

# Regional, Rural and Remote Education – Existing initiatives

Over the past year, the Australian Government has announced significant investments to increase post-secondary education access and attainment for learners from RRR areas, through an extensive [Regional Education Package](#) and the Government's response to the [Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education](#) conducted by Emeritus Professor John Halsey.

## ***Regional Education Package***

On 12 November 2018, the Government announced \$134.8 million over four years to provide students from rural and regional Australia with greater choice in, and access to higher education. The measures include:

- \$92.5 million over four years to support more students at five regionally focused universities over four years.
- \$34.1 million over four years to expand the Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships.
- \$7.5 million over four years to expand the Regional Study Hubs program, and
- Development a national regional, rural and remote education strategy.

## ***Response to the Halsey Review***

In May 2018, the Government responded to the Halsey Review with \$96.1 million in Budget measures to increase opportunities for students in regional and remote areas, including:

- \$28.2 million to expand the availability of sub-bachelor (including enabling) places to allow greater access to higher education for rural and regional students
- \$14.0 million to fully support an additional 185 commencing Commonwealth supported bachelor places from 2019 (rising to 500 in 2022) for students studying in regional study hubs
- \$53.9 million in income support to ease financial pressures on families in regional areas, by increasing the parental income cut-off for Youth Allowance's regional workforce independence criteria.

These supports build on the \$152 million *Regional Student Access to Education Package* election commitment and a range of ongoing initiatives implemented by Governments and communities to better prepare learners for success and improve access to tertiary education. Some examples of these and other initiatives relevant to the issues papers prepared as part of the development of a National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy are listed below:

## Support for Education Providers

### ***Australian Government Support for Regional Universities***

In 2017, regionally headquartered universities received more than \$1.6 billion in base funding for Commonwealth support students. The Australian Government provides significant additional support for university providers in regional and remote areas, including through regional loading subsidies of \$74 million in 2019. As well as general funding for undergraduate students, the Government funds enabling and sub-bachelor courses, which play a particularly important role in regional and remote areas.. Many states and territories also provide regional and remote loadings for VET providers.

### ***Regional Study Hubs***

The Australian Government is investing \$24.2 million over four years to assist in the establishment and operation of 16 community-owned, Regional Study Hubs at 23 locations across regional Australia. [Regional Study Hubs](#) provide infrastructure such as study spaces, video conferencing, computing facilities and high-speed, reliable internet access, as well as academic and pastoral support for students studying via distance at partner universities.

### ***Apprenticeships***

The [Rural and Regional Skills Shortage Incentive](#) provides up to \$1000 to eligible employers who hire an Apprentice for a Certificate III or IV qualification for an occupation on the National Skills Needs List in a rural and regional workplace.

### ***Skilling Australians Fund***

In the 2017–18 Budget, the Government established the [Skilling Australians Fund](#) which is managed through a project-based National Partnership Agreement with the states and territories. Under the Agreement, each state or territory has the opportunity to develop projects for consideration by the Government with funding prioritised to projects from the states and territories that support apprenticeships and traineeships in key areas including in rural and regional areas and industries and communities experiencing structural adjustment.

### ***STEM Professionals in Schools***

STEM Professionals in Schools is a national volunteer program funded by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training and run by the CSIRO. The program facilitates partnerships between schools and industry to bring real STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) into the classroom. STEM Professionals in Schools connects primary and secondary school teachers and STEM professionals with a broad range of expertise and experience to enhance STEM learning and interactivity for students all around Australia.

### ***National Research Infrastructure (NRI) Investments***

The Australian Government's national research infrastructure (NRI) investments support many RRR researchers as they provide important data or virtual capabilities that can be accessed anywhere in Australia.

## **Financial Support**

The Australian Government offers a number of programs that support apprentices and learners in approved education and training activities:

### ***Income Support***

[Youth Allowance](#) is available to dependent learners aged 18-24, and whose parents' assets and income is below a certain level. Students who need to live away from home receive a higher fortnightly rate of Youth Allowance than students living at home. In recent years, the Australian Government has invested \$136 million to make it easier for RRR students to access Youth Allowance under the [regional workforce self-supporting independence criteria](#). Learners from RRR areas with parental incomes below \$160,000 (plus an additional \$10,000 for each additional child in the family) can qualify for [independent Youth Allowance](#) where they have also met other criteria.

In 2018, the Australian Government reduced the period RRR learners need to be employed under the self-supporting criteria from 18 months to 14 months to qualify for independent Youth Allowance. This will mean that a student is able to meet the relevant earnings criteria to prove independence within one gap year, as opposed to having to work for longer and delay their commencement in university or VET.

Youth Allowance recipients can also access [Relocation Scholarships](#), [Fares Allowance](#) to travel to and from their place of study, as well as [Rent Assistance](#). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners can access [Abstudy](#), and learners 25 years or older can receive [Austudy](#).

### ***Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships***

The Government is providing \$58.1 million to fund 3,155 Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships. The Scholarships provide up to \$18,000 to support rural, regional and remote students to study Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), including Health and Agricultural Science at Certificate IV to PhD level.

### ***HELP / VET Student Loans***

The Australian Government provides financial assistance to students through the [Higher Education Loan Program \(HELP\)](#), which removes the up-front cost of tertiary education tuition fees by providing income contingent loans. Further information on what is available and eligibility requirements are on the [StudyAssist](#) website.

In 2017, the Commonwealth supported RRR students towards achieving higher-level vocational qualifications by providing \$130.6 million in loans to students studying certain diploma level and above VET qualifications via the VET Student Loans programs.

### ***Living Away from Home Allowance***

The Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA) assists eligible apprentices during the first three years of an Australian Apprenticeship where they are required to move away from their parent's or guardian's home in order to take up or remain in an Australian Apprenticeship. Australian Apprentices may be eligible for up to twelve months of LAFHA at the first year rate of \$77.17 per week, a further twelve months assistance at the second year rate of \$38.59 per week, and a further twelve months assistance at the third year rate of \$25 per week.

## **Other Student Support**

### ***Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program***

The Australian Government also supports university outreach programs for low-SES students through the [Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program \(HEPPP\)](#), \$650 million over four years which aims to ensure that Australians from low-SES backgrounds have the opportunity to study at university. HEPPP provides funding to assist universities to undertake activities and implement strategies that improve access to undergraduate courses for people from low-SES backgrounds, as well as improving the retention and completion rates of those students. Examples of HEPPP-funded university outreach programs include Student Futures Program (Federation University Australia), Uni-Bound (Southern Cross University), Whole of Community Engagement (Charles Darwin University) and Live, Learn, Grow (University of Newcastle). HEPPP also supports the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, which has been a catalyst for change.

### ***The Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP)***

This program provides around \$70 million per annum in supplementary funding to universities to offer scholarships, tutorial assistance, mentoring, study skills and other support services for around 19,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students. ISSP assists universities to tailor their services to match student needs and includes measures and requirements to support RRR Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

### ***Away from Base (AFB) Mixed-Mode***

This program provides support to around 6,500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who study by distance. The program assists eligible students towards the cost of travel, meals and accommodation to access compulsory course elements in another location away from their permanent home. Around \$26 million is provided annually through 21 training and university providers.

### ***Disability Support***

The Higher Education Disability Support Program (DSP) provides funding to universities for undertaking activities that assist in removing barriers to access and participation in higher education for students with disabilities. The National

Disability Coordination Officer Program (NDCO) supports a network of regionally based officers to assist people with disability access and participate in tertiary education and subsequent employment. Disabled Australian Apprenticeship Wage Support (DAAWS) is a subsidy available to employers who take on an eligible disabled apprentice or trainee.

### ***Learning Options***

Education providers deliver a range of online and blended learning options that enable RRR learners to remain in their home communities. The government's investment in the National Broadband Network will assist these forms of learning by connecting more households, businesses and education providers to reliable, high-speed internet.

### ***Not-for-profit Organisation Initiatives for RRR Learners from Equity Groups***

Support for RRR learners from equity groups is also provided by not-for-profit organisations. The Smith Family's *iTrack* online mentoring program matches students from a low-SES background (including RRR students) in Year 9 to 11 with a supportive adult who provides advice about workplace, study and career opportunities. CareerTrackers is a not-for-profit organisation that has created pathways and support systems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young adults to attend and graduate from university. Other initiatives include Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) and the Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia (EPHEA) network, both of which are valuable resources for RRR learners from equity groups and supported by the Government's HEPPP program.

## **Supporting RRR Communities**

### ***Regional Deal Pilots***

The Government is developing a number of Regional Deal pilots, run by the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities. Regional Deals, similar to the existing City Deals, are tailored agreements between all three levels of government for a shared vision for the region, and to the investment, reforms and planning needed to achieve this vision. The deals not only bring together all three levels of government, but the private sector and other key community stakeholders and leaders to capitalise on local opportunities to help the region reach its maximum potential. The links between education and skills development and local employment and business development can be an important focus of the Regional Deals. The Government has announced Regional Deals in the Barkly region including Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory, and in Hinkler, which encompasses the towns of Bundaberg and Hervey Bay in Queensland.

### ***Employment Services***

The Government also has a number of employment programs that include services which support participants in rural and regional areas to improve their educational attainment. These include Transition to Work, ParentsNext, Empowering Youth Initiatives and the Regional Employment Trials Program.

## **Pre-tertiary education**

### ***Early Childhood Education and Care***

The Australian Government [Community Child Care Fund](#) (CCCF) provides grants funding to child care services to reduce barriers to accessing child care, particularly in disadvantaged, regional and remote communities. The [Connected Beginnings program](#) – also part of the CCCF - aims to support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children in areas of high need, be well prepared for school by supporting pregnant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from birth through to school age.

### **Schools**

Australian Government funding for school students in RRR Australia will grow from \$4.4 billion in 2018 to \$7.1 billion in 2029 equating to a per student funding increase of 3.8 per cent between 2018 and 2029. In addition to this increase in funding, the Australian Government announced in February 2019, a \$200 million program to keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in school and attract teachers to remote areas, by waiving university debts for teachers who work for an extended period in remote communities. The Australian Government also supports the [Teach for Australia](#) initiative, which aims to recruit Australia's future leaders into the teaching workforce to inspire, connect and empower them to a lifetime of action towards educational equity.

### **Careers Advice**

The [National Career Education Strategy](#), [Beyond School Study Guide](#) and [StudyAssist](#), [Quality in Learning and Teaching](#) and the [Job Outlook](#) all provide information for students and educators to improve student outcomes as they transition to further education or employment. Sites such as Job Outlook in particular provide a large amount of information on career options and industry trends by region to assist learners make informed choices about jobs in their area. However it should be noted that the data limitations of geographically larger areas with smaller populations and unreliable internet access make even these online sources of information inferior and difficult to access for RRR areas compared to metropolitan areas.