



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE



Response to the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy Framing Paper*

7 February 2019

Executive Summary

The University of Melbourne welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Regional Education Expert Advisory Group's Framing Paper to inform the development of the National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy. This response builds on the University's submission in 2017 to the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*, and contributions to other consultations.¹

The University acknowledges the importance of increasing rural, regional and remote (RRR) students' participation in post-secondary education. The policy concerns outlined by the Framing Paper are addressed in the University's strategy, programs and engagement activities. The University's [Access and Participation Plan 2018](#) sets regional and remote students as a priority equity group. As outlined in this submission, the University also runs a range of programs to assist students to enroll, transition and succeed at our metropolitan and regional campuses.

The development of a National RRR Education Strategy will provide guidance to the Australian Government and other stakeholders on actions to increase capability and build on existing initiatives. Strategic planning and oversight of Australia's entire post-secondary sector, including RRR education, will be crucial to achieving broader sector goals as well as targeted improvements for student cohorts.

A National RRR Education Strategy should complement and scale-up the many active programs run by institutions. For instance, the University of Melbourne runs diverse initiatives that encourage RRR students to participate in higher education, through residential camps on and off campus; leadership programs that bridge secondary and tertiary education; sporting and cultural activities to create welcoming campuses; and Student Success supports to assist learning, completion and entry to employment. These experience-based programs are backed up by enrolment information services, careers and teaching networks, and bursaries or scholarships to give RRR and other students equitable access to a tertiary degree.

The University also delivers education in rural settings, including the Bachelor of Agriculture at its Dookie campus, and medical education at its Rural Clinical School in Shepparton.

Key Points and Recommendations

The **key points** of this submission are as follows:

- Post-secondary education should be treated as a joined-up and holistic system overseen by a single independent body, with the aim of streamlining and integrating sector planning, educational pathways, data capture and progress oversight.
- The National Strategy's approach to RRR education should be underpinned by the fundamental elements of a high-functioning education sector, characterised by mission diversity, that delivers quality teaching and learning, broad accessibility, diverse course and vocational options, positive student experience, workforce preparation, domestic/global collaboration, and stability in funding and planning.
- While presenting a challenge, the vibrant diversity of education providers and locations across Australia can be turned into a strength – through strategic mapping of disciplinary capability, potential partnerships and program supports – to help institutions match up with domestic and international opportunities (particularly regarding specialised training and entrepreneurial education).

¹ [Response to the Independent Review into Rural, Regional and Remote Education \(2017\)](#); [Growing International Education in Regional Australia \(2018\)](#); [Student Equity 2030: Response to the NCSEHE Discussion Paper](#).

The University **recommends** the Expert Advisory Group include the following actions as part of the National RRR Education Strategy:

- 1: **The Australian Government should work with the post-secondary education sector to expand opportunities for students and postgraduates to complete training and secure early-career supports in RRR locations, particularly in areas such as teaching, healthcare, medicine, agriculture and veterinary services.**
- 2: **The National RRR Education Strategy should facilitate support for bespoke partnerships to expand educational offerings in RRR areas.**
- 3: **The Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program, a crucial element in expanding access for RRR students, should be maintained and increased in alignment with strategic targets.**
- 4: **The Australian Government should work with State and Local Governments to identify and address regulatory impediments to the efficient establishment of key supports for RRR students in higher education, such as barriers or inefficiencies in approval processes for student accommodation.**
- 5: **The National RRR Education Strategy should establish a framework for acknowledging and scaling-up programs that are demonstrably improving RRR access to education.**
- 6: **To complement the aspiration raising and information sharing efforts of universities, the National RRR Education Strategy should encourage the resourcing of high-quality, up-to-date and workplace-linked careers advice within RRR schools.**
- 7: **To support students experiencing multiple disadvantage to access post-secondary education, the National RRR Education Strategy should take the lead from sector leaders (such as indigenous student support centres and peak bodies) to facilitate the implementation of comprehensive and flexible access and support packages.**
- 8: **The National RRR Education Strategy should encourage partnerships that leverage, share and expand the entrepreneurial expertise and infrastructure that is present in innovation hotspots.**
- 9: **The National RRR Education Strategy should support the key elements of growth in post-secondary education:**
 - **Policy settings for employment, accommodation and immigration that align with the goal of a thriving international education sector;**
 - **Targeted programs that drive international collaboration;**
 - **Stable and predictable funding settings for teaching and research to maintain Australia's high-quality educational profile;**
 - **Recognition of student experience as essential to Australia's competitiveness.**
- 10: **The National RRR Education Strategy should lead a collaborative mapping exercise that identifies the disciplinary strengths and workforce training capacity of all RRR providers, and how educational pathways can be streamlined and promoted.**
- 11: **To enable holistic policy making for all levels and categories of education, a single body (with State, Territory and Australian Government support) should be established to provide independent oversight, monitoring, reporting and high-level advice to government.**

- 12: **The National RRR Education Strategy should set goals that are reflective of the present breadth and diversity of the post-secondary system, with success markers that draw on data from both universities and VET providers.**
- 13: **A unique student identifier should be introduced for all tertiary students in higher education and VET to aid the assessment of institutional performance, as well as enhancing understanding of the study pathways taken in RRR and other areas.**

For further information, or to discuss this submission, please contact Dr Julie Wells, Vice-President (Strategy and Culture) at julie.wells@unimelb.edu.au or (03) 8344 2639.

Challenge A – Fewer study options in RRR areas

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

The National RRR Education Strategy should aim to expand educational opportunities in RRR locations in strategic alignment with regional workforce demands and socio-economic needs. For instance, building capacity to train and retain skilled teachers and medical or health workers in RRR locations would deepen healthcare students' and early career employees' social connections and professional aspirations within those areas, while providing greatly needed services to local communities.² Examples of how this is possible from the University's experience are discussed below.

Teacher training: Attracting and retaining well-trained teachers for RRR schools is an ongoing challenge. The Report of the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* called it 'one of the most persistent challenges on the education agenda'. The flow-on effects of teacher shortages impact educational and economic outcomes across successive generations.

Institutions such as the University of Melbourne are working to address this problem with educational placements and training programs. Such programs could be significantly scaled up through the National RRR Education Strategy to expand options for study and employment in RRR areas.

An initiative that has been shown to increase teaching capacity outside metropolitan areas is the **Rural Placement** as part of the **Master of Teaching (Primary/Secondary)** led by the University's Melbourne School of Graduate Education (MSGE). Following an expression of interest and selection process, Teacher Candidates are placed in Victorian government schools in RRR areas to do a 22-day (Primary) or 30-day (Secondary) teaching block, with appropriate academic, professional and financial supports.

In 2017-2018, the University facilitated 46 Teachers Candidates to do placements in the Goulburn Valley. These students were provided funding by the Student Teacher Rural Practicum Placement Program (Victorian Department of Education and Training). In 2018 MSGE Teacher Candidates also completed 70 placements in other regional schools – such as in Ballarat, Geelong and Sunbury. Approximately 50 of those placements were undertaken by Teacher Candidates who live in or near those regions. Students who complete the placements report they are more open to working permanently in RRR areas after doing the placement, and the program has led to a number of job offers and acceptances for graduating teachers in RRR schools.

Over the nine years that the initiative has run, more Teacher Candidates have applied for Rural Placements than the funding available to support them, and many are disappointed to miss out on the opportunity. Resources to support social connections with the host community, accommodation and career development are limited. Programs like this could be significantly scaled up across the sector, with appropriate Australian and State/Territory government support, to build lasting foundations for a high-quality teaching workforce with discipline expertise in RRR areas.

² See <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/attracting-and-keeping-australia-s-rural-health-workers>

In partnership with the Northern Territory (NT) Department of Education, MSGE also runs the **Clinical Teaching Practice in North East Arnhem Land**. In 2018 MSGE placed five Teacher Candidates in a school in North-East Arnhem Land as part of an indigenous education focus for their final placement. Since 2011 the University has placed 60 Teacher Candidate in RRR communities in the NT and 25 in Mildura.

Since the start of the partnership in 2011, 18 MGSE graduates have returned to teach in NT schools. They now play an important role in hosting and supporting new Teacher Candidates, forming a valuable community of learners and practice. In addition, they maintain relationships with academic staff at the University and with other mentors working in remote schools.

Studies have noted that Teacher Candidates who grow up in rural areas are particularly likely to establish a long-term career in a rural school, being more familiar with smaller communities, class-sizes and RRR cultural settings.³ The National RRR Education Strategy could promote collaboration between metropolitan and RRR educational institutions to ensure teacher candidates and early career teachers are well supported to train and excel in RRR settings.

Medical practice and healthcare: The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has identified that Australians living in rural and remote areas generally experience poorer health and welfare outcomes than people living in metropolitan areas. As such, RRR education – supported by well-aligned tertiary training provided by metropolitan institutions in cities or in RRR areas – could be directed towards fostering and expanding the training of medical and allied health professionals.

Universities, including those with a main metropolitan campus, can support RRR students to study locally by directly providing high-quality educational training and services in RRR areas, or in partnership with a local educational institution. Examples of this are covered below.

- The University of Melbourne's **Department of Rural Health (DRH)** provides professional health education and research training in rural contexts across medicine, nursing, allied health and dental care. The DRH's **Rural Clinical School** has a main hub in Shepparton and a twenty-year tradition of delivering clinical education in rural areas. The DRH also has major nodes at Ballarat and Wangaratta, and associations with nearly 40 smaller towns in rural Victoria.

The longevity of the Rural Clinical School demonstrates that medical training can be successfully undertaken in RRR places such as Ballarat, Bendigo, Shepparton, Wangaratta and others. Approximately 40 new doctors currently graduate each year from the Rural Clinical School, as well as the school providing clinical placements in district hospitals and general practices throughout rural Victoria.

- The University of Melbourne's medical degree already has a notable RRR identity and presence:
 - 27 per cent of students selected into the University's Doctor of Medicine course are of rural origin;
 - 25 per cent spend at least one year at our Rural Clinical School in Shepparton, with half of those completing all three years in a rural environment;
 - at least 50% of all Commonwealth-supported places in the Doctor of Medicine must undertake a rural placement of at least four consecutive weeks.

The selection of rural-origin medical students and the implementation of rural clinical schools have proven to be approaches that make an effective contribution to distributing Australia's medical workforce to RRR areas. Through other excellent initiatives such as the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training program, a substantial number of medical students can undertake most of their clinical training in a rural area.

³ See <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/the-problem-with-staffing-rural-schools>

- The University of Melbourne is a participant in the **Murray Darling Medical School Network**, which was formalised in 2018 and supported by the Australian Government in the 2018/19 Federal Budget. Collaborating with La Trobe University, the University of Melbourne will expand its Doctor of Medicine (Rural) in Shepparton by 30 places, with half of the new places allocated for biomedical graduates from La Trobe University's regional campuses in Bendigo and Wodonga. The Initiative will deliver end-to-end medical training in north-eastern Victoria. Incoming students are selected for their commitment to rural Australia.

The two Universities' collaboration will enable high-achieving and committed graduates from rural secondary schools to train as rural doctors without moving away from RRR areas. This is crucial as currently there are fewer opportunities for young medical professionals to remain in RRR areas, undertake specialist training, or pursue a senior medical career.

- The University also participates in the **Murray to the Mountains (M2M) Intern Training Program**. The M2M Program aims to increase the number and capability of rural doctors by providing a comprehensive training program in the rural context, including large and small rural hospital exposure, delivering specialist services from small rural hospitals and working as a general practitioner in rural communities. All towns involved in community placement rotations have hosted education and social events for interns, general practitioners, medical students, nurses, ambulance officers and allied health professionals to establish the social connections necessary for a long-term working relationship in those places.
- The University's Melbourne **Poche Centre for Indigenous Health** and the DRH have also partnered with the Kaiela Institute in Shepparton to support the enrolment and graduation of indigenous health and medical PhD students.

The above initiatives represent examples of targeted, collaborative and high-quality education and training in RRR regions in alignment with community need and workforce gaps. The National RRR Education Strategy could aim to expand educational opportunities along these lines to deliver well-crafted and lasting impact in those areas. However, it is also worth noting that education alone cannot solve the health care and service gaps, as financial and non-financial incentives have a crucial influence, particularly on female professionals.⁴

Further development and transformation of pre-vocational and vocational programs for varied health and medical workforces in RRR areas following the above models or others could be linked into the National RRR Education Strategy. The Strategy should encourage Australian Government collaboration with the education sector to develop more viable postgraduate specialist training programs in RRR locations, so health and medical professionals can remain in those settings while pursuing the next level of their career.

Recommendation 1: The Australian Government should work with the post-secondary education sector to expand opportunities for students and postgraduates to complete training and secure early-career supports in RRR locations, particularly in areas such as teaching, healthcare, medicine, agriculture and veterinary services.

⁴In an investigation of the role of financial incentives and non-financial factors in doctors' workforce participation the Centre for Research Excellence in Medical Workforce Dynamics has found that financial incentives alone are unlikely to address supply shortages. For female doctors, as with women in other occupations, the presence of young children is the most important factor influencing labour supply. To attract doctors to rural locations, the research highlighted non-pecuniary factors as most important, such as the amount of on-call, the ease with which a locum doctor can be arranged, the social interactions that are available in a location, the access to ongoing professional development, the availability of schools and employment opportunities for partners: [Solving Australia's Rural Workforce Shortage, Centre for Research Excellence in Medical Workforce Dynamics](#).

What potential is there for universities, vocational training providers and other service providers to better work together in RRR areas, including opportunities to expand service offerings and better support articulation between VET and higher education?

Certain sectors of Australia's economy are expected to grow significantly in coming decades. In addition to health care and education, there will be high demand in service sectors such as aged care. Overwhelmingly, jobs in these fields will involve higher-level skills requiring post-secondary qualifications. These jobs will also be critical in supporting equity, inclusion and wellbeing in Australian society more broadly. The post-secondary education system is at the forefront of sustaining Australia's skills capabilities in this regard.

The Murray Darling Medical School Network outlined in the previous section is just one example of the many possibilities for expanded service offerings that could come from strategic partnerships between education providers. In the Murray Darling Medical School Network case, two metropolitan universities with respective rural campuses are delivering RRR-trained medical professionals.

Along these lines, partnerships between rural-based education providers and other providers (whether metropolitan or RRR) that leverage the capabilities, specialisations and unique features of the participating institutions would be an efficient way to meet changing demands.

Partnership models can be diverse and involve community stakeholders and service providers beyond mainstream educational institutions; e.g. the University of Melbourne's **Academy of Sport Health and Education** program outlined below, which offers an alternative pathway into post-secondary education and involves vocational learning linked with tertiary opportunities.

Recommendation 2: The National RRR Education Strategy should facilitate support for bespoke partnerships to expand educational offerings in RRR areas.

Academy of Sport Health and Education (ASHE)

ASHE was established in 2004 as a partnership between the University of Melbourne and the Rumbalara Football and Netball Club in Shepparton with the goal of providing an alternative pathway to further education and employment for Indigenous youth who have disengaged from secondary school. Through GO TAFE, students are offered VCAL and vocational learning in a culturally safe and supported environment.

Since its inception, over 250 ASHE students from across the Goulburn Valley have completed certificate level qualifications.

ASHE will be part of the new Munarra Centre from 2021 and re-named the Munarra Academy. The Munarra Centre will be a state-of the art centre designed as a regional hub of connection and transformation for Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people across Australia, embedding Aboriginal culture across all programs and positioning Indigenous knowledge transfer and cultural exchange as a national asset.

Project partners include the Victorian State Government, Greater Shepparton City Council, Rumbalara Football and Netball Club, the Kaeila Institute and the University of Melbourne. The Munarra Academy will deliver enhanced education and training programs with a pipeline to higher education and connect students in the region to Aboriginal cultural knowledge.

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

What financial supports work best for students from RRR backgrounds, including those who choose to relocate? What forms of support might be useful in helping students from RRR backgrounds to continue with their tertiary study? How can universities assist RRR students to feel like they belong on their campus?

The University, which has regional campuses in Werribee, Creswick, Shepparton, and Dookie, has developed a range of targeted supports to help students from RRR backgrounds to settle in and succeed in their studies. Many of our institutional efforts to help RRR students feel at home are supported by the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP), the single most important Australian Government-funded initiative for engaging disadvantaged students, raising aspirations and providing support on campus through outreach activities.⁵

The following are examples of programs that, in the University's experience, are effective:

- **Access Melbourne:** To broaden RRR students' access to higher education the University has guaranteed Australian Tertiary Admission Rank levels for students from regional Australia (typically slightly lower than 'clearly-in'). Through a HEPPP-funded initiative, *Access Melbourne*, eligible students who have experienced disadvantage during their secondary studies can apply for enrolment at the University.
- **Access Scholarships:** The University awards up to 180 *Access Melbourne* scholarships each year which provide \$5000 per annum for the duration of an undergraduate program. Each year a significant number of these scholarships – based on equity criteria – support students from RRR areas to study at the University: 67 scholarship offers in 2017, 88 scholarship offers in 2018, and 101 scholarship offers in 2019. The University also has a bursary program which can help with accommodation and other living expenses, and our residential colleges offer other scholarships and assistance.
- **Student Success:** In partnership with student groups, academic divisions, alumni and external organisations, the University delivers services and activities relevant to specific cohorts through a whole-of-university scheme called *Student Success*. Different supports are provided at different times, reflecting the stages of the students' educational journey.
 - For first year students, this includes check-in phone calls; small group mentoring with student peers; subject selection and course design advice; extra-curricular and social opportunities, such as camps and events; and daily 'Unimelb Essentials' meet-ups to clarify expectations, milestones, and available tools for completing the year.
 - For later year students, the program includes individual strengths-based coaching; academic assistance including English language, communication and professional development skills; and regular appointments and supports for students identified as 'at risk' of not meeting academic standards.
 - For graduating students, *Student Success* includes tiered career planning advice and assistance (such as online resources, information sessions, staged practical workshops, mock interviews and specialised services).

⁵ A recent study by Prof. Sue Kilpatrick et al shows that University outreach programs can 'disrupt' the thinking of rural children and adults about their education/career paths and prompt them to explore tertiary courses as well as a broader range of jobs: see coverage 'University outreach programs change rural students' perceptions', *The Australian*, 5 February 2019; see article '[Disruptions and bridges in rural Australia: higher education aspiration to expectation of participation](#)' *Higher Education Research and Development* Dec 2018, DOI.

- **Active Campuses Program:** A program aimed at fostering a sense of belonging amongst RRR students, the University's *Active Campuses* utilises funding through the Student Service and Amenities Fee Grant Program. Based at the University's regional campuses including Creswick, Dookie, Shepparton and Werribee, it supports 1,500 regional campus students to participate in sporting and recreational opportunities. This creates a positive campus experience through social events, orientations and competitions while linking in with local community clubs, facilities and other programs.

Recommendation 3: The Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program, a crucial element in expanding access for RRR students, should be maintained and increased in alignment with strategic targets.

Accommodation: A major factor impacting the success or otherwise of tertiary students' relocation, transition and wellbeing is the availability of safe, secure and student-supportive accommodation in proximity to the campus. Adequate student accommodation is particularly critical for RRR students relocating to study, as well as international students.

For this reason, the University of Melbourne now provides an accommodation guarantee for all eligible undergraduate students through its Melbourne Accommodation Program. The University is working towards a target of delivering 6000 affiliated and associated quality undergraduate accommodation places by 2020. These places will be dedicated to supporting the implementation of the University's accommodation offer for students 'new to the City of Melbourne' (i.e. those who must relocate from outside metropolitan Melbourne to take up their university place).

However, providing enough accommodation can be beyond the available resources of universities and other higher education providers, despite the significant investments already made by the sector. There is also the important consideration of accommodation affordability for students of varying financial means or disadvantaged background.

If the National RRR Education Strategy aims to significantly grow the numbers of new domestic and international students studying away from home, whether in RRR or metropolitan places, it should also aim to achieve a sustainable balance between growth and necessary infrastructure. Where housing paucity is identified, and local educational institutions alone are not likely to be able to bridge the gap, the Australian Government could provide incentives for private development of affordable student housing, using the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) as a possible model.

In the University's experience, regulatory impediments can slow the University's ability to bring accommodation online. Delays in approvals at the State level have meant major accommodation developments were unduly held up. Streamlining approval requirements and other administrative barriers where they exist in State legislation would allow the University to respond more quickly and flexibly to meet student needs and efficiently manage its assets.

Recommendation 4: The Australian Government should work with State and Local Governments to identify and address regulatory impediments to the efficient establishment of key supports for RRR students in higher education, such as barriers or inefficiencies in approval processes for student accommodation.

The many RRR-targeted programs listed above and elsewhere in this submission demonstrate the creative and persistent efforts being made by metropolitan universities, such as University of Melbourne, to engage, stimulate and positively impact RRR communities through improving student access to tertiary education. Universities such as Melbourne are using government, institutional and philanthropic resources to reach out and create bridges across Australia where it is feasible in our remit.

As well as establishing a roadmap for boosting RRR education and fixing problems, the National RRR Education Strategy could be a positive opportunity to celebrate and support the existing work of universities and other education providers.

Recommendation 5: The National RRR Education Strategy should establish a framework for acknowledging and scaling-up programs that are demonstrably improving RRR access to education.

Challenge C: Raising aspirations for tertiary education

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

Institutions such as universities have significant influence on supporting, informing and encouraging career choices for students from RRR backgrounds. One key way to raise aspirations is to ensure talented secondary students, wherever they are, can see a clear and achievable pathway to higher education and, beyond that, career options. The Strategy Framing Paper notes that students from RRR areas are more likely to choose VET study options, perhaps ‘reflecting negative student perceptions of their prospects of getting into or completing a university degree’, or ‘less exposure to role models who have obtained higher-level qualifications’.

Care needs to be taken with this assessment and further survey work with RRR students could better inform policy making in this area. VET is, and should remain, a quality educational pathway for students who chose it. VET education can also reflect the local economic opportunities, for example, and offer real-time, vocationally oriented education.

For building tertiary education aspirations, a highly successful University of Melbourne program, the *Kwong Lee Dow Young Scholars Program*, may serve as a useful model for promoting a university education as an attractive option for a broader range of students.

Kwong Lee Dow (KLD) Young Scholars Program

Supported by philanthropic and institutional investment, the KLD program is the University’s flagship academic enrichment program. All Victorian and State border schools, and select New South Wales and South Australian border schools, are invited to nominate a student to participate in the two-year KLD program for students in Years 11 and 12. Annually, this results in a cohort of 700+ students in each of Years 11 and year 12.

Since its launch in 2007, on average 40 per cent of KLD scholars have been students from RRR locations.

Program benefits for KLD scholars include access to VCE revision lectures, borrowing rights at the University’s library, an overnight stay in a residential college for rural students, and the opportunity to interact with other KLD scholars virtually and face-to-face over a two-year period. Special benefits for rural KLD scholars who subsequently enroll at the University include a \$2500 relocation allowance and \$2500 to support an approved period of study overseas during their undergraduate degree.

A KLD mentoring program connects former rural KLD Scholars now enrolled at the University with current KLD Scholars from the same region. Mentees from across Victoria are assigned to a University undergraduate mentor to interact online throughout the year. Additionally, regional families are invited to the KLD Lounge on Open Day to meet each other and potentially form a support network.

Each year approximately 40 per cent of all 1000+ visitors to the Lounge are from rural Victoria. These positive metrics demonstrate the value – for students and their families/supporters – of programs like KLD Young Scholars for building leadership and aspirations in RRR communities.

The Strategy Framing Paper also raises ‘lack of information of available study and career options’ as a barrier.

A range of existing efforts aim to address this:

- University staff attend careers adviser meetings and/or provide remote support to Victorian careers advice and teaching networks.
- As part of the Tertiary Information Service (TIS) the University visits every region of Victoria over 45 days, with other Victorian tertiary institutions. The sessions provide information about the VTAC application process and courses at the University. Fifty-seven per cent of TIS time (19 days) is spent in rural Victoria. In 2018 the University engaged with 5600 rural Year 12 students at these events.
- University of Melbourne Information Evenings are held in regional locations at Bendigo, Sale, Warragul, Geelong, Ballarat, Albury, Shepparton, Mildura, Warrnambool, Hamilton, Wagga, Hobart and Launceston. In 2018 these events connected with nearly 1000 potential students.
- In 2018 the University ran 75 on and off campus events with rural schools from around Australia.

In addition to programs such as these, there is a crucial role for high-quality, up-to-date careers advice within schools. Connecting secondary school careers education and pathways into post-secondary school requires continual updating to ensure currency with the world of work and relevant training options. State/Territory and Australian governments can ensure that this capacity is sufficiently resourced and supported in secondary schools.

Recommendation 6: To complement the aspiration raising and information sharing efforts of universities, the National RRR Education Strategy should encourage the resourcing of high-quality, up-to-date and workplace linked careers advice within RRR schools.

Challenge D: RRR often experience multiple forms of disadvantage

What practical steps can be taken to support RRR students who experience multiple forms of disadvantage? How can we better support indigenous people from RRR areas to access and succeed in tertiary education?

Higher education providers are responsible for ensuring that they are accessible to traditionally under-represented cohorts of students. There is a legitimate expectation that Australia’s higher education system must be capable of widening access, and supporting success, for members of groups that are disadvantaged or experiencing multiple disadvantage.

The University’s [Reconciliation Action Plan](#) and [Indigenous Education Strategy](#) are two of the University’s policy drivers, aimed at attracting and supporting undergraduate students. Both plans are implemented and executed by **Murrup Barak**, the Melbourne Institute for Indigenous Development based at the University.

While participation rates are slowly improving, there are still major challenges and lags which the University is working to address in its own domain. Some of the ways indigenous students from RRR areas are supported to access and succeed in tertiary education are:

- The University provides Alternative Pathways to Learning through HEPPP and other sources, including ‘pathway to degree’ programs that work as bridging courses for RRR students. For example, school leavers and mature-aged students may undertake a Diploma in General

Studies (DIGS) at Shepparton, which allows students to develop their skills at a diploma level before committing to a full degree program at the University.

- The University also offers two extended Bachelor level degree programs open to Indigenous students. Eligible students have access to four-year (rather than three-year) degree programs in either Arts or Science. The additional year of study is designed to assist students develop the necessary academic skills required to succeed at University while living in a residential college on campus.

Alongside HEPPP-funded access programs, the University is proud to have embarked on innovative and grassroots-generated projects that provide pathways to learning and achievement, either in higher education or other levels of training. For instance:

- The **Academy of Sport Health and Education** partnership (outlined earlier).
- Through building relationships with regional communities, the University has developed initiatives to encourage indigenous learners to take up further study based on the appeal of high-performance sport:

The **Raise the Bar Academy** is a joint initiative between Athletics Australia and Melbourne University Sport. This program enables 35 students to spend a week in January on the University campus in Melbourne, where they receive professional coaching, academic mentoring and positive psychology training from professionals including elite athletes and staff members. There is also a major celebratory dinner at completion with indigenous Olympian special guests that builds participants' self-esteem and networks. Launched in 2015, in its first year the program received close to 150 applications from rural and regional Indigenous teenagers, often from disadvantaged communities.

The above examples illustrate that the practical approaches to support multiply disadvantaged and/or indigenous students to succeed in higher education should include:

- Strategic and well-supported indigenous leadership of institutional outreach activities (e.g. through a dedicated centre or division);
- Flexible or alternative modes of learning, or pathways to tertiary entry;
- Community outreach and engagement;
- Targeted programs to build familiarity and aspirations, such as through sport;
- Continued and expanded Australian Government support of key institutional programs such as through HEPPP.

Recommendation 7: To support students experiencing multiple disadvantage to access post-secondary education, the National RRR Education Strategy should take the lead from sector leaders (such as indigenous student support centres and peak bodies) to facilitate the implementation of comprehensive and flexible access and support packages.

Challenge E: Attracting people and jobs to RRR areas

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

Entrepreneurial education – including foundational STEM topics as well as specific courses aimed at building commercialisation and business launch skills – has the potential to stimulate economic growth in RRR areas, particularly through improving opportunities for students and young people.

Educational providers are well-placed to participate in partnerships with industry, business and community to build aspirations and develop links between education, training and work.

In many instances, it may be cost-effective and efficient for governments to support and encourage partnerships that leverage and share entrepreneurial education expertise and infrastructure that is present in existing innovation hubs, rather than starting afresh in RRR locations. A hub-and-spokes model that links RRR schools with high-performing innovation hubs is one way of achieving this.

Additionally, there are innovative ways to increase VET and university qualification rates through courses and programs that enhance the capacities of graduates to create their own jobs as well as being work-ready for employers. The University is applying this rationale in our own domain. The following partnership-based models are examples of good practice that may be adjusted and translated to RRR schools and universities:

- Drawing on the strength of the Melbourne Biomedical Precinct, the University is expanding a ‘school to bench to workplace’ vision. This vision is based on a purposeful collision of academic research, education, and commercial research. A key element is the specialist Elizabeth Blackburn School of Sciences, co-located in the Melbourne Biomedical Precinct and operating as a branch of the University High School. This School is designed to engage young people in Year 11 and 12 who have passion and potential to study and work in the STEM-M fields.
- The **Melbourne Accelerator Program** (MAP) is the University’s entrepreneurship program and start-up accelerator based in the city, with a track record of working with RRR partners. For instance, MAP and Australia Post partnered with regional councils in 2017 to run a ‘Regional Pitchfest’, which enabled young entrepreneurs, artisans and innovators from regional towns to pitch to an expert panel and win support to develop their idea.
- The University offers a **Master of Entrepreneurship** to train students in commercialising products and services, and help them to design, launch or strengthen their business.

Recommendation 8: The National RRR Education Strategy should encourage partnerships that leverage, share and expand the entrepreneurial expertise and infrastructure that is present in innovation hotspots.

What actions would further strengthen and increase the attractiveness of regional universities? What policies would attract more metropolitan and international students to study at RRR areas, including regional universities and campuses?

The University acknowledges the Government’s focus on promoting regional Australia as a study destination. It is appropriate that the National RRR Education Strategy aims to attract new students to study in RRR areas, primarily by identifying ways to capitalise on the benefits of education offered outside of Australia’s capital cities.

Diversification is key to a healthy international education sector. Australia has enjoyed rapid growth in its education exports over the past decade, particularly from its universities. Its status as a key destination for international students is built upon the teaching and research quality of its tertiary institutions, which provide an educational offering with a value proposition that meets the needs and aspirations of prospective students.

International students’ choice to come to Australia is informed by attractive factors such as:

- The strong reputation of Australia’s post-secondary education, driven by Australian universities’ rising places in global rankings;

- The flow-on effects of Australian universities' international research collaborations, two-way exchange agreements, and membership of international networks (e.g. Universitas 21 and the Association of Pacific Rim Universities);
- The availability of in-demand, high-quality postgraduate coursework education; and
- Presence of crucial student experience elements such as affordability, accommodation availability, English-language environment, and general quality of life in Australia.

As the international education sector grows globally, ensuring that Australia's value proposition remains world-class will require addressing capacity constraints including in the areas of accommodation, employment, health and transport, as well as identifying new markets, including for institutions located in RRR Australia. Government has an important role to play in growing new markets for international education. Attracting students to a particular market requires a clear-eyed assessment of the comparative advantage of the offer and developing a compelling value proposition that is unique and differentiated from others in a global market.

Students who come to Australia from other parts of the world are highly selective. A university education represents a major investment for those students and their families. Their choices on where to study are made on the basis of institutional profile, course quality, course fees, strong student employment outcomes and the perceived quality of life on offer at the study destination. In this weighing of factors, the agency of the students themselves should be clearly acknowledged. Ignoring this will result in policy interventions that intend to grow international education in selective parts of Australia but fail to achieve this aim.

Recommendation 9: The National RRR Education Strategy should support the key elements of growth in post-secondary education:

- **Policy settings for employment, accommodation and immigration that align with the goal of a thriving international education sector;**
- **Targeted programs that drive international collaboration;**
- **Stable and predictable funding settings for teaching and research to maintain Australia's high-quality educational profile;**
- **Recognition of student experience as essential to Australia's competitiveness.**

The National RRR Education Strategy should aim to grow the Australian education sector by building up capacity, course offerings, student supports and educational strengths in professional and vocational areas that will attract additional international students, rather than seeking to divert part of the existing international student cohort to RRR areas. Carefully considered systemic adjustments and collaboration between education providers and governments will be necessary to create conditions for a thriving, diverse post-secondary education system.

Australia's post-secondary education sector can play a substantial role in filling the growing demands of developing economies in Asia. For example, agriculture is a field in which RRR institutions and campuses enjoy a natural advantage. It is also a field in which workforce demand in Asia will continue to grow. As another example, India's expanding need for VET graduates, and the difficulties experienced in establishing its own capacity in VET provision, have been well-documented. Instances of growth and demand such as these offer an opportunity to increase the number of international VET students taking up study in RRR areas, given that regional locations are often well-served by TAFE campuses.

The National RRR Education Strategy should therefore support RRR education providers to selectively build educational capacity and sector share, based on the unique qualities and specialisations that are offered by RRR education and communities. There may also be opportunities for metropolitan universities to partner with RRR-based universities to enable international students to take part of

their course in a RRR location. For example, international students in Melbourne's Bachelor of Agriculture have an opportunity to study at our Dookie campus.

As a starting point to achieve this, the Strategy should initiate a mapping exercise to identify where the disciplinary strengths and training capacity of RRR institutions align with the skills and capacity-building needs of Australia and other countries. The mapping exercise would require collaboration and contributions from VET and tertiary education providers alike, as training pathways in this regard will work best when they are coordinated, streamlined and mutually reinforcing.

The mapping exercise should also involve Australian, State/Territory and Local Governments, and representatives from industry to identify where the strengths of a given regional area can meet the needs of domestic and overseas economies, and to consider how these strengths can be promoted to target markets.

Recommendation 10: The National RRR Education Strategy should lead a collaborative mapping exercise that identifies the disciplinary strengths and workforce training capacity of all RRR providers, and how educational pathways can be streamlined and promoted.

Challenge F: Implementing and monitoring a national strategy

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

Future workers will increasingly move periodically between learning and work, sometimes engaging in both simultaneously. This creates new challenges for universities and VET providers to become more accessible, and adaptable.

Australia's post-secondary education system will be called upon not only to provide young Australians with an initial opportunity, but to allow individuals to continuously re-skill in the face of industry transition and disruption. Ensuring there are appropriate pathways and alignment between different types of education, and assuring the quality and distinctiveness of providers, will be important to the success of Australian post-secondary education overall.

Siloed or piecemeal policy and funding settings work against the attainment of seamless post-secondary education pathways. A joined-up education architecture will enable smoother transitions between training, education and work. There are international examples of this approach, such as the University Grants Committee in Hong Kong and Higher Education Funding Council for England in the United Kingdom. A post-secondary school Board (or Commission) would complement the functions of the National School Resourcing Board (at the primary and secondary level). Such an agency could include Commissioners responsible for specific priority areas of the education system, including RRR, for example.

For this reason, rather than a designated stand-alone Commissioner, the University recommends the National RRR Education Strategy should be overseen by a single body that is also responsible for overseeing other key education strategies, such as the National Strategy for International Education 2025. A single body with a broad remit for Australian education could also link appropriately to crucial national strategies such as the National Innovation and Science Agenda, Women in STEM Decadal Plan (in development) and VET reforms being undertaken by the Department of Education and Training.

Recommendation 11: To enable holistic policy making for all levels and categories of education, a single body (with State, Territory and Australian Government support) should be established to provide independent oversight, monitoring, reporting and high-level advice to government.

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

Australian Governments make a substantial financial investment in the education system. It is reasonable to expect education providers to be accountable for delivering the outcomes that are intended by that investment.

In measuring success, the University recommends setting goals and targets that are reflective of the breadth and diversity of the post-secondary system, by integrating data from both universities and VET providers, and properly capturing new and different course models (such as micro-credentials, sub-bachelor degrees, and other courses of different duration).

The introduction of a unique student identifier for all tertiary students in higher education and VET could significantly aid the assessment of institutional performance, as well as enhancing understanding of the study pathways taken in RRR and other areas. Linking NAPLAN and PISA data with post-school data would also assist.

Currently, the performance indicators reported in the higher education statistics and on the QILT website have a significant focus on bachelor-level performance. This siloed approach to data collection and reporting will hinder efforts to keep track of success under the National RRR Education Strategy.

Rather, success markers should be aimed at capturing university and VET data, at the sub-bachelor, bachelor and post-graduate levels, to ensure that the future post-secondary education sector is meeting its responsibilities in RRR areas. In time, micro-credentials and alternative course types could be included as a credentialing framework is developed for those emerging course types. There should also be a key role for qualitative assessment, which is sensitive to divergent and institution-specific approaches to students.

Recommendation 12: The National RRR Education Strategy should set goals that are reflective of the present breadth and diversity of the post-secondary system, with success markers that draw on data from both universities and VET providers.

Recommendation 13: A unique student identifier should be introduced for all tertiary students (in higher education and VET) to aid the assessment of institutional performance, as well as enhancing understanding of the study pathways taken in RRR and other areas.