

RUN submission on Review of Senior Secondary Pathways

What are the essential skills, knowledge and capabilities students should expect to leave senior secondary schooling with to help them succeed in their post-school lives?

Literacy and numeracy, digital skills and broader life skills, such as problem solving, creative thinking, teamwork and navigating complex systems, are essential.

Students aspiring to higher education also need discipline specific knowledge and skills. There is a shortage of STEM teachers across schools in regional, rural and remote areas. Regional schools face significant issues in attracting and retaining teachers, and lack resources to provide the necessary support and professional development for teachers, principals and school leaders. Participation in initial teacher education courses has been declining and is affected by policies at state and federal levels. Further work is needed to improve the availability of teachers in general and STEM specialist teachers in particular in regional Australia.

How can we help students make better decisions about learning pathways within school?

Implementation of Recommendation 4 from the National Regional, Rural and Remote (RRR) Tertiary Education Strategy Final Report would address these issues. The recommendation is to build aspiration, improve career advice and strengthen RRR schools to better prepare students for success, including by:

- implementing a regionally based model for independent, professional career advice
- improving online career related information and advice
- establishing aspiration-raising initiatives covering both VET and higher education
- expanding access to high quality VET programs in RRR schools
- improving support available to teachers, principals and school

Schools, parents and carers have a vital role to play in guiding students' decisions about their post-school future. They also need better, more current information about the range of post-school pathways and options that are available.

There is need to better integrate the many national and state platforms and websites which provide advice to senior secondary students about post-school pathways.

Employers and tertiary education providers need to engage with schools in regional rural and remote areas, where post-secondary participation rates are lower.

How do we change negative perceptions of certain pathways?

There needs to be acknowledgment among schools, parents and students of all the post-school pathways that are possible. In regional areas participation in VET is higher than in metropolitan areas. The need in regional areas is to raise students' aspirations to participate in higher education. Students participating in regionally based universities are typically older, already employed, studying online, studying part-time, and often have caring responsibilities. Many have entered through VET pathways, enabling programs and foundation programs.

It is important for the review of senior secondary pathways to consider ways to improve transitions from senior secondary school into university for RRR students.

There is an opportunity for the Australian Government to provide greater incentives for employers that address specific workforce and skill needs in regional Australia.

How can we support young people to make better decisions about their post-school pathways?

Regional students need support and advice to build aspirations and increase awareness of career possibilities. The challenges are greater in regional areas where students lack access to a wide range of industries and employers.

Outreach activities such as university students and staff visiting schools, and open days on university campuses for school students are important. Tertiary education providers need to engage closely with schools and develop programs to support students in their first year after finishing school.

An outcome of the Joyce Review is the establishment of a National Careers Institute and appointment of a National Careers Ambassador. It is critical that regional students get their fair share of benefit from this.

How can we make sure opportunities are available and support is tailored to the needs of all young people?

Special consideration and support are needed for students in regional areas. Innovative course offerings that integrate or bridge the gap between VET and higher education courses, such as apprenticeship degrees and higher education qualifications focused more on practical learning and technical and professional skills development, may be of use. VET in schools should be improved in some RRR areas.

Is there anything else you would like the Review Panel to consider?

RUN supports implementation of the recommendations of the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy: Final Report (June 2019). Their consideration by COAG is important.