

Committee Secretary

Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee,

The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry looking at the role of culture, family and community in delivering better education outcomes for students living in remote Australia and in complex environments.

ATN is the peak body representing Australia's four most innovative and enterprising universities; University of Technology Sydney, Curtin University, RMIT University and University of South Australia. In 2018, ATN universities were educating over 1,500 Indigenous students and over 1,000 students from remote areas.

The role of universities is a unique and an important one in our communities. They are public institutions committed to excellence in teaching and learning and world class research, and they are also organisations connected and embedded within their local communities – particularly in the case of regional campuses. Our universities engage in outreach, both in terms of sharing the practical insights from their research (such as key learnings from the Centre for Crop and Disease Management at Curtin University) and encouraging children and young adults to explore their options for education and training.

ATN showcases two alternative and complementary approaches to reaching students in remote Australia. One approach is to maintain regional campuses which form an integral part of their communities and reduce the distance barriers to accessing higher education – for example, the Kalgoorlie, Northam, Geraldton and Albany campuses of Curtin University and the Whyalla and Mount Gambier campuses of University of South Australia.

These regional campuses offer a mix of on-campus and online delivery that fits around students' lives, are embedded with local industry, and allow students the opportunity to transfer to other campuses if they need. Examples of these campuses being tailored to their local communities include:

- Agribusiness at the Muresk Institute, Northam campus
- Indigenous Tertiary Enabling Course at the Geraldton campus
- Marine science and conservation at the Albany campus
- Education and social work at the Whyalla campus
- Nursing and midwifery at the Mount Gambier campus.

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The other approach is to focus on welcoming these students to a metropolitan campus, offering an inclusive option for those who need to or want to study elsewhere.

This approach is exemplified by the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research at University of Technology Sydney. The Jumbunna Institute offers specialised support for Indigenous students including:

- Academic support
- Developing foundation skills
- Housing assistance
- Social opportunities, such as a first year camp
- International study opportunities.

The Jumbunna Institute also has a research focus with research hubs in areas such as child protection, cultural resilience, law and justice, and work and employment.

Curtin University has a similar institute called the Centre for Aboriginal Studies. Other Curtin University initiatives included the Future Footprints Expo which was organised by the Association of Independent Schools of WA and hosted by Curtin University at Curtin Stadium. During the Expo, more than 200 regional and remote Indigenous students from across Western Australia heard insights on employment, training and furthering their education. The Expo brought together industry professionals and the higher education sector so that secondary school students could gain a deeper understanding of the options available to them after school.

ATN universities are also at the forefront of innovative online teaching and learning and understand the benefits and drawbacks of online study. UniSA Online is a separate unit within University of South Australia which offers courses designed from the ground up to be delivered online. In order to support regional and remote students UniSA Online-specific scholarships and grants are available, including:

- UniSA Online Aboriginal Grant to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- UniSA Online Study Grant to provide financial assistance to students who are financially disadvantaged and/or from a rural or isolated area.

Curtin University also runs the Laptop Sponsorship Program to provide refurbished laptops to regional and remote Indigenous students.

Remote students and their communities are a diverse cohort with different needs and priorities. Some students will find a regional on-campus offering that suits them and their career, while others while opt for blend of online and campus study and some will want to pursue opportunities in metropolitan areas. ATN universities exemplify the innovative and enterprising approach these focused and determined students need.

It is important that our higher education sector is similarly diverse, caters to students' needs and expectations, and continues work closely with local communities and industries.

ATN would welcome the opportunity to provide further information on any of the points raised in our brief submission, if requested.

Yours sincerely,

Luke Sheehy

Executive Director

Australian Technology Network of Universities

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