

National Framework for Rural and Remote Education in Australia

MCEETYA Taskforce into Rural and Remote Education, Training, Employment and Children's Services

Foreword
by Geoff Spring, Chair

The MCEETYA¹ Taskforce into Rural and Remote Education was established in 1999 with the following terms of reference:

To develop a report through a range of local case studies in each participating state and territory highlighting workable and potentially workable local strategies to improve employment, education, employment, training and children's services in rural and remote Australia.

This body of work has been completed and the case studies are available on the Internet at www.edna.edu.au.

In May of the following year the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission tabled its report of the National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education in Federal Parliament. Included in the recommendations of the report was Recommendation 4.5, which states;

MCEETYA, in consultation with the proposed Rural School Communities Taskforce (Recommendation 4.4) should draw up a national rural education policy and plan incorporating the principles set out in this chapter and the five criteria defined in Chapter 3.

Relevant State and Territory ministers, with the exception of Tasmania, agreed to respond to the HREOC recommendation through an extension of the terms of reference of the MCEETYA Taskforce on Rural and Remote Education, Training, Employment and Children's Services.

This draft Framework is the product of the work of the Taskforce on behalf of its member states and territories.

It has been developed to facilitate building upon the diversity of contexts and initiatives extant in regional, ru-

ral and remote areas of Australia in relation to producing access to quality education for all families, children and students.

In addition to this framework, individual states and territories have analysed and responded to the recommendations of the HREOC Report in their own jurisdictions within local capability and policy settings.

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of the National Rural Education Framework is to

- provide a framework for the development of nationally agreed policies and support services
- promote consistency in the delivery of high quality education services to rural and remote students and their families
- provide reference points and guidance for nongovernment providers of services and support for education in rural and remote areas
- facilitate partnership building between government and non government providers of services and support related to the provision of education in regional, rural and remote locations

Rationale

Recommendation 4.4 in the HREOC report referred to the necessity to develop a national rural education policy. The Taskforce believes that it will be more productive to develop an agreed Framework that allows for local differences and provides flexibility in implementation by individual state and territory education systems and sectors.

The framework focuses upon the requirements of providing education in rural and remote locations while recognising that country communities are often places of great innovation, expertise and resilience.

The Context of Rural and Remote Education

During the development of the framework, it became obvious that the terms 'rural', 'regional' 'country' 'remote'

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and 'isolated' had different connotations (and definitions) across the range of agencies, providers and people who use the terms, both in education and non-education settings. However, for the purpose of this framework, the terms rural and remote are used throughout.

Characteristics of places variously termed rural, regional, country, remote and isolated include;

- population size, movement and diversity relative to metropolitan centres, including the requirement for young people often having to move to larger centres to access further education and training
- distance from large population centres, and service centres resulting in high travel and accommodation costs to users and providers of services
- high migration of families and youth to larger population centres
- existence of social infrastructure including IT infrastructure
- levels and breadth of employment, and existence of key industry/activity
- diversity and levels of access to a range of youth services including the full range of education services

Generally, when any or all of these characteristics or groups of them are experienced in deficit, rural, remote and isolated communities record higher than the national average for students 15 years and younger leaving school (particularly for Indigenous students) and lower participation rates in higher education. However, the participation rate in VET in rural and remote areas is higher than in urban centres. This may be due to the early school leavers seeking post-school options to support entry to the workforce. Vocational education programs are also seen as a pathway into local or regional employment, or in support of an existing family business.

In recognising the diversity of contexts and need, the MCEETYA Taskforce affirmed the significance of conclusions from the series of case studies developed to highlight workable and potentially workable local strategies to improve children's services, education, training and employment in rural and remote Australia. These case studies outlined the nature, outcomes and key aspects of the dynamics of eight community-based secondary school projects in diverse locations across Australia, using a set of benchmarks.

In these case studies, the factors that operated to drive successful outcomes were:

- the place of local commitment and ownership of programs that met locally specific need;

- the function of collaborative action between industry, civic and education partners
- the need for predictable and sustained funding - and
- the role of infrastructure that enabled development

The case studies are available on the Internet at www.edna.edu.au.

Remote and isolated locations provide the greatest challenges for improving the provision of education, options and pathways for children and families. These are often compounded when considering the aspirations and needs of Indigenous communities, especially where there is a very significant adherence to traditional culture and lifestyles. The framework enables considered responses to be made to the specific needs of Indigenous students and families.

Education in rural and remote Australia has experienced greater priority from all jurisdictions in recent years. This has been driven by several key forces including a renewed recognition of the value of the economic and social contributions made by country people and country communities to the nation's output, and to the nation's well-being.

It has also been driven by communities and community leaders who articulate the services and supports required by families and individuals and who are prepared to become involved in solutions building.

A preference for whole of government action and utilizing leadership and capacities at all levels and locations are priorities for improving services and support.

The rapidly expanding IT infrastructure available to rural, regional and remote locations is providing a powerful means of multiplying the impact of distance education techniques and is transforming ways and means of providing access for all to high quality education. Continuing action on improving access and cost issues is essential together with ensuring that user computer/ICT competency levels are developed to enable benefit from new technology options and services to be realised.

While much has been done at national and state levels to improve Information Communication Technology (ICT) in county locations, the major challenge of improving user affordability must be met in order to fully capitalise upon the revolution in on-line learning that is taking place.

The National Framework for Rural and Remote Education

The National Framework for Rural and Remote Education (NFRRE) comprises 3 elements:

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION						
Vision	By age 18 each young person residing in rural or remote Australia will receive the education required to develop their full potential in the social, economic, political, and cultural life of the nation.					
Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students and families living in rural and remote Australia have specific needs which are the direct result of living in particular geographic locations. The needs of rural and remote students should be met through local commitment and ownership as well as through predictable and sustained government funded initiatives. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a high degree of variability in the characteristics of rural and remote communities, both within and between states and the Northern Territory. The provisions of education in rural and remote Australia requires creative and flexible approaches that utilize leadership capacity at all levels, innovative technology and methodology, and whole of government approaches. 			
Essential Enablers	P ersonnel	R ellevant Curriculum	I nformation Communication Technologies	M ultimode Delivery	E nvironments	R esourcing
Key Challenges and Requirements	Recruitment/Retention Leadership/Succession Training & Development	Outcomes Standards Pathways	Content Access Quality	Structures Innovation Flexibility	Community Partnerships Cultural Sensitivity	Building Capacity Assuring Quantity Predictability
	Diverse & reliable supply Success plans Incentives Family assistance	Programs consistent with national goals Articulated planning for life-long learning Access to VET Enterprise Education	Broadband provision Affordability and accessibility Reliable infrastructure	Support of current modes ICT Training and Development for staff Broadening of best practice networks	Support of industry, civic, education, government and nongovernment collaboration Identification and use of local expertise and leadership	Support for local for social capital building Funding for equitable access Disseminate best practice Whole of government approaches

RURAL AND REMOTE CONTEXTS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

Population Size & Diversity, Community Opportunities, Social Capital Building, Distance, Flexibility, Leadership, Cooperative Action, and Sustainability

- a vision statement
- a set of principles
- a set of essential enablers for the provision of high quality education

Vision

That by age 18, each young person residing in rural and remote Australia will receive the education required to develop their full potential in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the nation.

This vision is supported by the National Goals for Schooling, Goal 3.1

Schooling should be socially just so that: students' outcomes from schooling are free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability and of differences arising from students' socioeconomic background or geographic location (emphasis added)

The HREOC report also refers to eliminating "negative forms of discrimination based on . . . geographic location". It asserts that education for rural and remote students must be available, accessible, affordable, acceptable and adaptable.

Principles

The Framework is underpinned by the following principles

- students and families living in rural and remote Australia have specific needs which are the direct result of living in particular geographic locations
- there is a high degree of variability in the characteristics of rural and remote communities, both within and between the states and the Northern Territory
- the provision of education in rural and remote Australia requires creative and flexible approaches using innovative technology and methodology to improve access, within a reliable infrastructure
- the provision of quality education in rural and remote Australia requires creative and flexible approaches that utilize leadership capacity at all levels, innovative technology and methodology, and whole of government approaches.

Essential Enablers for Quality Education Provision

A detailed search of the relevant literature and an analysis of the success factors of the case studies referred to previously, has resulted in a set of Essential Enablers for the provision of quality education in rural, and remote locations. They are:

- Personnel—teachers, administrative and classroom support, specialists
- Relevant curriculum
- Information communication technologies
- Multiple modes of delivery
- Environments formed through effective community relationships and partnerships
- Resourcing

Each Essential Enabler has been included in the framework because it is core to translating the principles into practice.

The acronym PRIMER reinforces the importance of the enablers. Enablers are the fundamentals for ensuring the provision of quality educational opportunities in country locations, and for country communities.

Each enabler provides suggestions for areas in which effort should be focussed. This does not preclude individual education systems developing their own strategies in accordance with local policies and priorities, which may include links and pathways with early years services and post-schooling options.

Personnel. Personnel is all the human resources required to staff and operate a preschool school, or education service.

Key challenges include:

- Recruitment—conducting sound workforce planning to ensure that predicted staffing needs are met. It also refers to promoting teaching and living in the country.
- Retention—refers to ensuring that quality teachers and leaders are actively encouraged to remain in country locations. This can be achieved through initiatives such as incentives, as well as quality leadership and training and development programs.
- Training and Development—access to quality and relevant training and development is essential to ensure that teachers are up to date in all areas of their work, and have the skills to implement rapidly expanding content and alternative methodologies
- Appropriate Succession Planning—especially required for leadership and recruiting and retaining specialist staff

- Developing and Utilizing Community Expertise and Leadership—essential to building and operating sustainable services and support

To address the issue of attracting and retaining quality teaching staff, jurisdictions have established incentive packages. These strategies differ according to local conditions. Current incentive provisions variously include: teacher recruitment and scholarship programs; salary increase and other allowances such as rental subsidy; appropriate teacher housing; specific staff training and professional development opportunities; accrued additional paid leave; relocation allowances; motor vehicle provision; and/or guarantee of permanency and or placement in a school of choice after meeting service obligations. While the degree to which these strategies are successful in achieving intended outcomes varies, maintenance of effort to develop and implement new ways of attracting and retaining staff is required.

Additional strategies suggested by jurisdictions include consideration of accommodating the personal support needs of family units. For example, one member may be engaged in the teaching profession and a partner may work outside the education sector and requires relocation with a current employer or new employment opportunities. Rural and remote incentives are not confined to the teaching profession and whole-of-government approaches are seen as more likely to be attractive to introduce and retain education staff in rural, remote and isolated areas. Action continues to be needed to ensure that recruitment and placement policies and processes build upon the needs of individuals as well as systems and communities.

Efforts should be directed towards:

- continuing to promote working in remote, isolated and rural areas for the contextual and professional advantages in addition to promoting financial and industrial conditions packages
- raising the profile of the profession by acknowledgment of the professional qualities of country teachers, leaders and support staff
- expanding scholarships and funded programs targeted at increasing the teacher and education support personnel trained and prepared to serve for extended periods in rural, regional and remote locations
- the establishment of a national centre for rural education research and training and development which incorporates current initiatives and programs, and which focuses on partnerships and interagency strategies to drive local capacity building

- programs and initiatives that recognise and enhance access to local community leadership and expertise

Relevant curriculum. The case studies (and relevant research) developed by the MCEETYA Taskforce show that curriculum best meets the needs of rural and remote students when:

- programs are developed in partnership with the local community that are responsive to local community which needs and meet the requirements of a global society
- educational programs and curriculum are aligned to the requirements of the National Goals of Schooling and are appropriately applied to the local context
- educational options and pathways in schools are designed to articulate with training and employment pathways, so that students leaving school will have: participated in programs of vocational learning during the compulsory years and have had access to vocational education and training programs as part of their senior secondary studies; (source: National Goals of Schooling 2.3) and will have achieved employment related skills and an understanding of the work environment, career options and pathways as a foundation for, and positive attitudes towards, vocational education and training, further education, employment and life long learning. (Source: National Goals 1.5)

The commitment to a broad and balanced curriculum was affirmed in the second declaration of the national goals of schooling in 1999.

There is a base set of knowledge, skills and understandings that young people require to progress and develop within their current learning contexts and as they progress through levels of learning. Included here is a fundamental requirement for students to acquire competence in literacy and numeracy. National efforts to 'close the gap' in literacy and numeracy outcomes against the national benchmarks need to be maintained and expanded where required for targeted populations.

The Framework for VET in Schools asserts that Vocational Education is a shared responsibility in the community and fosters collaboration between education, business, government and community interests. Vocational Education recognises that students and their school communities have a significant and valued role in contributing to social, regional and economic development.

The National Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce identified the need for a community climate which accepts responsibility for fostering the transition of young people in their transition from school to post-school options. Many agencies and systems have implemented policies and programs that directly target needs of youth in areas like skill upgrading and confidence building. These need to continue and to be matched to both the local circumstances, and the wider global context.

Efforts should be directed towards:

Ensuring that curriculum remains relevant and meets the needs of students by:

- continuing the priority of the achievement of essential standards in literacy and numeracy by all students
- ensuring access to the eight areas of the curriculum for all
- further developing the focus on transition points in schooling and particularly between middle and senior schooling, and the schooling/post-schooling exit points
- supporting learning in a variety of settings and experiences so that young people understand the relationships and flow between learning and working
- engaging local stakeholders (industry, business and community organisations) to develop strategies and options

Information communication technologies (ICT). The MCEETYA Taskforce recognises statements of the National Bandwidth Inquiry, AEIAC, 2000, which identified certain critical aspects related to rural and remote education namely:

- equitable access to quality on-line content is essential to the delivery of the curriculum to rural, remote and especially isolated students
- “(f)ind(ing) appropriate and empowering ways of meeting the challenges of providing affordable, quality and timely access to bandwidth, to enable Australians living in regional, rural and remote areas to participate fully in the information” economy remaining a priority
- that whilst issues of provision, bandwidth and quality are being addressed by jurisdictions including the Commonwealth the MCEETYA Taskforce notes that: “. . . policy makers at the national level should acknowledge that continual upgrading will be a necessary aspect of use of technologies”

Additional consideration directed at community access, affordability, reliability and availability of technical support, partnerships (government services and non government, community) and training, will importantly connect students within their own communities and with communities far and wide to increase identification with a “national place.”

In response to Recommendation 8 of the Besley Report, Connecting Australia – Report of the Telecommunication Services Inquiry, a National Communications Fund (NCF) has been set up under the Commonwealth Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. The NCF will have \$50 million over 4 years to improve service delivery for health and education sectors and encourage high bandwidth data services to regional communities.

In January 2001, the Prime Minister announced the Schools Online Curriculum Initiative (SOCCI). The initiative, extending over five years will provide for the large-scale, collaborative development of a national pool of online curriculum resources supporting mechanisms for sharing the resources across school systems. In addition, the initiative will advance the development of a national market in quality-assured Australian online school resources. Funding for the initiative includes \$34.1 million from the Commonwealth to be matched by the States and Territories.

Online learning issues for the School sector are being progressed through Learning in an Online World – School Education Action Plan for the Information Economy which has been supported by MCEETYA. Further information on the implementation of the action plan can be found at <http://www.edna.au/preview/schools/reports/learningonline.pdf>)

Efforts should be directed towards:

- expanding the upgrading of infrastructure, and ongoing training and development of professional expertise
- reducing the user costs of infrastructure to rural and remote locations and customers
- monitoring of the National Communications Fund and making required adjustments as necessary to maintain high levels of access and use
- collaborating with the SOCCI initiative to ensure that students and families in rural and remote locations have ready access to high quality on-line curriculum that is culturally affirming

Multiple modes of delivery. The diversity of rural and remote locations requiring quality education services of necessity requires a multimode approach to delivery. Distance and population size and range of choice means that

not all curriculum will be available through face to face means.

A strategy that focuses on flexible curriculum delivery using a variety of vehicles and structures is required. Examples include:

- the clustering of sites and pooling of resources to deliver a wider range of curriculum than would otherwise be available on one site
- short-term and long-term programs which support access to centres of excellence and specialisation
- hubs and service providers preparing a range of curriculum content and making it available on-line, with appropriate marking and reporting services
- on-line provision; distance delivery education; mobile classrooms; face to face teaching; flexibility of/across year levels, flexible allocation of time; and home tutoring

Jurisdictions manage distance education provisions in different ways depending on local contexts. However, this provision needs to be maximised by capitalising on the expanded choice through the growing number of national and international providers of on-line curriculum.

Acceptable standards of provision address life long learning principles for all, and the range and variety of learning styles within each community. Mixed modes of delivery have been very successful in many locations, particularly where effort has been directed at engaging students in the design and delivery of their education services.

With the growing power, reach and affordability of ICT, efforts to both expand and refine different ways of delivery needs to be maintained.

Efforts should be directed towards:

- publicising successful initiatives
- expanding the number of programs which enable and encourage flexible innovative delivery
- continuing the development of on-line curriculum materials that are inclusive of rural and remote contexts and circumstances, and identifying and then using best practice examples of online curriculum materials and pedagogies
- drawing on existing good practice which uses innovative delivery to address geographical disadvantage.

Environments formed through effective community relationships and partnerships for sustainable delivery. In accordance with the National Goals of Schooling:

Learning environments must be designed and managed to match principles and criteria of social justice, so that,

All students have access to the high quality education necessary to enable the completion of school education to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent and that provides clear and recognised pathways to employment and further education and training. (Source: National Goals of Schooling 3.6)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students (Source: National Goals of Schooling 3.3)

Learning environments in the broadest sense vary considerably throughout rural and remote Australia as does the potential for communities to create partnerships. Community partnerships are fundamental to building learning environments. It is acknowledged that the fundamental capacity of a rural or remote community to build a learning environment will vary significantly throughout Australia. It is also the case that schools can play a vital role in local capacity building and utilization. This is particularly so in Remote Indigenous Communities. The National Goals for Schooling statement requiring improved learning outcomes over time is particularly relevant.

Critical factors for many successful educational initiatives are close consultation with communities and the development of partnerships with them. By building effective community relationships and partnerships, projects can be tailored to meet local needs and conditions, as well as meeting wider requirements. A focus on building partnerships at local and agency level can result in heightened community involvement and facilitate sustainability. Partnerships are particularly important when planning for and delivering vocational education and training for Indigenous communities. This is because raising education provision and outcomes is central to furthering practical forms of reconciliation.

Partnerships are also important in framing the design and access to the curriculum areas that are required to ensure all students experience learning consistent with the national goals of schooling.

Efforts should be directed towards:

- implementing the Commonwealth Government initiative on community-based participation agreements between ATSIC and remote Indigenous communities
- creating capacity for communities to develop local responses to local problems, and show-

case exemplars of best practice. An example is the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy announced in the 2001-2002 Commonwealth budget

- developing partnerships between stakeholders from both within and among neighbouring communities should be encouraged and developed so that effects caused through small populations are minimised
- examples of best practice strategies such as outreach programs that enhance partnerships and community involvement should be identified and disseminated

Resourcing. Equity of resource allocation must be ensured with resources targeted to identified local needs, to provide facilities, encourage partnerships and community-capacity building, provide transport, technology, care programs, access to libraries, access to social, health, and community development services and other agencies. Weighting of needs should, in giving consideration to resource allocation, be applied to match degrees of rurality, remoteness and isolation.

The combined resources of the State and Commonwealth governments and communities are available to enable students to achieve success. The impact of resources is amplified when a combination of school, vocational and workplace learning is used to foster collaboration between education, business and industry, government and community.

The Commonwealth seeks to enhance the educational outcomes of all school students by providing support for education systems and schools through its funding programs, through policy development and through research and analysis of nationally significant educational issues.

Whole of government approaches to resource allocation and utilisation together with effective local partnerships can increase the impact of them for families and communities.

Efforts should be directed towards

- appropriate resources to support addressing rural issues within jurisdictions
- maintaining a funding priority for rural and remote students and families
- ensuring that decisions about resource allocation for rural and remote education are based upon sound data
- developing and disseminating models of effective and efficient resource allocation and use to improve learning outcomes for rural and remote students

Conclusion

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission has stated that “an emphasis on education as a right will require governments to fashion teaching and learning for individuals, taking into account all of their circumstances”.

The National Framework for Rural and Remote Education nests within the broader work of MCEETYA through its various taskforces and working groups.

This framework informs the work of those groups which have a specific link to rural and remote issues, namely the Indigenous Education Taskforce, the Vocational Education and Training in Schools Taskforce and the Measurement and Reporting Taskforce.

Used in conjunction with existing policies and practices, it will ensure that there is improvement for children and students in rural and remote Australia in the quality of education provision available to them and to which they are inherently entitled.

Effective implementation of the framework will require development of indicators of success and appropriate ways and means of measuring and reporting on them.