



Charles Sturt
University

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING
COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT,
EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Supplementary Submission to
the Inquiry into the Education of
Students in Remote and
Complex Environments

15 June 2020

Office of the Vice-Chancellor
Charles Sturt University



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Mr Andrew Laming MP
Chair, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Training
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Chair

Thank you for this opportunity to provide a supplementary submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training inquiry into the Education of Students in Remote and Complex Environments.

Charles Sturt University welcomes the Committee's request for information on the further complexities arising from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the response of Australian families and education institutions, as it is clear the pandemic is having a significant effect on the education of students around Australia, and will continue to do so for some time.

Charles Sturt's actions in response to the coronavirus pandemic have been driven by two considerations: supporting and protecting our students, staff and communities, and ensuring we can meet their needs now and into the future.

As one of Australia's most experienced providers of quality online education, the University was able to transition smoothly and effectively to online provision of all courses, and institute work-from-home arrangements for all but essential staff, and some researchers. Online teaching and remote working arrangements will remain in place until at least early July.

Charles Sturt's experience in online provision also enabled us to adapt our support arrangements for current and prospective students. The University has offered school engagement material and online video consultations for several years; in the past few months we have also set up virtual open days and parent information sessions.

For example, our annual Year 10 Subject Selection Evening has become an interactive online event (to be held on 24 June). Online engagement with prospective students and their parents has increased substantially this year – inline consultations have double compared to 2019, for example – with most of the growth coming in the past few months. It is clear that in many cases the increased interest is the result of parents' concerns about their children's education options.

The University offers conditional early offers through Charles Sturt Advantage, a well-established program that helped more than 700 students secure an offer to study with us in 2020. This application-based program considers prospective students' soft skills – highly valued by employers – as well as their academic record. The program is open to people who are considering university study after time in the workforce, as well as those just finishing high school; for the latter, a conditional offer through Charles Sturt Advantage means students face considerably less pressure as they approach their HSC or VCE exams – and especially this year, when many of them are dealing with disruption to their education.

Charles Sturt is launching a new initiative that will also help deal with this challenge. The HSC Revision project will address a key barrier to university entry for Low SES families and schools – relatively lower levels of attainment – by providing free and accessible HSC Workshops, to be held on the Charles Sturt Wagga Wagga and Bathurst campuses during the September school holidays this year. Up to 300 Year 11 and 12 students can participate in each of the 10 planned workshops, which will focus on key NSW HSC subjects including English Standard and Advanced, Mathematics Standard and Advanced, and Chemistry.

The revision sessions will be delivered through an experienced partner, InspirED, (formerly known as HSC in the Holidays), who have been delivering HSC enrichment programs since 2005. InspirED specialises in providing expert support to HSC students from senior teachers and exam markers, while also connecting them to their future study and career paths. InspireED's results show high levels of improvement and subsequent educational attainment for participants.

At this point the HSC Revision project is a pilot, and will be subject to evaluation later in the year, but if it proves successful we will explore options for expanding the program across our broader regional footprint in 2021.

As part of our wider response to the COVID-19 pandemic Charles Sturt drew on university financial resources to set up a financial assistance scheme for students who incurred additional study-related expenses as a result of the pandemic, and fast-turnaround funding program for research projects focused on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the health, wellbeing, business performance, communities and economy of Australia, especially in regional areas.

The 11 successful projects address issues like health care, including mental health; disruptions to children's education; assessing the effectiveness of containment measures; and designing privacy and security features for contact tracing apps like the Australian Government's COVIDSafe. All of the projects will be complete by the end of the year, so the findings can be applied as soon as possible.

One of these projects is particularly relevant to the Committee. A team of Charles Sturt University researchers Associate Professor Lena Danaia in the School of Teacher Education and Associate Professor Amy MacDonald, Dr Jacquie Tinkler and Mr Steve Murphy in the School of Education, will focus on disruption of primary school Mathematics and Science education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project will examine the effects on teachers, students and parents, especially in relation to providing Mathematics and Science subjects remotely, and will identify practices most valuable to those affected by any future disruption.

In response to a request from regional schools to provide content for remote teaching, Charles Sturt University set up Explorations GenNeXt, a dynamic online learning series. Designed with a blended learning environment in mind, the series lets students explore some of the big ideas, issues, industries and opportunities in regional Australia, such as sustainability, social justice, professional sports, paramedicine, the dramatic arts, media, leadership and change.

The series features content from Charles Sturt academics and alumni, and industry leaders from across the country. While developed to provide content for schools and students during the pandemic, Explorations GenNeXt has proven so popular it will become a part of Charles Sturt's engagement with schools and communities in future.

Charles Sturt University is confident of the success of initiatives like the HSC Revision project, Explorations GenNeXt, and the Mathematics and Science education project, and their value to teach. They draw on the expertise of our academic staff, the University's expertise in online provision, our own financial resources, and our dedication to supporting regional communities and students from remote and complex environments.

However, these projects, and others, represent a commitment of time and resources at a point when universities around the country are facing significant financial challenges. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to again commend to the Committee the recommendations of the Napthine Review, as embodied



the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy; the proposal by the Regional Universities Network for an increase to regional loading; and our own proposals for a research funding framework which recognises the role of universities in regional areas.

As always I would be pleased to provide further information to the Committee on any of the projects mentioned in this submission, and would be available to provide evidence at any proposed hearings that that Committee may undertake on the matter.

Yours sincerely

Professor John Germov
Acting Vice-Chancellor



Links and further information

Online video consultations:

<https://study.csu.edu.au/contact-us/consult>

Virtual Open Day:

<https://study.csu.edu.au/life/events/open-day>

Year 10 Subject Selection Evening:

https://charlessturt.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJYudO6uqjosG90xzg4fRnkSd4yM1_i1Eq47

Charles Sturt Advantage:

<https://study.csu.edu.au/study-options/pathways/charles-sturt-advantage>

Maths and Science education project:

<https://news.csu.edu.au/latest-news/big-names-to-feature-in-charles-sturts-explorations-gennext-online-learning-series>

Explorations GenNeXt:

<https://about.csu.edu.au/community/events/explorations-gennext>