



Australian Government

Department of Education and Training

INDEPENDENT REVIEW INTO REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION

Australian Government Response

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The importance and challenges of regional, rural and remote education

Students are firmly at the heart of this Government's vision for education in Australia, from high chair to higher education. Every student deserves the opportunity to succeed, no matter where they live.

A high quality early childhood education is recognised as an important foundation for future educational achievement. Research shows that participating in a quality preschool program can significantly increase positive education and life outcomes for children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

That commitment to quality continues into schooling. We want students to have a quality education with access to the best teachers. We want a national curriculum that is up-to-date, balanced and relevant. And, importantly, we want the people who know our students best – their parents, teachers, principals and community – to be able to make informed decisions about their education.

The *Quality Schools* package announced on 2 May 2017 outlines the Government's plan to ensure every student in Australia gets funding support according to their needs, and that the record and growing investment in schools is used to maximise student outcomes.

Over the next decade, the Australian Government will grow its record level of recurrent funding for schools from \$17.5 billion in 2017 to \$29.5 billion in 2027.

The Australian Government recognises that it generally costs more to educate students going to school in regional, rural and remote areas than it does for students in city-based schools. That is why the *Quality Schools* package increases Commonwealth funding for those students from \$3.9 billion in 2017 to \$6.8 billion in 2027 - an increase of 74.6 per cent. This will mean per student funding for students in these areas will grow by 4.9 per cent per year over that period.

While funding is an important aspect of school achievement, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development makes it clear that funding alone is not enough to turn around declining student performance.

To ensure the increased school funding is used to drive better outcomes for students, the Government commissioned the *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* (the Excellence Review), chaired by Mr David Gonski AC. The result of this work is *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools (the Report)*, which is a once in a generation report that provides an opportunity to turn around our school system.

The final report of the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* (IRRRRE) was considered by the Expert Panel of the Excellence Review ensuring that improving educational outcomes in regional Australia is a key consideration in reforming Australian schools.

The Expert Panel has taken IRRRRE recommendations focusing on schooling and industry-schooling pathways, specifically 1-4, 7 and 10, into account in developing its priorities and recommendations. This whole of government response notes that the five areas identified in the Report are closely aligned with IRRRRE recommendations. The five areas are:

- laying the foundations for learning
- equipping every student to grow and succeed in a changing world

- creating, supporting and valuing a profession of expert educators
- empowering and supporting school leaders
- raising and achieving aspirations through innovation and continuous improvement.

Both reviews will be taken into conversations with states and territories on the development of national and bilateral reform agreements.

The Government has heard the challenges facing regional, rural and remote communities and the key role education and training plays in the success of those communities. That is why in 2016 this government announced the \$152 million *Regional Student Access to Education* package which is assisting students from regional, rural and remote Australia. This package included significant initiatives that were considered necessary to support our regional, rural and remote students even ahead of a formal review.

However, decisions must be based on evidence, and so as part of this regional, rural and remote package, in 2017, the then Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon Barnaby Joyce MP and the Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, announced the IRRRRE review. The IRRRRE was led by Emeritus Professor Dr John Halsey FACE, FACEL (SA) of Flinders University, and an eminent authority on rural education.

The Australian Government's Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education

Emeritus Professor Dr John Halsey from Flinders University conducted the review to examine the challenges faced by these students and to find innovative solutions to help them succeed at school and beyond.

Professor Halsey presented the final report to the Government in January 2018.

The review considered the key issues, challenges and barriers that impact on the learning outcomes of rural (including regional, rural and remote) students. It provided recommendations on innovative and fresh approaches to support improved access and achievement of these students in school and their transition to further study, training and employment. Although early childhood education was not covered under the Terms of Reference for the Review, it is acknowledged in the final report that early childhood education plays a crucial role in laying a strong foundation for future learning.

The review investigated:

- the gap in educational achievement between rural and metropolitan students
- the key barriers and challenges that impact on the educational outcomes of rural students, including aspirations and access issues
- the appropriateness and effectiveness of current modes of education delivered to these students, including the use of information and communications technology and the importance of face-to-face rural education provision
- the effectiveness of public policies and programs that have been implemented to bridge the divide
- the gaps and opportunities to help students successfully transition from school to further study, training and employment
- innovative approaches that support rural students to succeed in school and in their transition to further study, training and employment.

The review was highly consultative and covered all states and territories. Some 340 submissions from interested parties were received in response to the discussion paper. Professor Halsey hosted 30 community, youth and School of the Air forums and held consultations with 63 stakeholders in all capital cities and 31 regional, rural and remote locations. An extensive literature review informed both the discussion paper and final report.

The final report on the review was submitted to the Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, on 31 January 2018. The report's 11 recommendations and 53 related actions call for a greater awareness of the issues, challenges and opportunities faced by rural students and that every young person, regardless of location or circumstances, has access to high quality schooling and opportunities.

The Government thanks Emeritus Professor Dr John Halsey for his time, considerable effort and service in undertaking this independent review. We would also like to thank all of those in the education community, as well as in the broader Australian community, who have taken the time to so generously share their thoughts, experiences and evidence with Professor Halsey.

The Government's Response to the IRRRRE Final Report

The Government is well positioned to respond to the four priority areas identified in the final report:

- establishing a national focus for regional, rural and remote education
- enhancing leadership, teaching, curriculum and assessment
- improving information and communications technology (ICT)
- enhancing transitions into and out of school.

Indeed, many current programs and initiatives provide the framework for increasing support for regional, rural and remote students, parents and communities in accessing the best education and training they possibly can.

The Government accepts all 11 recommendations in the IRRRRE final report, and notes that Professor Halsey provided 53 suggested actions as examples of what could be done to implement these recommendations. Many of the actions are very specific and may cut across existing initiatives, work plans, funding arrangements and levels of government. In these circumstances, the actions provide a starting point for the many conversations that will continue to flow from the IRRRRE final report.

The recommendations themselves vary in their applicability to a 'whole of government' approach, being specifically relevant to one portfolio, and/or needing the engagement with states and territories. The most important commitment the Australian Government can give is to ensure that we take these recommendations into our conversations with states and territories, as the primary deliverers of education when implementing policies and programs in these areas of Australia.

A copy of the IRRRRE report was provided to the Expert Panel conducting the Excellence Review. The recommendations relating to schooling and school pathways were all referred to the Excellence Review and a number of the findings of the Excellence Review reflect the IRRRRE recommendations.

On 13 April 2018, the IRRRRE was presented to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Education Council. The IRRRRE is being considered further by the Education Council, and with the Excellence Review, will be a key element of the development of national and bilateral reform agreements with states and territories to commence in 2019.

By responding to these recommendations, building on current initiatives and taking some new steps, and doing so across the Commonwealth and in partnership with the states and territories, we will seek to make a lasting and real difference to the opportunities of regional, rural and remote students.

Establishing a national focus for regional, rural and remote education – Recommendation 11

Professor Halsey notably identified this as his highest priority, and raised this in Recommendation 11 - Establish a national focus for regional, rural and remote education, training and research to enhance access, outcomes and opportunities in regional Australia.

Professor Halsey noted that a clear message in many consultations was the need to bring together interested parties to collaborate and share good practice, whether this is whole of government or a place-based approach or a simple coordinated effort. He noted that an enduring focus and concerted effort on raising the achievements and improving the post school opportunities of regional, rural and remote (RRR) students requires a national focus and an understanding of what outcomes existing resource allocations achieve and how they can be improved.

Australian Government response

The Government supports this recommendation and is focused on encouraging job creation and economic growth so that all regional, rural and remote Australians have the opportunity to contribute to their full potential. The Government's increasing investment in regional education and training will help to ensure a stronger, more sustainable economy for regional Australia.

The Government acknowledges that a one-size-fits-all approach to regional policy does not work. The Government is investing in partnerships with communities to ensure that the national policies are informed by local people living in individual regions. This vital link between local community stakeholders and government increases awareness of issues affecting regions and provides an understanding of the unique advantages of a region to maximise positive impacts.

The Australian Government funds a range of regional grants programs, which are available to local governments and not for profit organisations. These programs seek to create jobs, drive economic growth and build strong regional communities into the future. In recognition of the significant role of skills development in regional development, the Government will explore options to expand regional program funding eligibility to incorporate funding to vocational educational providers and ensure they remain eligible to access a range of regional programs.

The Regional Development Australia (RDA) program that Professor Halsey refers to in his report is a national network of Committees made up of local leaders who work with all levels of government, business and community groups to support the economic development of Australia's regions. RDA Committees play a facilitating role in their communities and have a clear focus on growing strong and confident economies that harness their competitive advantages, seize on economic opportunity and attract investment. With their new Charter in place, RDA Committees are required to collaborate closely with key stakeholders to identify opportunities to grow their regional economies, including engaging with governments, industry, business, education providers and communities.

To monitor this work the Government will report annually through the Regional Ministerial Statement on progress in delivering improved access, outcomes and opportunities for regional, rural and remote Australians in education, employment and training.

Enhancing leadership, teaching, curriculum and assessment – Recommendations 1, 2, 3 and 8

The Review identified several themes or factors that have a major impact on student achievement. Of these four are identified in this priority area – leadership, teaching, curriculum and assessment. Professor Halsey identified four recommendations to address his findings:

- Recommendation 1 – Establish and/or refine processes for ensuring the relevance of the Australian Curriculum and state/territory assessment processes for RRR students and communities
- Recommendation 2 – Ensure RRR contexts, challenges and opportunities are explicitly included in the selection and pre-service education of teachers, initial appointment processes and their on-going professional support
- Recommendation 3 – Ensure RRR contexts, challenges and opportunities are explicitly included in the selection, preparation, appointment and on-going professional support of educational leaders
- Recommendation 8 – Improve opportunities for regional, rural and remote schools to implement entrepreneurship in education through curriculum, teaching, system and cultural changes and building on good practice.

Professor Halsey noted that curriculum is critically important as it plays a defining role about what is taught and learnt in schools. He also noted that bringing the curriculum to life in regional, rural and remote contexts, and assessing its success, are major challenges particularly for the states and territories that are free to deliver the Australian Curriculum in ways that are best suited to their students.

The Review refers to Professor John Hattie who stated in 2009 that teachers have the greatest in-school impact on student learning, and Professor Halsey therefore acknowledges that having a highly competent teacher workforce is critical to raising the achievements of students and their transitions to further study, training and employment.

Professor Halsey also identifies that the impact of school leadership significantly affects student learning and that school leaders play a key role in improving outcomes through a number of channels.

Professor Halsey also notes that attracting and retaining school leaders for regional, rural and remote schools, as with teachers, continues to be a major challenge for most education systems.

And finally under these recommendations, the Review identifies the opportunities that may be presented to students and youth in regional, rural and remote communities to create employment. The review further states that this entrepreneurial education requires schools to reach out and engage with business and employers and adjust their approaches to 'mainstream' entrepreneurship.

Australian Government response

The Government supports these four recommendations.

The Australian Curriculum has the broad support of all states and territories and from the review in 2014 is seen as a positive development in education in Australia. The relevance, context and application of the curriculum and the assessment of students' progress are an important aspect of this Government's focus on student success.

The Australian Government also knows that having well trained and knowledgeable teachers and school leaders provides the foundation for a strong, high quality education system in Australia. Quality teachers are keys to driving student outcomes. That is why the Government established the Teacher Educational Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) and why we are working collaboratively with states and territories in implementing the recommendations of TEMAG.

Given the terms of reference of the Excellence Review, and noting state and territory responsibilities, it was appropriate that recommendations 1, 2, and 3 be considered by that review to inform its recommendations to Government. The Excellence Review found that curriculum delivery and assessment needs to be tailored to meet the needs of all students, including those in rural, regional and remote schools, ensuring that students are set up for life beyond the classroom. It also championed the importance of identifying and supporting teachers and school leaders who choose to move to regional, rural and remote areas, acknowledging the importance of a skilled teaching workforce in improving student outcomes.

With the Australian Government's leadership role, we will consider these issues in the development of a new national school agreement and the ensuing bilateral agreements with states and territories from 2019. We will also work with all education ministers through Education Council to implement curriculum and assessment initiatives, and support programs and incentives to place quality teachers and leaders into regional, rural and remote schools.

In parallel to this work, and to inform Education Council, the Government will task the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership to undertake research into best practice approaches to teacher and school leader training, professional development and support for regional, rural and remote settings.

In relation to Recommendation 8, the Government recognises the importance of mainstreaming entrepreneurship in the curriculum and school systems as well as in relationships between teachers, students, parents, community and industry. It is an important element in preparing students for the changing nature of work.

The Australian Curriculum: Work Studies and Economics and Business has specific content that details entrepreneurial skills and behaviours. Critical and creative thinking is also one of the seven general capabilities in the Australian Curriculum. Through critical and creative thinking, students are encouraged to develop enterprising behaviours, such as showing initiative and adaptability, and to develop entrepreneurial approaches to imagine possibilities, consider alternatives, test hypotheses, seek and create innovating pathways and draw conclusions. Our challenge is to bring these worlds together – of entrepreneurs and curriculum – and how to best engage, including through initiatives such as P-TECH and the National Career Education Strategy.

The Department of Jobs and Small Business's Entrepreneurship Facilitators helps young entrepreneurs access assistance to start their own business and connects them to existing programs including the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme. The Entrepreneurship Facilitators work in Cairns, the Hunter Region and Launceston.

The Australian Government will work across departments and agencies to identify the most appropriate way to engage entrepreneurs in education, including assessing relevant funding program guidelines to ensure explicit links to education and training are included.

Improving information and communications technology (ICT) – Recommendations 9 and 10

The IRRRRE explored the provision and use of ICT in the delivery of education in the regional, rural and remote setting. Not surprisingly Professor Halsey found that access to technology and the internet is an issue for schools, students and families. He further identified that the level of teacher expertise presented a challenge to the delivery of education. His recommendations included:

- Recommendation 9 – Improve the availability, accessibility and affordability of Information and Communications Technology for RRR schools, teachers, students, parents and communities
- Recommendation 10 – Support RRR communities to implement innovative approaches to education delivery designed to improve education access and outcomes for students living in remote communities.

Australian Government response

The Government supports these recommendations and recognises the vital importance of communications to schools, teachers, parents and communities in regional, rural and remote Australia. Increasing the availability and opportunities to use ICT to improve education access and outcomes is an important element of success, particularly for our regional, rural and remote schools and students.

Recommendation 10 was considered by the Excellence Review. The Excellence Review took a broad view and focussed on the importance of innovation across the whole schooling system. It found that innovation must be supported by evidence and data, can be identified through good practices and built upon by actively encouraging continuous improvement, as well as through ensuring teachers have opportunities to work collaboratively and time to devote to professional learning.

There is an increasing focus across Australia on digital access, literacy and application as the future of education and the world of work changes. That is why the Australian Curriculum includes a focus on digital skills and why this Government is continuing to invest in education initiatives such as the Inspiring all Australians in Digital Literacy and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) measures as part of the National Innovation and Science Agenda (NISA).

While this is much broader than regional, rural and remote settings, this Government recognises the impact of the digital divide among the most disadvantaged students, including those living in rural and remote areas. For example, the National Broadband Network (NBN) Co's Sky Muster satellite services became available on 29 April 2016. This Government prioritised work with NBN Co, the Isolated Children's Parents' Association and the education sector to develop a special product so distance education students could have the additional data they need to get the most out of their studies. As of 25 January 2018, 683 students across regional, rural and remote Australia were benefitting from the Sky Muster distance education product.

One of the priorities for this Government in 2018 will be to further improve the delivery of education services over Sky Muster, including home-schooled students that are isolated for geographic/medical reasons. In addition, schools, emergency services and health facilities in the Sky Muster footprint are also able to access special NBN 'Public Interest Premises' packages to help them do their vital work for regional, rural and remote communities. A data allowance of up to

300GB per month may be allowed. As of 25 January 2018 there were 103 primary and secondary schools in the Sky Muster footprint using the PIP satellite service.

On 29 January 2018 NBN Co announced a trial of multicast technology over the Sky Muster service for 15 distance education schools across the Northern Territory. The technology will enable satellite retailers to deliver content simultaneously to multiple users with uninterrupted, quality streaming and improved video conferencing. These services are intended for use by schools delivering distance education services to remote students such as School of the Air. Subject to the results of the trial, NBN Co plans to roll-out the technology to regional and remote locations across Australia from late 2018.

These initiatives are part of the Government's on-going commitment to increase the opportunities which access to fast broadband can provide to rural and remote parts of Australia.

Enhancing transitions into and out of school – Recommendations 4, 5, 6 and 7

Professor Halsey identifies in his report the importance of identifying early the educational and associated support needs of students to give them a strong start at school. He also identifies the connection with students through their schooling experience is critical to their long term success throughout school and in the choices and directions they take towards further education or employment.

Professor Halsey made four recommendations relating to these important transitions:

- Recommendation 4 – Ensure RRR children start school with a strong foundation for learning
- Recommendation 5 – Expand the availability, affordability and accessibility of high quality work experience placements, VET, dual VET/university options and two year associate degree programs for RRR students
- Recommendation 6 – Support RRR students to make successful transitions from school to university, training, employment and combinations of them
- Recommendation 7 – Encourage the philanthropic sector to play a greater role in raising achievements and improving opportunities for RRR students.

Australian Government response

The Government supports these recommendations noting that recommendations 4 and 7 in particular were considered by the Excellence Review. Both reviews highlight the importance of a high quality early education provision and the importance of building confidence and capability in children prior to the commencement of formal schooling. Similarly, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has asked the Education Council, comprising Education Ministers from the Australian Government and all states and territories, to provide advice in 2018 on early learning reform principles informed by the *Lifting Our Game: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions*.

As with all recommendations there are opportunities to work closely with states and territories. In the vocational education and training (VET) space the Commonwealth will continue to engage with Skills Ministers through the COAG Industry and Skills Council and to increase the quality and raise the status of this important sector. Considerations may include the place of TAFE in the regions as identified by Professor Halsey. The Government is working with the states and territories on the new

National Partnership for the Skilling Australians Fund. This new agreement will support more people to choose and succeed in an apprenticeship or traineeship pathway, and for employers to gain the skilled workers they need to drive innovation and growth. States and territories will need to commit matched funding and develop projects that support apprenticeships and traineeships across a range of agreed priority areas, including rural and regional areas. To ensure successful outcomes, they are also required to engage with, and seek support from, employers and industry in the development of their projects.

In relation to recommendation 5, the Government is keen to ensure that VET and higher education pathways offer regional, rural and remote students the opportunity to continue their education and contribute to building prosperous, sustainable communities.

Over the next four years (2018-19 to 2021-22) through the Commonwealth Grant Scheme, the Turnbull Government will invest around \$28.4 billion in direct subsidies to higher education providers to support over 800,000 students each year. Over the same period, the Turnbull Government will invest around \$300 million in regional loading to universities with regional campuses in recognition of the cost of provision in regional settings.

The Government is providing \$28.2 million in the 2018-19 Budget to expand the availability of sub-bachelor (including enabling) places to allow greater access to higher education for rural and regional students. It is estimated that this will provide around 500 additional commencing sub-bachelor and enabling Commonwealth supported places from 2019. These places will only be available to those institutions that operate in regional areas. The allocation of places to enabling and sub bachelor places will be determined following consultation with the sector. Places will be allocated through a competitive process prioritising regional needs and capacity to deliver solutions to those needs.

The Regional Study Hubs, announced as part of the 2017-18 Budget, will provide infrastructure such as study spaces, video conferencing, computing facilities and internet access, as well as pastoral and academic support for students studying via distance at partner universities. The Government has committed \$16.7 million in funding to support the establishment and ongoing operational costs of up to eight community-owned study hubs across regional Australia.

In response to the IRRRRE, the Government is providing \$14 million in the 2018-19 Budget to fully support an additional 500 Commonwealth supported places (CSPs) for rural and regional students. Eligibility would be limited to places for students studying at regional study hubs. Funding sufficient for an additional 185 CSPs would be available annually from 1 January 2019, growing to around 500 CSPs by 2022.

The Australian Government commissioned a review of the affordability of university accommodation for regional, rural and remote students. The report makes clear that accessible information about accommodation options is important for students in making their decisions to relocate for study. Universities will be asked to ensure that such material is available to meet the information needs of regional, rural and remote students. Universities will also be encouraged to offer an accommodation guarantee to regional, rural and remote students, particularly those from low SES backgrounds, concurrent with their offer of a place.

To facilitate greater transparency for this information, the Government will commission a project through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program National Priorities Pool to undertake an annual assessment of the support that universities offer regional, rural and remote students on transition to university, including but not limited to accommodation. The results will be

published through the national admissions platform and on the Quality Indicators of Learning and Teaching (QILT) website. The first assessment will be undertaken in mid-to-late 2018 to inform 2019 enrolments.

In responding to recommendation 6, the Government is committed to giving all Australians an opportunity to gain a first class education. It acknowledges the financial difficulties which some students and their families may experience in undertaking education and training and has a number of measures in place to assist people financially.

The Government agrees with the call for greater support for rural students to move successfully to further study, employment or training. It is important that schools, businesses and families work together to help young people continue their education and training and create a productive, skilled and knowledgeable future workforce.

The Australian Government will continue to provide programs and initiatives that support young people move from school to further education, training, or work. These include the Preparing Secondary Students for Work framework, a new high level National Career Education Strategy in 2018, the highly successful Pathways in Technology (P-TECH) pilots, the \$1.5 billion Skilling Australians Fund, JobActive, the Transition to Work Program, the Parents Next program from July 2018, Youth Jobs PaTH and the National Work Experience Program.

More specifically, the \$24 million Regional and Rural Enterprise Scholarships Program aims to improve access to educational opportunities for regional, rural and remote students. The program will provide at least 1200 undergraduate, postgraduate and VET students a scholarship to study STEM disciplines, including health and agriculture. The scholarships are valued at up to \$18,000 each with at least 600 scholarships allocated in each academic year 2018 and 2019. Students may receive a further \$500 to support an internship.

In continuing to respond to Recommendation 6 about successful transitions from school to further education and training, the Government will investigate further improvements for online information for career advisers and students regarding post-school options. The Government administers Job Jumpstart, which is a one-stop-shop for young people seeking employment planning and job search information. The Job Outlook website also assists young people to make decisions about study, training, their first job and the next steps in their career.

There are numerous Government support options available to regional, rural and remote students who are making the transition to tertiary education. Youth Allowance, Austudy, and ABSTUDY all provide a fortnightly income for those eligible. Students receiving these payments may also be eligible for Commonwealth Rent Assistance, Student Start-up Loans and Relocation Scholarships. The government also provides Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships. Additionally, the majority of universities offer scholarships and bursaries which are available to regional rural and remote students.

There has been significant work undertaken to improve the MySkills, MyFuture and QILT websites. The sector-led admissions transparency work is delivering a national higher education admissions platform that will provide easy access to clear, concise and comparable information on course options and admission requirements. This will have a major benefit for all students facing disadvantage, including students from regional, rural and remote areas who may be less familiar with higher education opportunities and admissions requirements.

Nevertheless, there can be further improvements to address the specific needs of regional, rural and remote students and for career advisers in schools to better link existing information in user-friendly ways.

In 2017, the Government changed the Youth Allowance 'workforce participation' independence criteria for students from regional, rural or remote areas who must move away from home to study. From 1 January 2018, regional and remote students who have been self supporting over a 14 month period (instead of the previous 18 month period) since leaving school, who have earned 75% or more of Wage Level A of the National Training Wage Schedule included in a modern award, and have parental income under \$150,000 are able to qualify as independent for Youth Allowance.

In response to recommendation 6, the Government will improve regional students' access to Youth Allowance by lifting the parental income cut-off for the 'workforce' participation' independence criterion.

The 'workforce participation' independence criterion for regional students was introduced in 2011 to address lower participation rates of regional students in tertiary education. Its \$150,000 parental income cut-off was designed so the criterion targeted families who faced significant financial costs in their family budget when having to support children who must relocate to study. Since 2011 the parental income cut-off of \$150,000 has not changed. Consequently, the numbers of students qualifying as 'independent' under the criterion has halved since 2013.

Because the cut-off has not increased, students from families that would have been eligible in 2011 no longer qualify. Students with both parents earning around \$80,000 each from jobs like teaching or nursing, miss out.

The Government will increase the cut-off from \$150,000 to \$160,000, plus an additional \$10,000 increase to the cut-off for each additional child in the family. This is designed to recognise the extra costs of raising larger families. Increasing the cut-off to \$160,000 and adding on \$10,000 per additional child will mean that for families with two children the cut off will be \$170,000 and for a family with three children the cut off would be \$180,000. The Government will also provide students with additional certainty about whether they will meet this parental income cut-off, by making the year in which the parental income is assessed the financial year preceding the beginning of the student's 14 month self-supporting period which forms part of the independence criterion. This way, students will know before they decide to take a gap year to work whether their parental income will be under the cut-off.

It is expected the number of regional students who qualify for Youth Allowance under this criterion will increase by 75 per cent due to these reforms.

Next Steps

The Australian Government will work to implement the series of initiatives outlined in this response that support regional, rural and remote students in collaboration where possible.

The Government will work with Education Council and the Industry and Skills Council and build a strong evidence base for what works in supporting regional, rural and remote education and training.

The Government looks forward to working with our state and territory colleagues and across departments and agencies with interest and influence in the challenges for regional, rural and remote education in Australia.