

As part of your assessment of the adequacy of government measures to provide equitable access to secondary and post-secondary education opportunities to students from rural and regional communities attending metropolitan institutions, and metropolitan students attending regional universities or technical and further education (TAFE) colleges I offer the following response based on information gathered by the *Australian Secondary Principals Association (ASPA)*.

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

The Australian Scholarships Group (ASG) has developed calculators designed to assist parents / students ascertain the possible costs of education. The Secondary Schooling Costs Calculator and the University Costs Calculator may provide a starting point for ascertaining the financial impact on students. This is for a point of reference and ASPA is not endorsing or promoting any ASG product.

Extract from Media Release – 18March 2008

## **University Costs Calculated For Regional & Country Students**

The Australian Scholarships Group (ASG) has developed a unique new online tool to calculate the estimated costs that new students (many with the help of their parents) will face in order to gain their university qualifications. [1]

ASG's new online University Costs Calculator can show the cost comparisons that a student living away from home is estimated to face from 2008 if they choose a career, for example, as a:

- Teacher (national priority courses for four years) with an estimated total cost of \$101,182 if living in halls of residence, or \$104,182 in shared independent living or \$108,209 if living in a family boarding program such as Homestay. This compares to city students who will pay an estimated total of \$56,792 if living with their parents.
- Nurse (national priority courses for three years) with an estimated total cost of \$74,755 if living in halls of residence, or \$76,974 in shared independent living or \$79,953 if living in a family boarding program such as Homestay. This compares to city students who will pay an estimated total of \$41,918 if living with their parents.
- Journalist (Band 1 HECS – Bachelor of Arts – three years) with an estimated total cost of \$77,939 if living in halls of residence, or \$80,158 in shared independent living or \$83,137 if living in a family boarding program such as Homestay. This compares to city students who will pay an estimated total of \$45,102 if living with their parents.
- Engineer (Band 2 HECS – Bachelor of Engineering – four years) with an estimated total cost of \$114,739 if living in halls of residence, or \$117,739 in shared independent living or \$121,766 if living in a family boarding program such as Homestay. This compares to city students who will pay an estimated total of \$70,349 if living with their parents.

- Dentist (Band 3 HECS – Bachelor of Dentistry – five years) with an estimated total cost of \$152,449 if living in halls of residence, or \$156,252 in shared independent living or \$161,356 if living in a family boarding program such as Homestay. This compares to city students who will pay an estimated total of \$96,189 if living with their parents.

The online University Costs Calculator is the second calculator ASG has developed. It supports ASG's Secondary Schooling Costs Calculator. ASG hopes its new University Costs Calculator will help encourage parents to plan for their children's future education and assist new university students to budget more accurately for their annual costs while studying.

Based on national average figures ASG estimates a student beginning university in 2008 can expect to pay a total of \$55,749 for his or her three-year Bachelor of Accounting course and personal living expenses while living at home with his or her parents. The same qualification will cost \$88,586 if the student is living in halls of residence, \$90,805 for shared independent living and \$93,784 for boarding with a family such as Homestay although these amounts will vary from state to state. (See ASG's University Costs Calculator for more information –[www.asg.com.au](http://www.asg.com.au) – click on the calculator link.) Amounts are indexed by the appropriate Consumer Price Index (CPI) Growth Factor Amounts (available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics averaged over the past five years up to September 2007).

The HECS fee estimates have been indexed by the Tertiary Education Sub-Index of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) Growth Factor Amount of 4.2%. Living options cost estimates have been indexed by the All Groups Consumer Price Index (CPI) Growth Factor Amount of 2.75% (available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and averaged over the past five years up to September 2007).

To use ASG's online University or Secondary Schooling Costs Calculator visit: [www.asg.com.au](http://www.asg.com.au) or for more information about ASG and its programs, phone 1800 648 945.

**Reference:** [1] Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Government, 2006 Full Year Student Data, [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher\\_education/publications\\_resources/profiles/students\\_2006\\_selected\\_higher\\_education\\_statistics.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/students_2006_selected_higher_education_statistics.htm)

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

**The affect of Geographic location:**

### According to PISA 2006 -

In scientific literacy, the average score of students attending schools in remote areas was significantly lower than that of students attending schools in either provincial areas (by 47 points) or metropolitan areas (by 57 points).

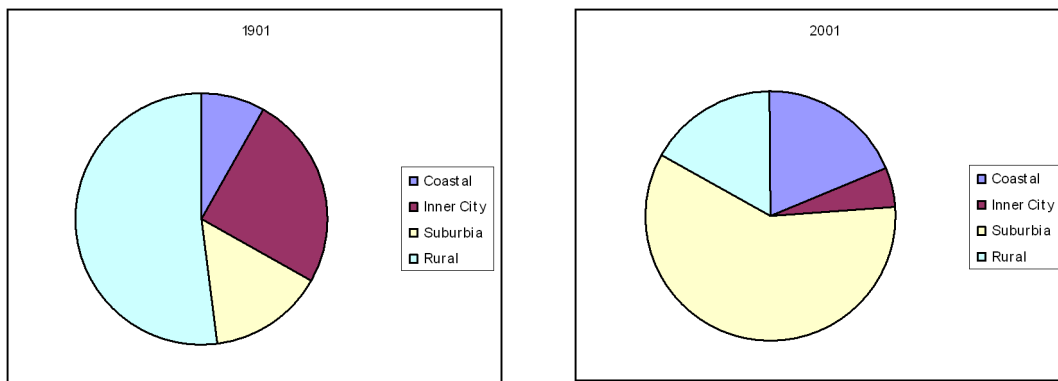
In reading literacy, the average score of students attending remote schools was about 30 score points lower than that of students attending schools in provincial areas, and about 50 score points lower than students attending schools in metropolitan areas.

In mathematical literacy, the average score of students attending remote schools was 40 score points lower than that of students attending schools in provincial areas, and 58 score points lower than students attending schools in metropolitan areas.

### Push from the bush:

There have been very significant changes that have occurred in many rural communities over the past decade caused by:

- Age trends in population
- Smaller communities are tending to get smaller
- Environmental factors including severe drought and uncertainty surrounding critical water supply
- A decrease in government departments and agencies
- A decrease in private enterprises such as banks
- Decreased employment opportunities
- The loss of a professional class in some communities.



Population Growth Report 2007 (KPMG Australia)

- **Many rural communities now have limited access to resources and support structures that once existed -this is especially the case in regard to medical facilities.**
- Recent substantial rises in fuel prices have left some people in rural communities more isolated than ever and the cost of travel has increased significantly. It is now clear that this is having a major impact on communities
- There are rural communities that are now significantly marginalised socially and economically, and this has major implications for education.

**C.** the implications of current and proposed government measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas;

- d. the short- and long-term impact of current and proposed government policies on regional university and TAFE college enrolments;
- e. the adequacy of government measures to provide for students who are required to leave home for secondary or post-secondary study;
- f. the educational needs of rural and regional students;

The following is taken from the Australian Secondary Principals Association (ASPA) Rural Education Policy Paper and outlines the concerns expressed by Secondary School Leaders with regards to the educational needs of rural and regional students.

#### 1. STAFFING OF RURAL SCHOOLS

SiMERR National Survey (2005) found that: Teachers in Provincial Areas were twice as likely, and those in Remote Areas about six times as likely as their Metropolitan and Provincial City colleagues to report high annual staff turnover rates (>20% p.a.) in their schools.

Staffing issues include-

- High staff turnover.
- Quality of staff.
- Suitability of staff for rural life. Many rural communities have their own particular issues and in some cases are vastly different to the experiences that people have had prior to taking up appointments. SiMERR National Survey (2005) found that the teachers tended to gain employment in locations similar to those in which they lived while undertaking pre-service education. In particular, about 73% of respondents who lived in rural centres while completing their initial teacher education are currently teaching in Provincial Area or Remote Area schools.
- **Training for life in the 'fishbowl'.**
- Access to casual / relief staff - in many rural communities this is a critical and significant issue.
- Attracting executive / administrative staff to rural localities - rural locations attract less competitive fields. Rural schools tend to have some of the most inexperienced staff and school leaders; this creates a situation of inexperienced teachers exacerbated by inexperienced administrators.
- Physical conditions in some localities are extreme.
- Social issues that affect all school leaders and their staff.
- Variable role of Teachers and Administrators in rural schools; in smaller Schools staff are required to teach across subject areas, often without effective training, preparation and support.
- The rigidity of staff formulae for teaching and ancillary positions.
- **Current "incentive packages" to attract staff to Rural locations**

**Recommendations:**

Quality teachers and administrators make a significant difference to the outcomes achieved by students. ASPA recommends -

- That processes and procedures are adopted to ensure that only appropriate and quality permanent, temporary and casual staff appointments are made to rural schools
- That a progressive incentive package be developed that will assist to recruit staff to rural localities, and retain quality staff past the minimum requirement. This includes:
  - **transfer 'rights'**
  - salary incentives
  - provision of quality (heavily subsidized / free) housing
  - travel incentives
  - increased education opportunities for teachers / administrators children
- That research is undertaken to ascertain why there is a limited number of staff applying for executive positions in rural areas. These results should form the basis of changes to address this issue.
- That education systems develop or extend scholarship schemes targeting pre-service teachers
- That education systems look at initiatives that will ensure there is no shortage of casual / relief teachers in rural localities
- That education systems target students from rural locations for teacher training
- That education systems establish structured paid preparatory programs (at all levels) for new appointments to rural areas to address the uniqueness of their appointments
- That induction programs (at all levels) be compulsory for new appointments to rural areas.
- In principle support for SiMERR National Survey (2005) recommendation 3 which states that education authorities, in partnership with universities, local councils, industries and businesses, develop or improve strategies to promote the advantages of living and teaching in rural communities.
- In principle support for SiMERR National Survey (2005) recommendation 5 which states that education authorities, in collaboration with universities and professional organisations, establish a Rural School Leadership Program. This program would have both incentive and developmental dimension, be highly selective and competitive, and target experienced teachers with significant leadership potential.

## 2. PROFESSIONAL CONNECTEDNESS AND ISOLATION

The SiMERR National Survey (2005) found that teachers in Provincial and Remote Areas indicated a significantly higher unmet need for a broad range of professional development opportunities than did those in Metropolitan Areas. It also pointed out that teachers outside Metropolitan Areas indicated a significantly higher unmet need for a range of resources and assistance including ICT support and maintenance, learning support, and resources to cater for student diversity, than did their metropolitan colleagues.

In relation to Professional Learning in rural schools some key points need to be emphasised-

- Whilst rural schools, depending on locality, have a range of experienced and inexperienced staff, the fact remains that many inexperienced teachers and administrators are located in rural schools.
- That Head Teachers / **HOLA's etc** often oversee Learning Areas or parts thereof where they have no training and no expertise
- That Head Teachers / **HOLA's etc** often supervise inexperienced teachers who maybe the only teacher in that Learning Area.
- Opportunities for rural teachers to be involved in Professional Learning are often limited by isolation

- Opportunities for collaboration with colleagues, mentoring and release time for professional development are restricted

### **Recommendations:**

Because of the geographical isolation, and the fact that rural areas often have large numbers of early career teachers, quality Professional Learning is critical to the success of rural public education. ASPA recommends -

- That a differential funding model be used to support Professional Learning in rural schools ensuring that higher costs associated with travel and the greater proportion of early career teachers is not adversely affecting the capacity of schools to provide quality Professional Learning
- That relief staffing levels be reviewed to ensure that schools have sufficient casual staff to allow teachers to attend Professional Learning programs
- That education authorities look to implement initiatives that will give greater access to Professional Learning programs including mentoring, coaching and collaborative time.
- That education authorities look to implement initiatives that provide schools with quality curriculum support
- Development of initiatives such as video conferencing facilities and regional support for school staff
- In principle support for SiMERR National Survey (2005) recommendation 9 which states education authorities, in collaboration with professional organisations, develop and monitor induction and orientation strategies to support the particular needs of teachers new to rural and regional schools.
- In principle support for SiMERR National Survey (2005) recommendation 10 which states that education authorities, in partnership with schools and school communities, universities, and professional organisations meet the continuing professional development needs of staff in rural and regional areas through a range of strategies that ensure equitable access to ongoing quality professional learning
- In principle support for SiMERR National Survey (2005) recommendation 11 which states that education authorities and curriculum bodies address the professional isolation of rural and regional teachers by developing and monitoring strategies to ensure equitable access to and involvement in a range core activities, enabling them to be engaged and contributing members of their professional community.

### **3. ACHIEVEMENT OF RURAL STUDENTS**

Rural students do not perform as well on a range of academic standards as students in urban areas; *there are of course some exceptions but this is the generally the "norm".*

*The Education Foundation in its paper 'Equity, Excellence and Effectiveness' says 'Despite the commonly held view that all students should have maximum economic and social opportunities in life...the emergence of the knowledge economy has occasioned a growing disparity between regions in Australia. School selectivity and social geography....act to increase concentrations of academic under-performance'*

*The Education Foundation research goes further "Although patterns of outcomes of schooling cannot be laid solely at the school and system doors, given the social and economic forces that exist, they do raise questions about whether our school system is effectively structured to ameliorate the social, regional and other inequalities in place'.*

Two community level factors having the greatest impact on academic outcomes are:

- a) **Socioeconomic status:**

PISA (2006) results showed that *"In scientific literacy, students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile scored a significant 87 points or more than one proficiency level lower than students in the highest socioeconomic quartile. In reading literacy the difference in average scores between students in the highest and lowest socioeconomic quartiles was 84 score points. In mathematical literacy, students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile scored on average 78 points lower than those students in the highest socioeconomic quartile"*.

**b) Geographic location:**

PISA (2006) results showed that *"In scientific literacy, the average score of students attending schools in remote areas was significantly lower than that of students attending schools in either provincial areas (by 47 score points) or metropolitan areas (by 57 points). In reading literacy, the average of students attending remote schools was about 30 score points lower than that of students attending schools in provincial areas, and about 50 score points lower than those students attending schools in metropolitan areas. In mathematical literacy, the average score of students attending schools in remote areas was 40 score points lower than that of students attending schools in provincial areas, and 58 score points lower than students attending schools in metropolitan areas."*

**Recommendations:**

All students regardless of their geographic location or socioeconomic status are entitled to receive a quality education. ASPA recommends -

- That education systems research and identify the key factors that affect the performance of rural students
- That the results of these findings should be published and recommendations made to the governments to address the issue of rural underachievement
- The development of Rural / City School Partnerships
- The issue of access to study seminars / support for students in the final year of schooling (HSC etc) be examined to provide equity with urban counterparts
- In principle support for SiMERR National Survey (2005) recommendation 18 across all curriculum areas, which states that education authorities, in partnership with schools, rural communities and other agencies, develop strategies, allocate funding, and provide resources to enable rural and regional students to access locally and online a broader range of educational experiences.
- In principle support for SiMERR National Survey (2005) recommendation 19 which states that government and non-government schools in rural areas form clusters within which staff are shared to maximise the subjects available to students.

**4. CURRICULUM GUARANTEE**

Many schools are facing very significant challenges in terms of providing a curriculum guarantee for their students. This will only exacerbate as enrolments decline. In larger rural schools this may not be an issue but if all schools are to provide students with the very best standard of education possible then the issues surrounding curriculum offerings especially in small and isolated communities must be addressed.

In many rural localities students have:

- Limited subject choice including access to VET courses
- Limited facilities
- Limited access to specialist teachers
- Limited access to critical support structures
- Teachers who teach across Learning Areas / curriculum areas without adequate training

Distance Education is potentially a powerful solution for schools to address issues surrounding curriculum guarantee; some recognition must be made however that, in some systems, the current structures and modes of delivery are outdated.

Technology has the potential to provide solutions to many of the issues that have been raised. The quality of some of the technology and access to technology support remain major stumbling blocks.

### **Recommendations:**

A critical part of a quality education is that there is a curriculum guarantee for students regardless of their geographic locality. Study through Distance Education mode is critical in supporting a curriculum guarantee, but the quality of that mode of delivery has to be equivalent to that students would receive by any other means. ASPA recommends -

- That education systems conduct significant research into the long term viability of schools in rural areas with a view to ensuring a curriculum guarantee for all rural students
- That education systems look at a coordinated program to ensure that all students can access quality Teaching and Learning programs across the total curriculum
- That education authorities in collaboration with schools and non-government agencies, develop and disseminate strategies and resources applicable to rural and regional contexts that cater for the diverse needs of students
- That successful initiatives and programs that support a curriculum guarantee are well publicised
- That resources be available to support the successful implementation of such programs
- That there is clear recognition within education systems that high quality technology is an essential element in ensuring there is a curriculum guarantee to all students
- That education systems make clear, well researched, published projections on enrolment trends and that this data be the basis of discussion of future school structures
- That all rural schools to have appropriate band width to support the use of technology in Curriculum delivery
- That all rural schools have video conferencing facilities, and that appropriate professional learning (re use of equipment and pedagogy issues) exists to support the successful implementation of such.
- That rural schools do not incur a staffing reduction due to Distance Education enrolments

## **5. ABORIGINAL EDUCATION**

According to PISA 2006:

In scientific literacy the performance of Indigenous Australians was 88 score points lower than that of non-indigenous students, a difference equivalent of more than one proficiency level. The performance of Indigenous students is significantly and substantially below the OECD average.

The wide gap in performance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is also evident for reading and mathematical literacy, and similar in size to the performance gap in scientific literacy.

Wide gaps remain in outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Indigenous students have poorer health outcomes, are less likely to succeed in school, are less likely to be employed and are far more likely to be the victims or perpetrators of crime. Furthermore, Indigenous children are over-represented as victims of child abuse and neglect.



Educators have been challenged to improve the outcomes of Aboriginal students but there needs to be an acknowledgement of the wider issues that affect the performance of Aboriginal students at school.

*Closing the Gap is the Northern Territory's Indigenous Generational Plan, aimed at closing the gap in outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Territorians. It contains a vision and objectives for the future socio-economic wellbeing of Indigenous Territorians and sets ambitious but achievable targets for the next 5, 10 and 20 years. It also identifies priority areas for action (including Education) in the next 5 years, based on the best available evidence of which actions will have the greatest impact.*

To achieve these changes, a partnership is needed between governments and Indigenous people, with a willingness for all parties to consult and accept their responsibilities to create a better future; all governments must commit to overcoming this disadvantage.

### **Recommendations:**

Many rural schools have a significant enrolment of Aboriginal student. Often these students have special circumstances and special needs. ASPA recommends -

- That systems acknowledge the wider and varied issues that affect, and impact on, the performance of Aboriginal students at school generally and provide support services and differential resourcing to address these issues
- That there be a review of the allocation of Aboriginal support staff
- That education systems and DEEWR ensure that there are quality training programs available to all staff providing assistance to Aboriginal students (eg in class tutors)
- That where schools are required to make submission for funding under special programs such programs have longer term focus, as short term funding processes are extremely time consuming, in terms of submission writing, and that in many cases do not allow for continuity and development of programs
- That the education systems negotiate and work with the teacher training institutions to ensure that all institutions have included mandatory units on teaching Aboriginal students
- Ongoing financial support for Dare To Lead
- In Principle support for Cape York Institute Teach for Australia initiative to create Teach for Australia Fellows and Teach for Australia Associate Teachers to work in rural communities.

### **6. STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS:**

Rural schools are not always able to provide specialist support classes and therefore many students with special needs are fully integrated. Education systems must ensure that the quality and quantity of service to students in rural schools is equitable to that of students in metropolitan schools.

Issues facing rural schools include -

- Often inexperienced teachers integrating Life Skills courses into mainstream classes with limited resources and training
- Dealing with students with very challenging behaviours.
- Access to support staff in schools
- Access to, and the quality of Medical expertise in rural localities, including mental health

### **Recommendations:**

Schools in rural localities cater for the full range of students and often have limited

access to specialist support facilities and structures for students with special needs. ASPA recommends -

- That the education systems take immediate action, through Professional Learning, to meet the significant demands placed on teachers and teachers aids that are largely untrained in dealing with special needs students.
- That education sectors develop and implement effective professional learning programs for teachers' aides and teaching staff to support the successful integration of students.
- That differential staffing models be applied so that:
  - there is sufficient staff in rural schools to support students with special needs
  - support is provided to schools on the basis of need rather than simply on student numbers considering factors such as community mental health support structures etc

## 7. BUILDINGS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Rural students should have access to quality buildings and infrastructure. The reality is that many rural schools lag behind their metropolitan counterparts in this area.

### Recommendations:

Having quality facilities that convey a positive image of public education and provides quality resources for students and staff is critical to the survival of rural schools. ASPA recommends -

- That there be a commitment from education sectors to capital works in rural schools to ensure that the facilities in such schools are of a quality the equivalent of the best schools
- That there be a commitment to the ongoing development of Public Private Partnerships to provide capital programs and infrastructure in rural schools
- That differential formula on rooming and properties allocations be adopted to take into account local circumstances
- That the technology infrastructure in rural schools be the equivalent to that available in urban schools.
- Education systems in collaboration with school communities, industry and business develop Public Private Partnerships to ensure facilities and infrastructure to the same level as metropolitan schools.

### References:

1. *PISA in Brief from Australia's Perspective; Highlights from the full Australian Report (Sue Thomson and Lisa De Bortoli)*
2. *Issues in Teaching and Learning Science, ICT, and Mathematics in Rural and Regional Australia: A National Survey (SiMERR, Professor John Pegg and Dr Terry Lyons (Project Leaders) Dr Debra Panizzon, Ms Anne Parnell, Mr Tony Brown, Dr Chris Reading, Dr Lorraine Graham, 2005)*
3. *Population Growth Report 2007 (KPMG Australia)*
4. *Teach for Australia - A practical plan to get teachers into remote schools (Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, November 2007)*
5. *NSW Secondary Principals Council Rural Education Reference Group, DRAFT Rural Education, 2007*

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

**h.** other related matters.