

29/08/2017

Emeritus Professor John Halsey
C/o: Department of Education and Training
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Professor Halsey,

The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education.

The ATN is a national collaborative group of five major universities including Queensland University of Technology (QUT), University of Technology Sydney (UTS), RMIT University (RMIT), University of South Australia and Curtin University. All of our universities have genuine linkages to industry as an inherent part of both our teaching and research. Students are at the core of everything we do.

One of the key strengths of the Australian higher education sectors is the diversity between universities. This diversity extends to differences in courses, delivery modes, cohorts, university student experiences, and research strengths and profiles. Australia's higher education sector provides equal opportunity to students, regardless of their background or location. Furthermore, Australia's universities provide opportunities to students anywhere in Australia and proactively support students to succeed. Although our universities all have their main campus in metropolitan settings, we believe Australian students regardless of where they live should be able to access higher education that suits their needs.

As noted in the discussion paper, "Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education", regional, rural and remote students are underrepresented at Australian universities. The ATN believe it is important that opportunities are provided to these students to undertake and succeed at their university studies. To that end, it is important to note that regional, rural and remote definitions are highly correlated with the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas, and while they are correlated ATN universities provide support to regional, rural and remote students in addition to programs targeting low SES students. ATN universities support regional, rural and remote students at all points of the student life cycle. Examples of these follow below.

UTS's U@Uni Schools Outreach program aims to increase the number of students from under-represented communities successfully completing university study. Outreach activities include U@Uni Summer School program for Year 11 students from U@Uni partner schools to participate in two week intensive workshops in areas such as media production, business, engineering and IT. Such programs have contributed to UTS increasing its number of commencing domestic undergraduate students with a disadvantaged backgrounds by 40 per cent over the 2011-2015 period.

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Curtin University have developed a program called Curtin AHEAD which actively targets students during the pre-access and access phase of the student lifecycle. Curtin AHEAD is a collaborative and innovative outreach program that provides a range of skills-building, self-confidence and career development activities that help people discover their potential to pursue higher education. The program also exposes participants to university life. Curtin AHEAD initiatives are designed for people to access higher education regardless of their background, location or circumstance, including people from regional and remote areas and people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. Curtin AHEAD also works with regional and remote communities, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Development in the Kimberley and Youth Development in the Wheatbelt. Since 2014, Curtin AHEAD has supported over 1,000 students into higher education, with nearly 60 per cent enrolling at Curtin University.

Students from underrepresented groups face a number of challenges in participating and completing higher education. The ranges of challenges are broad and varied but can include factors such as geographical location, socio-cultural incongruity and financial constraints. As such, early intervention can result in students being supported to complete, rather than withdrawing. ATN universities also run targeted programs to ensure that students succeed in their studies, examples of which can be found below.

QUT has a variety of complementary programs that ensure students from regional, rural and remote Australia are supported at the commencement of their study. During orientation week, all domestic students who are relocating (based on post-code) are contacted directly and invited to attend student-led sessions that cover life on campus, accommodation and transport options, learning and personal support, and financial support options. To complement this, all students relocating from regional and remote locations are given a welcome call by a Student Success Advisor and provided with information and referral to learning support services and resources. A key aspect of this call is ensuring that the students are aware of the QUT scholarships which are purposely targeted at regional, rural and remote students. These scholarships provide financial support and range from \$3,500 to \$7,500 per annum.

The University of South Australia has a suite of both student and staff facing dashboards. These dashboards utilise learning analytics, and are obtained through the University's learning management system. Academic staff use the dashboards as a means of identifying students who are considered to be academically 'at risk' early in a course, or within a program. The analytics help staff recognise where there are individual students who are consistently not accessing the system, or not engaging with the course learning materials, or where a student's pattern of engagement has varied over a course. This enables tailored support to be put in place to enhance students' success.

RMIT's Connect for Success program is a specially designed program that targets students who are at risk of non-completion. This program includes three phases, a broad communication campaign, an engagement campaign and a performance campaign. The campaigns occur at set intervals during the semester, and become more targeted as the semester progresses. The week 3 communication campaign informs students about the learning assistance resources at

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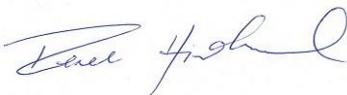
RMIT. The week 5 and week 7 campaigns are specifically targeted at students who have been identified as struggling with early semester assessment. The Connect for Success program has seen contacted students obtain success rates that are on average 10 per cent higher than those of students who have not responded to the programs contact requests.

The ATN believes that universities should be encouraged and incentivised to meet and support the needs of regional, rural and remote students. Universities nor students should be punished for their geographical locations, rather both should be supported to meet high quality educational outcomes. ATN universities have a strong commitment to ensuring that all students are supported throughout their studies, and as noted above have dedicated programs to enable students from underrepresented backgrounds to succeed with their ambitions of higher education endeavour. The ATN maintains that students should have the freedom to choose the university and course of study that meets their ambitions, regardless of where the university may be located.

It is important that Australia's higher education system remains diverse, offering students a variety of educational opportunities, recognising that not every student wishes to study the same course or content in the same location. A study found that rural and remote students often relocated in order to access particular programs at particular universities¹. By retaining a diverse offering of courses, universities in Australia provide opportunities to meet the unique needs of individual students who are pursuing higher education that will best suit their future needs. As such the ATN recommends that universities across Australia are adequately supported both in policy and financial environments to continue providing opportunities and support to underrepresented cohorts.

Please do not hesitate to contact the ATN Directorate on (02) 5105 6740 or via e-mail at renee.hindmarsh@atn.edu.au to discuss any elements of the submission further.

Yours sincerely,



Renee Hindmarsh

ATN Executive Director

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¹ Blakers, R., Bill, A., Maclachlan, M., and Karmel, T.,. (2003). Mobility: Why do university students move? Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2003.