

Rural and regional access to secondary and tertiary education opportunity

Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education response

This response focuses on the needs of Indigenous students located in rural regional and remote contexts of Australia.

- a. The financial impact on rural and regional students who are attending metropolitan secondary schools, universities or TAFE

There is a financial consequence for any student studying away from home. Despite the fact that some Indigenous students are able to get allowances to supplement their fees and other expenses associated with studying away from home, they still do not adequately meet the actual costs involved. However, there is even greater cost associated with studying away from home, and this is the cost of community loss. Indigenous Australians have close association with the community. Making an assumption that a student can be removed from the community in order to undertake study without a "loss" is false.

- b. the education alternatives for rural and regional students wanting to study in regional areas

There are very few, and those that do exist are often inadequate. Distance education study is an approach to learning that not all students are suited to. In particular, traditional Indigenous Australians generally do not like traditional distance education approaches. However, Batchelor Institute and some other providers of indigenous education have found that running courses in students communities to be the best option, and where absolutely necessary, for experienced learners, block release learning activity on campus. Funding formulas and programmes are generally inadequate for this.

- c. the implications of current and proposed government measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas

Vocational Education Broadband Network. Broadband access in remote and rural Australia is inadequate. Even with the changes provided by TELSTRA in the last year or so through wireless access the situation is still quite poor in many communities. Increased broadband access location education network is critical particularly in providing access to students to the network.

There does not seem to be any particular advantage for TAFE for rural and remote students coming out of the Bradley Report.

- d. the short and long term impact of current and proposed government policies on regional university and TAFE college enrolments

Until governments come to the realisation that it costs significantly more money to educate and train a person in rural and remote Australia, than a person living in urban Australia, there will be little change in the educational outcomes.

- e. the adequacy of government measures to provide the students who are required to leave home to secondary or postsecondary study

These are inadequate, and misdirected, particularly when it comes to Indigenous Australians. The Data on participation and completion rates of Indigenous people should indicate that there is a problem.

- f. The educational needs of rural and regional students

The educational needs of rural and regional students are no different from the educational needs of students living in urban centres. However, there are also groups living in rural areas that have particular needs. Particularly Indigenous people in the Northern Territory, rural South Australia, western Queensland, and WA.

- g. the impact of government measures and proposals on rural and regional communities

The impact has been minimal. When it comes to closing the gap of educational disadvantage amongst Indigenous Australians, particularly those located in rural and regional areas, it is clear that current government measures have done little. In all measures Indigenous people score much lower than mainstream Australians.

Funding for higher education and TAFE programs of students located in rural and regional Australia needs to be significantly adjusted to take account of the additional expense of providing education and training in these contexts. The current formulas used do not adequately take into account the additional cost required to run programmes. In particular, the cost of providing education and training to Indigenous Australians in their communities is significant. This is coupled with the fact that in most cases such courses or programs are dealing with small numbers, which again reduces any potential economies of scale. Indigenous Australians are also less likely to be in an economic position to pay fees or supplement their training/education costs. Training providers such as BIITE have invested significant money in facilities and personnel in order to provide a broad base of appropriate education/training. Many of these costs are fixed, and indeed in the case of personnel costs it is often necessary to lock people into fixed term appointments in order to secure their services. Employment costs are also high because they need to take into account the higher cost of living in rural and remote contexts. All of these items place significant demand on the limited funds provided to run appropriate training and education courses.

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