to have withdrawn.

Since 2010 when Charles Sturt University commenced Aspiration and Outreach with targeted schools under HEPPP funding, evaluation has shown a marked increase in enrolments from targeted partner schools to the University. UAC and VTAC enrolment data shows an increase in enrolments to Charles Sturt from Future Moves schools, while figures among non-Future Moves schools have shown a general decline since 2010. 2012 onwards has seen an upward trend among Future Moves schools from 369 enrolments to 527 in 2016. Enrolments to Charles Sturt University by Indigenous students (approximately 20 per cent of Future Moves participants) from Future Moves schools have more than doubled from 2012 to 2016.

Ongoing evaluation shows that Future Moves activities achieve immediate positive shifts in students' aspiration to attend university (21 per cent) and their perceived likelihood of getting into university (23 per cent). Among Indigenous students, (approximately 20 per cent of Future Moves participants), these positive shifts are even higher with a 23 per cent positive shift in aspiration and 28 per cent positive shift in likelihood.

Interviews and surveys with teachers shows that teachers perceive the program to have an ongoing impact that extends beyond the actual activities and events. School staff talk about Future Moves events and workshops becoming traditional practice within schools with students looking forward to them each year and that the program not only supports building aspirations within schools but helps to build a university-going culture.

Another benefit of the Future Moves program has been the increased sense of belonging and enhanced student experience displayed by the 253-active volunteer undergraduate student leaders involved with the program. Leaders actively contribute to the program; they are inspiring to school students and often design activities with program staff. The recognition and reward for their volunteer hours and input into the program provides evidence for the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement (AHEGS). Involvement in the Future Moves Leaders Program provides opportunities to develop transferrable skills for employment while at university or in the future.

Enabling sub degree programs and pathway programs such as the Charles Sturt University Diploma of General Studies are critical to ensure that all students with the capacity to study at university are afforded the opportunity to do so. The results of the Diploma students, who's entry ATAR averages approximately 35, supports the need for alternate entry programs and the decreasing relevance of the ATAR, particularly for regional students. Student Anita Poupa is an example of the need for and benefits of such pathway programs for regional students, [see](#)

In addition to the Diploma of General Studies, Charles Sturt University runs a large enabling Program (STUDY LINK) comprising a suite of short, self-paced non-credit bearing subjects aimed at increasing students' skills and confidence to succeed at university. This is particularly relevant to regional students who may have

already suffered educational disadvantage. Within excess of 60,000 enrolments over its history, STUDY LINK students report increases in confidence and skills because of program completion.

The proposed Federal Budget reforms suggesting the removal of enabling funding and transferring the burden of cost to the students is a significant disadvantage for regional students and reduces the ability of universities to effectively support transition from school to further study. As previously mentioned, refer to Charles Sturt University submission to the Senate Education and Training Committee Inquiry of 7 July 2017).

(b) **Charles Sturt University's Recommendations**

Charles Sturt University recommends:

- that the Aspiration and Outreach agenda be continued;
- the proposed budget reforms that remove enabling funding to be rejected;
- that consideration is given to the need for additional strategies to effectively support and engage regional rural and remote students who study by distance education; and
- that three-year funding streams for outreach funding are established.

Furthermore, Charles Sturt University supports a minimum three-year HEPPP funding stream to encourage schools' continued partnerships and participation, as per the August 2017 EPHEA statement:

This three-year funding stream would mean that equity practitioners can coordinate widening participation and retention programs, resources and partnerships more effectively and sustainably.

(EPHEA 2017, Information to Government Representatives regarding the Higher Education Support Legislation Amendment (A More Sustainable, Responsive and Transparent Higher Education System) Bill 2017.)

Conclusion

Charles Sturt University is pleased to respond to Emeritus Professor John Halsey's discussion paper on key educational challenges and issues that impact on the learning outcomes of students in regional, rural and remote communities.

We recognise that country students are the focus of an independent review by the Australian Government into regional, rural and remote education.

We are also pleased that the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education is part of the Turnbull Government's election commitment to improve the education and preparation of country youth to develop into their best selves and fully participate in the 21st century economy.

Drawing on our century-plus, second to none, hands-on experience in regional, rural and remote education, as well as building on our commentary, view and position of Emeritus Professor Halsey's Discussion Paper, Charles Sturt University has proposed a range of recommendations that we believe would strengthen the regional, rural and remote education.

By adopting our recommendations the Review will strengthen the growth and the development of regional, rural and remote education capability and capacity for the benefit of non-metropolitan Australians.

It is critical that governments, both Federal and State invest in the future of our regions to ensure that all Australians can access educational opportunities which in turn drive the national economy, create wealth and prosperity and position Australia in the highly competitive global marketplace.

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